‘Getting into the nucleus of the school’: Experiences of collaboration between Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators, Senior Leadership Teams, and Educational Psychologists in Irish post-primary schools.

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A thesis submitted to the Department of Educational Psychology, Inclusive and Special Education, Mary Immaculate College, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Educational and Child Psychology.

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Abstract

'Getting into the nucleus of the school': Experiences of collaboration between Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators, Senior Leadership Teams and Educational Psychologists in Irish post-primary schools.

Objective: The research explored barriers and facilitators to collaboration between National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) psychologists, Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs) and Senior Leadership Teams (SLT) in Irish post-primary schools. Collaboration is intended to occur across the Continuum of Support (CoS), a multi-tiered system of support providing staged support and consultation for students with identified and diagnosed special educational needs. NEPS' role in facilitating collaboration is uncertain, exacerbated by the absence of policy outlining the SENCO role and tensions between special and inclusive education. It is necessary to explore experiences of collaboration between NEPS psychologists and post-primary schools within this nebulous policy context.

Methods: A sequential explanatory design was used, framed by Dynamic Systems Theory; participants were NEPS psychologists, SENCOs and SLT. Phase 1 involved a bespoke online survey (n=278), based on policy and literature, which identified barriers and facilitators to collaboration using descriptive statistics. In Phase 2, semi-structured interviews (n=9) were analysed using multi-perspectival Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

Results: Phase 1 provided a quantitative overview of barriers and facilitators to collaboration; Phase 2 facilitated an experiential exploration of collaboration between NEPS, SLT and SENCOs. Participants described the experience of transitioning from working in silos to collaborative hubs. Systemic and interpersonal factors facilitated the deliberate construction of evolving, dynamic, collaborative spaces between post-primary schools and NEPS. There are practical implications for NEPS psychologists in creating space for hubs rather than silos, including working collaboratively across the CoS, fostering supportive and trustful interpersonal relationships, and centring the expertise of schools and families in the collaborative process.

Conclusion: Policy gaps arise regarding consultation, collaboration, special education, and inclusion. This research begins to clarify the varied ways in which practice occurs in these gaps and indicates ways in which NEPS psychologists can collaborate with SENCOs and SLT to create active, effective hubs of knowledge to support students across the CoS.

Keywords: Inclusive and Special Education; Post-Primary School; SENCO Role; Collaboration; Educational Psychologist; Senior Leadership Team; Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own original research and does not contain the work of any other individual, save those identified and acknowledged according to standard academic conventions.

Signature: Maria Holland

Date: 29/4/2022

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Abbreviations

AP I	Assistant Principal I
AP II	Assistant Principal II
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Servics
CoS	Continuum of Support
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DECPsy	Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology
DES	Department of Education and Skills
DfE	Department for Education (UK)
DoE	Department of Education
DoH	Department of Health (UK)
DST	Dynamic Systems Theory
EP	Educational Psychologist
EPSEN	Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act
GET	Group Experiential Theme
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
LAOS	Looking At Our Schools
MANOVA	Multivariate Analysis of Variance
MIREC	Mary Immaculate Research Ethics Committee
MTSS	Multi-tiered System of Support
NCSE	National Council for Special Education

NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
PET	Personal Experiential Theme
PoR	Post of Responsibility
RtI	Response to Intervention
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SENCO	Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator
SERC	Special Education Review Committee
SET	Special Education Teacher
SETAM	Special Education Teacher Allocation Model
SLT	Senior Leadership Team
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
SSE	School Self Evaluation
TPL	Teacher Professional Learning
UDL	Universal Design for Learning
UN	United Nations
UNCRPD	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
WHO	World Health Organisation
WoE	Weight of Evidence

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Rationale and Context

This research explored experiences of collaboration between special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs), senior leadership teams (SLT), and National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) psychologists at each level of the Continuum of Support (CoS) in Irish post-primary schools. NEPS is under the auspices of the Department of Education (DoE), known as the Department of Education and Skills (DES) until 2020 (Government of Ireland, 2020). I became interested in this area after observing excellent collaborative practice between a post-primary SENCO, principal, and NEPS psychologist during school placement in Year 1 of the Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology (DECPsy). Significant time had been invested by all three in establishing supports for students across the CoS, and I observed the SENCO and NEPS psychologist engaging in collaborative conversations about whole-school and individualised supports. This enhanced my understanding of how collaboration between NEPS and post-primary schools can support students across the CoS.

Education provision for children with special educational needs (SEN) in Ireland has undergone considerable changes, and remains in a state of flux (Fitzgerald & Radford, 2017; Shevlin & Banks, 2021a). Changes in Irish policy have resulted in a whole-school approach, mediated by the CoS, with specific roles assigned to NEPS and SLT at each level of the CoS (DES, 2017b; NCSE, 2014; NEPS, 2010). NEPS' consultative model of service, which aligns with the CoS, widened NEPS involvement in post-primary schools to a collaborative role across the CoS (DES, 2017b; NEPS, 2010). This shift has been partly driven by changes in the model of resource allocation, which emphasises school-based identification of needs rather than diagnosis (NCSE, 2014). Although in practice many post-primary schools appear to have SENCOs, the SENCO role is not explicitly defined in policy, and a psychological lens on collaboration between NEPS, SENCOs, and SLT is largely absent from research (DES, 2017b; Fitzgerald & Radford, 2017). This contrasts with international contexts such as England, where the SENCO role is underpinned by the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice and the

mandatory National Award for SEN Co-ordination (Department for Education (DfE) & Department of Health (DoH), 2015; Petersen, 2010). Research is needed to investigate how the NEPS consultative model is implemented collaboratively through the CoS. The current research explored experiences of barriers and facilitators to collaboration between SENCOs, SLT, and NEPS.

The way in which the CoS is implemented is coloured by a broader debate around tensions between and within special and inclusive education (Florian, 2019). Until the mid-to-late 1990s, there was little legislation or policy supporting educational provision for children with SEN in Ireland. Since that time, there has been a proliferation of policy documents around SEN provision (Shevlin & Banks, 2021a). At times Irish policy has aligned with international discourse, yet some key divergences remain (Shevlin & Banks, 2021a). Changes in Irish policy are influenced by an international policy context which is increasingly moving towards an inclusive agenda, with a focus on fulfilling the human rights of all children to access education in local schools (Shevlin & Banks, 2021a). The Irish government ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in 2018; according to the UN, the Irish model of a continuum of provision ranging from mainstream to special schools constitutes ability-based segregation and is inconsistent with the UNCRPD (de Bruin, 2020; Shevlin & Banks, 2021a). This has contributed to an inclusive education agenda in Ireland, juxtaposed with a continuation of pre-existing systems of special education, indicating policy-practice mismatches (Shevlin & Banks, 2021a). A crossroads has been reached regarding the future direction of the Irish education system (Shevlin & Banks, 2021a). Given the state of flux in which Irish educational policy finds itself, the evidence-base is insufficient to draw conclusions regarding the nature of collaboration between NEPS and post-primary schools.

1.2 Epistemological and Theoretical Lens

The conceptual quality of the thesis is rooted in alignment between the research paradigm, epistemological and theoretical lenses, and methodological approach. Pragmatism involves selecting multiple methodologies which align with the research questions; this study's mixed-methods, sequential explanatory design reflects the methodologically eclectic nature of pragmatism (Mertens, 2014; Meyer,

2021). Qualitative and quantitative methods are needed to gather data which are both accurate and experientially rich; this is particularly relevant given the scarcity of research into collaboration between post-primary schools and NEPS. Phase 1 involved an online survey and Phase 2 comprised semi-structured interviews, framed by interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). In the overall synthesis, more weight was placed on Phase 2 than Phase 1 data. Conducting the Phase 1 survey facilitated the development of a high-quality semi-structured interview schedule which was sensitive to the practice and policy contexts (Yardley, 2015). Phase 2 utilised a multi-perspectival directly-related group design; SENCOs, SLT, and NEPS constitute subgroups who are immersed in a common experience but with different perspectives (Larkin et al., 2019). IPA facilitated a granular exploration of participants' experiences (Smith et al., 2022). In conjunction with IPA, Dynamic Systems Theory (DST) provided a theoretical lens to explore interactions between SENCOs, SLT and NEPS. DST posits that systems are in a constant state of flux and are influenced by recursive interactions within and between systems (Karimi-Aghdam, 2017). Because DST examines intra- and interpersonal relationships and systemic linkages, this aligns with IPA and facilitates exploration of interacting systemic and interpersonal factors which shape collaboration between NEPS and post-primary schools.

The thesis begins with a rigorous review of policy, theory and research. This review paper includes a thematic analysis of Irish and international policy and theory, followed by a systematic review of primary research in light of themes identified in the thematic component. This section finishes with an overall synthesis of the thematic and systematic components, leading to the identification of research questions and a rationale for the current study. The empirical paper reports on research carried out under the headings of introduction, method, results and discussion. The thesis concludes with a critical review and impact statement, situating a reflection and critical appraisal of study findings within the theory, policy, and research context. The impact statement comprises an outline of the study's impact in the field of educational psychology, including the local, national, and international impact of the dissemination of the research and implications for future research, policy, and practice.

Chapter 2: Review Paper

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 Context and Rationale

Education provision for children with special educational needs (SEN) in Ireland has undergone considerable changes, and remains in a state of flux (Fitzgerald & Radford, 2017; Shevlin & Banks, 2021a). The National Council for Special Education reports increased numbers of students with SEN attending mainstream post-primary schools; in 2018, 17.9% of 13-year-olds were identified as having SEN, with less than 1% attending special schools (NCSE, 2018). This review focuses on post-primary schools because historically, efforts to support children with SEN have been largely focused on primary rather than post-primary schools (de Bruin, 2020). Post-primary schools often involve larger and more complex physical and organisational structures than primary schools, presenting particular challenges for students and teachers (NEPS, 2010). Recent policy changes require mainstream post-primary schools to support all students' learning, necessitating effective collaboration between post-primary schools and external professionals including National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) psychologists. These changes have been partly driven by changes in additional resource allocation; supports are based on school-level profiling of needs, with schools allocating the greatest level of support to students with the greatest level of need (NCSE, 2014). This model is mediated by the Continuum of Support (CoS), a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) which provides a consultative framework for NEPS psychologists and post-primary schools to support all students' common needs, distinct needs of some students and unique needs of a few students (NEPS, 2010). The implementation of the CoS is coloured by broader debates regarding tensions around special and inclusive education.

Changes in Irish policy are occurring within an international policy context which is increasingly moving towards an inclusive agenda, focusing on the right of all children to access education in local schools (Shevlin & Banks, 2021a). The Irish government ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in 2018; according to the UN, the Irish model of a continuum of provision ranging from mainstream to special schools constitutes

ability-based segregation and is inconsistent with the UNCRPD (de Bruin, 2020; Shevlin & Banks, 2021a). This has contributed to an inclusive education agenda in Ireland, juxtaposed with pre-existing systems of special education, indicating policy-practice mismatches (Shevlin & Banks, 2021a). The UN's vision of inclusion involves transformation of culture, policy, and practice to support students' needs and remove barriers to participation (de Bruin, 2020). Notably, many countries have continued with a continuum of educational provision: all eight European jurisdictions which responded to an NCSE survey in 2019 had special schools, and intended to continue with this model of provision despite ratifying the UNCRPD (NCSE, 2019). While the UNCRPD emphasises all students sharing common learning environments, it is clear that, in practice, all does not always mean all (Kauffman et al., 2018; NCSE, 2019).

There is little consensus around definitions of special and inclusive education, and considerable disagreement about whether the most appropriate approach to supporting children with SEN involves special education, inclusive education, or a combination of both (Florian, 2019; NCSE, 2019; Shevlin & Banks, 2021a). The UNCRPD arguably views special and inclusive education in terms of placement, taking the position that a model of parallel mainstream and special school settings is not inclusive and that jurisdictions which have ratified the UNCRPD should plan for a systemic transition over time towards educating all children in regular schools (NCSE, 2019). Research and theoretical discourse suggests a more temperate approach whereby special and inclusive education co-exist in tension with one another (Florian, 2019). Irish policy has previously espoused special education, providing separate, specialised support for children with SEN, but has gradually transitioned towards an approach which is more aligned with inclusive education (Shevlin & Banks, 2021a). A crossroads has been reached regarding the future directions of the Irish education system, with policy and practice continuing to evolve (Shevlin & Banks, 2021a).

Policy and practice are sometimes misaligned; for instance, many Irish post-primary schools appear to have special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs), but Irish policy has not explicitly addressed this role (Fitzgerald & Radford, 2017, 2020). The SENCO role has evolved in a policy vacuum, resulting in considerable variation in practice across schools (Fitzgerald & Radford, 2017). SENCOs may hold

an Assistant Principal (AP) I or II post as part of middle leadership post of responsibility (PoR) structures (DES, 2018). Undertaking SENCO duties as part of a PoR generally involves other leadership duties such as year head (DES, 2018). This is not mandatory; AP duties are decided by Senior Leadership Teams (SLT), comprising principals and deputy principals (DES, 2018). This contrasts with international contexts such as England, where the SENCO role is embedded in schools' leadership structures and is underpinned by the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice and the mandatory National Award for SEN Co-ordination (DfE & DoH, 2015; Petersen, 2010). Similarly in Sweden, SENCOs have a role in leading schools towards inclusive practices and specialist support, and are required to complete advanced study to obtain a SENCO degree (Gäreskog & Lindqvist, 2020). The NEPS role has transitioned from gatekeeping towards whole-school consultation (NEPS, 2010). Where formal roles exist, expectations regarding the collaborative process, including the SENCO role, are defined. Given the state of flux in which Irish educational policy finds itself, the evidence-base is currently insufficient to draw conclusions regarding the nature of collaboration between NEPS and post-primary schools.

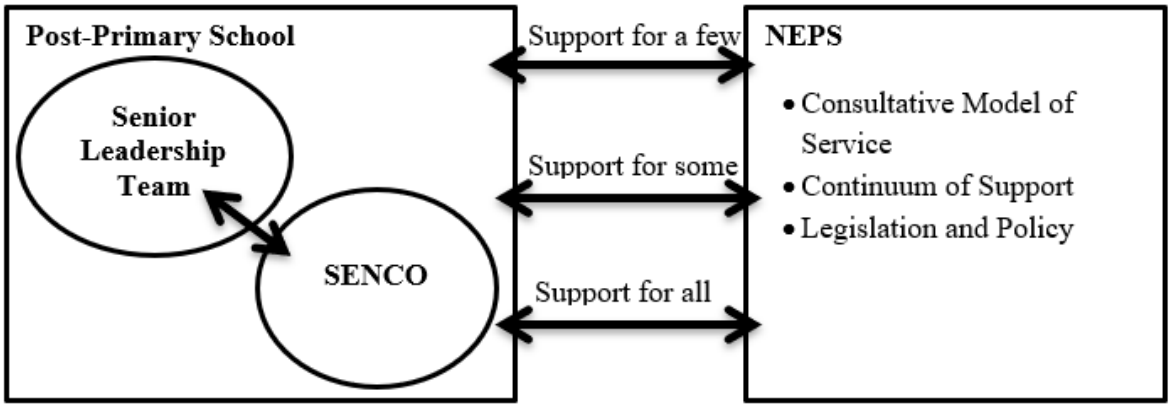
2.1.2 Dynamic Systems Theory

The review is framed by Dynamic Systems Theory (DST). DST provides a theoretical lens to explore interacting factors which shape collaboration between NEPS and post-primary schools (Larsen-Freeman, 2012); see Figure 1. DST posits that systems are in a constant state of flux and are recursively influenced by interactions within and between systems (Karimi-Aghdam, 2017). This reflects the concept of an inclusive school being dynamic and on-the-move (Booth & Ainscow, 2011). While surface-level structures like policies may change quickly, deeper structures including attitudes and ingrained practices may change more slowly (Thomas, 2009). Indeed, Irish legislation and policy, international policy, and theoretical discourse may be considered as dynamic systems in themselves, which are constantly changing in response to one another. From a DST perspective, NEPS and post-primary schools constitute separate, but interacting and mutually influential systems (Karimi-Aghdam, 2017). It is unclear how policy changes have translated to practice, from the perspective of NEPS and post-primary schools, as policy is often interpreted through the lens of local practices and priorities rather than implemented

directly as written (Skerritt, O'Hara, et al., 2021). Little is known about the degree of congruence between school management and the SENCO (Fitzgerald & Radford, 2017). The SENCO may have an SLT or middle leadership role, or indeed no formal leadership role; their role may involve making whole-school, strategic change, or they may be working from an isolated position (Fitzgerald & Radford, 2020). Although the relationship between post-primary schools and NEPS is based on consultation across the CoS, it is unclear how the two systems are linked at each level of the CoS.

Figure 1

A DST Lens on Collaboration between NEPS and Post-Primary Schools



2.1.3 Review Structure

The thematic component of the review examines tensions between consultation and collaboration, and special and inclusive education in light of Irish and international policy and theoretical discourse. The systematic review of primary research examines current knowledge regarding barriers and facilitators to collaboration between SENCOs, SLT and NEPS in Irish post-primary schools, and identifies future research directions, within the themes emerging from the previous phase of the review process (Gough et al., 2012). Insights gained from both phases are then synthesised and used to identify directions for future research.

2.2 Thematic Review of Legislation, Policy, and Theory

The thematic component of the review seeks to map the relationship between NEPS, SENCOs, SLT in Irish post-primary schools in terms of theory and policy. The review questions are two-fold; see Table 1.

Table 1

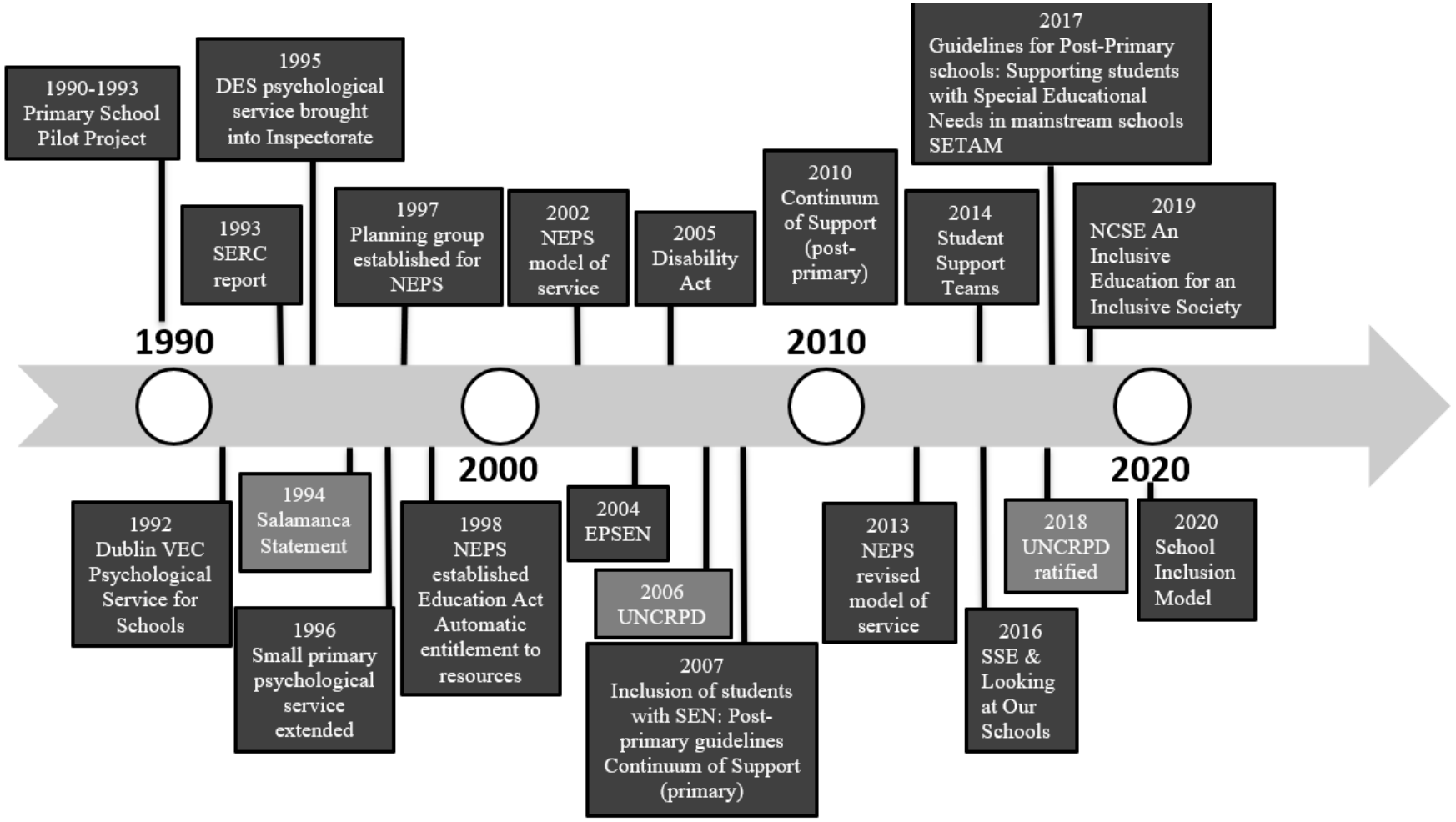
Thematic Review Questions

Question 1	How is the relationship between NEPS, SENCOs and SLT situated within special and/or inclusive education?
Question 2	What do theory and policy have to say about consultation and collaboration between NEPS, SENCOs, and SLT?

The thematic element of the review combines elements of a mapping review and qualitative evidence synthesis (Grant & Booth, 2009). The aim is to map themes lying across policy and theoretical discourse in order to identify gaps which point towards future research directions (Grant & Booth, 2009). A purposive search strategy was implemented in order to identify a breadth and depth of relevant theoretical papers relating to special and inclusive education, and consultation and collaboration (Gough et al., 2012; Grant & Booth, 2009); see Appendix A. The search process included searches of edited handbooks, the identification of seminal papers and ancestral searches of the reference lists of these seminal papers. Contemporary theoretical papers were identified using searches of four databases via EBSCO Host: Academic Search Complete, PsycInfo, PsycArticles, and ERIC. Website filters on www.irishstatutebook.ie were used to identify legislation with the terms ‘education,’ ‘disability,’ and/or ‘special educational needs’ in the title, enacted between 1990 and 2021. Relevant policy was identified using the NCSE and Department of Education (DoE) websites. See Figure 2 for a timeline of relevant Irish and international legislation and policy.

Figure 2

Timeline of Irish and International Policies



2.3 Thematic Analysis

2.3.1 Untangling Definitions of Special and Inclusive Education

This section addresses the first review question: how is the relationship between NEPS, SENCOs, and SLT situated within special and/or inclusive education? While special and inclusive education may appear disparate, contemporary discourse has begun to explicate the interdependencies and tensions between these fraught, mutually dependent concepts (Florian, 2019). Special education emerged as a response to the exclusion of children with SEN from mainstream schools; specialised teaching strategies were developed in special settings, separated from the mainstream context (Frederickson & Cline, 2015; Rix & Sheehy, 2013). Conversely, the wider inclusion agenda emerged as a human rights-based response to societal exclusion of people with SEN and/or disabilities (Frederickson & Cline, 2015). International policy drivers strongly espouse inclusive education: the UNCRPD positioned school and community inclusion as a human rights matter (UN, 2006). The UNCRPD emphasised the right of people with disabilities to access appropriate, inclusive education and stated that people with disabilities must not be excluded from mainstream education (UN, 2006). Thus the UNCRPD positioned special education, particularly when it occurs in separate settings including special schools and classes, as philosophically distinct from inclusive education and contrary to the human rights of people with disabilities (UN, 2006). This ideological purity is potentially problematic in practice, as there is a risk that focusing on the location of children's learning will result in some children not having their individual learning needs met (Kauffman et al., 2018). The interplay between special and inclusive education can be traced through legislation and policy; the aim of including all children in school and society is balanced with identifying and meeting individual needs.

Historically, Irish legislation and policy do not have an explicit underpinning philosophy; tensions are evident between elements of special and inclusive education and between past and current legislation and policy. In DST terms, previous policies are not erased when superseded by new policies but rather continue to influence current legislation, policy, and practice (Karimi-Aghdam, 2017). Policy documents such as the report of the Special Education Review Committee (SERC) in the early

1990s represented the first time that Irish policy explicitly acknowledged the necessity of providing appropriate education, rather than care, for children with disabilities (Government of Ireland, 1993; Griffin & Shevlin, 2011). Special and inclusive education coexist in the SERC report but are not explicitly identified; the SERC report deliberately chose not to espouse a particular philosophy, although as with all dynamic systems, language is not assumption free (Government of Ireland, 1993; Gumpel, 1974; Larsen-Freeman, 2019). For instance, the language of impairment, handicap and integration was used, indicating a medical model view of disability; conversely the SERC report acknowledged that diagnostic categories do not encapsulate children's presenting needs (Government of Ireland, 1993). This philosophical ambivalence was inconsistent with contemporaneous international discourse including the Salamanca Statement, which stated that full inclusion was a human rights matter and all children, without exception, should be educated in regular schools (UNESCO, 1994). While the absence of an underpinning philosophy may appear abstract and relatively unrelated to everyday teaching and learning in schools, this implicit approach to defining Irish policy's positionality continues to manifest in disjointedness within and between legislation and policy.

While the Education Act outlined the right of all children to an appropriate education, it included caveats meaning that schools could refuse to enrol children with SEN if school resources were inadequate or peers' learning would be adversely affected (Government of Ireland, 1998). Furthermore, additional supports for children with SEN were diagnosis-based until 2017, underpinned by the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (EPSEN) and the Disability Act, thereby separating educational provision for children with and without SEN (DES, 2017a; Government of Ireland, 2004, 2005). This deficit-oriented, medical model approach dichotomised children with and without SEN, and was not sufficiently flexible to cater for children's individual and changing needs (Frederickson & Cline, 2015; Griffin & Shevlin, 2011). In DST terms, a systemic separation was created between special and mainstream education, highlighting the practical importance of underpinning philosophy. Special and mainstream education systems must link in some way, particularly when they co-occur in the same setting; it is difficult to see how teachers could blend special and mainstream teaching techniques if these are conceptualised as inherently different. Overall, defining special and inclusive

education is a fraught process, although international policy drivers strongly favour an inclusion agenda. Definitions of special and inclusive education in Irish educational policy and legislation are nebulous, albeit historically rooted in the medical model.

2.3.2Moving Towards Inclusive Special Education

The coexistence of special and inclusive education is not necessarily a paradox. Irish policy attempted to implement a more cohesive blend of special and inclusive education with the introduction of the CoS in post-primary schools in 2010 (NEPS, 2010). The CoS is an MTSS which takes a systemic approach to supporting all children's needs, with the greatest level of need leading to the greatest level of support. Level 1 involves whole-school, systemic support for all students, Level 2 comprises additional support for some students, while Level 3 involves highly individualised support for a few students (NEPS, 2010). This reflects the idea that inclusive and special education can, and indeed must, coexist (Florian, 2019; Hornby, 2014a). Hornby (2015) refers to this more temperate approach as inclusive special education; the most useful elements of special and inclusive education are flexibly combined, centralising the children's needs in decision-making. This approach revolves around the deliberate use of specialised, individually tailored teaching strategies to support children's independence and inclusion in community life outside school (Hornby, 2014a). It is unclear whether the CoS is currently underpinned by inclusive special education because in Irish policy, language around special and inclusive education is used interchangeably, despite the disparate practices associated with each. Furthermore, the extent to which the CoS can facilitate inclusive special education is largely bound up in the model of resource allocation which determines how students move between levels, and the availability of therapeutic intervention.

Prior to 2017 diagnoses were required for children to access resources, thereby moving to Level 2 or 3 of the CoS (DES, 2017a). In practice, access to resources was diagnosis-led rather than needs-led, reflecting a special education model (Griffin & Shevlin, 2011; Shevlin & Banks, 2021a). There was an inherent contradiction between NEPS' role in providing diagnoses for children to access Levels 2 and 3 of the CoS, and the NEPS consultative model of service which

positions NEPS as whole-school capacity builders at Level 1 (NEPS, 2010). In 2014, the NCSE produced a policy document concluding that this resource allocation model required reform to achieve a more inclusive and equitable school system (NCSE, 2014; Shevlin & Banks, 2021a). The decision was partly resource-based; there were barriers to accessing Level 3 supports as timely assessments were often unavailable, prompting parents (those who could afford it) to purchase private assessments (Shevlin & Banks, 2021a). The Special Education Teacher Allocation Model (SETAM) provides resources to schools, based on schools' social contexts, standardised test scores and number of students with complex needs and came into effect in 2017 (DES, 2017a; NCSE, 2014). Schools allocate resources to groups and individuals based on current needs which must be identified and monitored in an evidence-based manner; whole-school supports are also involved at Level 1 (DES, 2017a; Shevlin & Banks, 2021a). Under this model, schools are essentially compelled to implement the CoS to facilitate children accessing more intensive tiers of support. This appears more consistent with inclusive special education, because it aims to be responsive to children's needs as they arise, providing a graduated, integrated response to a continuum of need (Hornby, 2014a).

This shift towards a focus on children's needs rather than diagnosis, and the emphasis on a whole-school approach in mainstream schools was arguably the most explicit indicator that Irish policy was transitioning in the direction of inclusive education; a key aim of SETAM was that every school would become inclusive (Shevlin & Banks, 2021a). SETAM has yet to be evaluated; it is unclear whether the transition from special to inclusive language constituted a meaningful, deep-rooted change or whether it was a surface-level response to inclusion-focused trends in international discourse (Shevlin & Banks, 2021a). SETAM changed the way in which the CoS was implemented, although the structure of the CoS itself remains unchanged (NEPS, 2010). This is exemplified by the shift in the role of NEPS from assessor and gatekeeper to facilitator of consultation; NEPS psychologists are expected to use problem-solving frameworks to enable schools to identify students with SEN across the CoS and to devise appropriate, evidence-based interventions (NCSE, 2014). Indeed the need for a SENCO role arguably grew out of this change in policy; a whole-school approach requires an agent of systemic change (Ekins, 2015; Fitzgerald & Radford, 2020). This highlights another systemic gap in policy;

the SENCO role, or an equivalent, is not explicitly mentioned in any national policy pertaining to post-primary schools. The early years sector is the only sector in Irish education which formally recognises a co-ordination role, the inclusion co-ordinator (INCO; LINC Consortium, 2021). The implications of the absence of the SENCO role from policy will be explored in the second thematic review question.

Irish policy is at a crossroads in regarding directions for future practice and policy (Shevlin & Banks, 2021a). In 2019, the NCSE published 'Policy Advice on Special Schools and Classes: An Inclusive Education for an Inclusive Society?' which, following a consultation process and a review of the literature, suggested exploring all options around SEN provision, including a full inclusion model similar to New Brunswick or Portugal, whereby all children are educated together in mainstream schools (NCSE, 2019). This was prompted by the Irish government's ratification of the UNCRPD in 2018, which is explicitly rooted in inclusion (NCSE, 2019; UN, 2006). Ireland is not alone in grappling with how to implement UNCRPD: some countries, including Germany, the UK, and USA, have not fully adopted UNCRPD, while it has been enacted in others, including Portugal (Shevlin & Banks, 2021a). This sparked an ongoing debate: closing special schools and classes would require a radical overhaul of the education system and would have considerable implications for relationships between SENCOs, SLT and NEPS by altering the focus of their joint work (Shevlin & Banks, 2021a). A purely ideological take on inclusive education suggests that while children's presence in mainstream is insufficient alone, it is a prerequisite for schools to become inclusive, and the continuation of the special education industry prevents all children from participating in their local school community (Hornby, 2014b; Shevlin & Banks, 2021a). However, this approach involves potential pitfalls; naming children's needs via diagnosis can minimise the impact of SEN by indicating appropriate intervention, and there is a danger that reducing specialist resources such as special classes could become a money-saving exercise (Hehir, 2007; Kauffman & Hornby, 2020). Evidently, the debate around what Norwich (2007) terms dilemmas of difference is far from resolved.

It is unclear what form the CoS would take in a full inclusion model; for instance, in New Brunswick there is no definition of students with SEN and therefore no distinction between students with and without SEN (NCSE, 2019). In contrast, the

CoS involves identifying children as having different levels of need (NEPS, 2010). Avoiding the identification of SEN could erase teachers' understanding of students' individual differences; inclusive special education emphasises the use of specialised strategies to support future independence in an inclusive society for students with higher support needs, rather than focusing solely on academic achievement at school (Florian, 2019; Kauffman & Hornby, 2020). It is unclear whether full inclusion will be enacted in policy, and indeed how this could sit alongside the complexity and disjointedness evident in legislation. From a DST perspective, Irish policy appears to layer inclusive language on top of the deep structures of a legislative system which is rooted in the medical model and special education (Shevlin & Banks, 2021a; Thomas, 2009). It is questionable whether the structures of special education, combined with the language of inclusive education, are sufficient to create inclusive special education in practice (Hornby, 2014a). Disjointedness in legislation and policy could create similar disjointedness in practice, creating dilemmas for SENCOs, SLT, and NEPS as they negotiate the constantly changing interplay between legislation, policy and practice (Fitzgerald & Radford, 2020; Skerritt, O'Hara, et al., 2021). The outworking of this theoretical and systemic nebulousness in the interactions between SENCOs, SLT, and NEPS will be examined in the second thematic review question.

2.3.3 Defining Consultation and Collaboration

This section addresses the second review question: what do theory and policy have to say about consultation and collaboration between NEPS, SENCOs, and SLT? The terms collaboration and consultation are often used interchangeably (e.g. NEPS, 2010a); however, they are not necessarily synonymous. Consultation is indirect work where educational psychologists (EPs) empower schools, parents and other professionals to improve a specific problem situation in a solution-focused manner, at the individual, group, or systems level (NEPS, 2010). Consultation is intended to be a flexible, rather than prescriptive, process; variation in practice is therefore expected (Wagner, 2017). Consultation lends itself to analysis using a DST lens, as its underpinning theoretical foundations are rooted in interactionist, systemic, and constructionist approaches (Wagner, 2017). Linking multiple systems is purposeful and solution-oriented; the goal is to promote positive change (Schein, 1997; Wagner, 2017). A key component of consultation is to build capacity in schools to prevent

difficulties by improving the support which is provided to all students (Wagner, 2017).

Consultation is intended to facilitate collaborative working. Collaboration involves multiple disciplines working together with families and communities to deliver high-quality care (WHO, 2010). Collaboration is a process in which all stakeholders' views are equally valued; stakeholders bring different knowledge or insights with the aim of co-creating solutions; EPs have specific expertise in facilitating collaborative processes (Wagner, 2017). (Arora et al., 2019; Wagner, 2017). When collaboration is achieved via consultation, systemic linkages constitute a reciprocal connection between systems. While consultation is intended to facilitate collaboration, the flexibility inherent within consultation can result in unintended consequences; consultation could occur in the absence of collaboration if there is a significant power imbalance between consultant and consultee (Gonzalez et al., 2004). Wagner recommends avoiding the terms consultant and consultee, as this implies a power imbalance whereby consultants imparts expertise to consultees (Wagner, 2017). If EPs are viewed as experts with superior knowledge, then consultation could be occurring in the absence of collaboration. In this review, collaboration refers to meaningful collaboration achieved via the consultative process and consultation refers to consultation occurring in the absence of meaningful collaboration. It is unknown whether consultation between SENCOs, SLT and NEPS is collaborative or whether power imbalances are at play which could create a sense of deficit between post-primary schools and NEPS.

The tension between consultation and collaboration may be contextualised within the special versus inclusive education debate. Special education assumes that teaching children with SEN requires different, specialised knowledge (Griffin & Shevlin, 2011). This implies an expertise differential and could be likened to consultation in the absence of collaboration. Collaboration arguably aligns with inclusion by assuming equality between stakeholders, albeit possessing different skills and knowledge, thereby minimising mismatches between different professions and bridging barriers which families must negotiate (Arora et al., 2019; Ekins, 2015). Meaningful collaboration is rooted in the biopsychosocial model, rejecting medical model deficit orientations (Gutkin, 2012). The CoS may facilitate inclusive education; however, the blending of the two approaches is not explicit in policy

(Fitzgerald & Radford, 2017). In the USA for example, some children's needs are met via three-tiered MTSS including Response to Intervention (RTI) or Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) (de Bruin, 2020; Department of Education, 2004; United States Congress, 1990). However, RTI and PBS are not directly analogous to the CoS. While RTI and PBS are effective in meeting individual needs, evidence indicates that broader MTSS models which encompass academic and behavioural factors are more cohesive and powerful; the CoS aims to provide tiered support for individual needs and involves the school community in providing preventative support for all students, meaning that all teachers must develop the skills to contribute to an inclusive learning environment (de Bruin, 2020). Conversely, New Zealand does not have SEN-specific legislation, creating challenges around defining the roles of EPs and schools within the collaborative process (Hornby, 2014b). Tensions between special and inclusive education in legislation and policy influence the nature and purpose of interactions between SENCOs, SLT and NEPS; it is unclear how these complexities manifest in practice in the Irish context.

2.3.4 Towards Meaningful Collaboration

Uncertainty around future directions of policy has implications for interactions between SLT, SENCOs and NEPS. The CoS is intended to facilitate collaboration between NEPS and post-primary schools via consultation. However, the SENCO role is absent from policy, apart from suggestions that a Special Education Teacher (SET) may undertake the duties of the co-ordinating teacher, which may be an oblique reference to the SENCO role (DES, 2017a, 2017b; NEPS, 2010). The teacher assuming this co-ordinating role should have access to relevant continuing professional development (CPD) and additional qualification opportunities, but neither is mandated (DES, 2017b; NCSE, 2014). The CoS explicitly allocates roles and functions within the consultative process to Special Education Teachers (SETs), SLT, and NEPS at each level of the CoS (NEPS, 2010). At Level 1, NEPS psychologists provide consultative support at a whole-school or group level about appropriate methods of identifying those at risk, developing whole school policies; NEPS may also provide input to staff about various topics including effective differentiation (NEPS, 2002, 2010). SETs collaborate with mainstream teachers and SLT have a strategic role in developing whole-school policies and interventions (NEPS, 2010). At Level 2, consultation between NEPS psychologists

and schools is focused on individual children or groups (NEPS, 2010). SETs may seek advice from NEPS, and SLT's role involves monitoring the numbers of students receiving support at Levels 2 and 3 (NEPS, 2010). Level 3 involves both consultation and direct work, including psychoeducational assessment, in order to create an action plan to address identified concerns (NEPS, 2010). While there is less emphasis on NEPS as expert gatekeepers in policy, it is unclear whether practice has followed suit.

The nebulousness of the SENCO role in Irish policy means that the status of the SENCO could vary across schools, depending on school culture and the value placed on SEN provision (Ekins, 2015). In England, the SENCO role has become more strategic in nature over time, with an increasing focus on leading the inclusive agenda within schools and co-ordinating practice within the school and with external professionals including EPs (Norwich, 2010). While these tasks are implicit in Irish guidelines for co-ordinating teachers, the role is not formalised (DES, 2017b). This poses a systemic barrier to collaboration, which requires that all stakeholders' roles are clearly defined in order to establish equality in the collaborative process (Curran, 2019; Wagner, 2017). Despite the clarity of the SENCO role in England, dilemmas arise around the justification and boundary of specialism (Norwich, 2010). If the SENCO role becomes over-specialised, there is a risk of perpetuating the dichotomisation of children with and without SEN and the view of EPs as experts, both of which pose obstacles to collaboration (Norwich, 2010). Conversely, if SENCO functions become overly integrated across school staff, there may be a risk of overlooking some children's needs and diluting specialist knowledge (Norwich, 2010). New Zealand policy bears some resemblance to Irish policy whereby the SENCO role is not rigidly defined; schools are not required to have SENCOs, although the role is becoming more common (Hornby, 2014b). Unlike England, SENCOs are not required to complete additional qualifications, resulting in considerable variation in practice across schools (Hornby, 2014b). The dilemmas arising in England and New Zealand highlight the systemic barriers to collaboration which arise both when the SENCO role is tightly and flexibly defined. Given that the SENCO role is absent from Irish policy, it is unclear how these tensions play out in practice in Irish post-primary schools.

The emphasis of the NEPS consultative model appears to have shifted towards meaningful collaboration since its first iteration in 2002, which implied an expert role involving NEPS giving advice to schools (NEPS, 2002, 2010). It is unclear how NEPS and schools navigated the gap between the consultative model and the diagnostic requirements of resource allocation policy prior to SETAM (DES, 2017a). Later NEPS policy documents use the language of collaboration within the consultative model, indicating a potential shift towards a more equal, collaborative relationship between NEPS and post-primary schools (NEPS, 2010). A collaborative approach to school self-evaluation (SSE) is also emphasised in policy, namely 'Looking at our School: A Quality Framework for Post-Primary Schools' (DES, 2016). Collaborative SSE is intended to include a collaborative approach to the CoS, whereby schools engage in provision mapping to identify strengths and gaps in their implementation of the CoS (Fitzgerald et al., 2021). This school-wide approach is facilitated by leadership from SLT and a clear conceptualisation of the SENCO role as an agent of change in schools; the latter is absent from policy (Fitzgerald et al., 2021). Mismatches are also found in New Zealand policy, where EPs do not have a formal role at the whole-school level; (Hornby, 2014b) and EPs are increasingly concerned about their lack of involvement in the general education system (Institute of Educational and Developmental Psychology, 2019). This appears inconsistent with the ostensibly inclusive approach adopted in New Zealand policy, and reduces the scope for meaningful whole-school collaboration (Hornby, 2014b). It is unclear whether systems created by somewhat ambiguous policies in Ireland and New Zealand could facilitate meaningful collaboration in practice (Thomas, 2009). In Ireland, it is uncertain whether the shift towards collaborative language reflects changes underpinning philosophy or simply in surface-level language features of policy (Thomas, 2009). Overall, collaboration is not a well-defined concept in Irish policy.

In DST terms, practice may be misaligned with the policy system, particularly when policy is unclear or in transition (Thomas, 2009). Policies are often interpreted and translated differently in different contexts, with schools generating their own policies that elaborate on and embed aspects of national policymaking into school cultures and working practices (Skerritt, O'Hara, et al., 2021). Organisational culture, which is generally led and set by SLT, is crucial in determining the

interpretation of policies and therefore the effectiveness of collaboration in bringing about change in schools (Schein, 2003; Schein & von Ameln, 2019). Teachers are both policy subjects whose practice is influenced and constrained by policy, and policy actors who actively interpret and translate policy into practice (Skerritt, O'Hara, et al., 2021). The SENCO role itself is an example of heterogenous practices in response to policy; schools who have developed a SENCO role have done so as a response to gaps between policy and what they need to do (Skerritt, O'Hara, et al., 2021). Interpretation and translation of policy also occurs around the NEPS role. Remnants of the previous gatekeeper role and other factors including time pressure and school expectations could lead to pressure to complete assessment work, limiting the development of collaborative practice (Wagner, 2017). Viewing policy interpretation and translation into practice as a dynamic process adds a layer of complexity to any attempt to understand collaboration between NEPS, SENCOs, and SLT. These processes are occurring within a disjointed policy context, making it unclear how, or whether, collaboration occurs in practice in Irish post-primary schools between SENCOs, SLT, and NEPS.

2.3.5 Conclusion

The CoS could be implemented very differently depending on whether it is viewed through the lens of special education, inclusive education, or inclusive special education. Consultation could occur in the absence of collaboration; the implications for practice are unclear. Using the language of special and inclusive education interchangeably and imprecisely creates mismatches and inconsistencies in legislation and policy, suggesting that SENCOs, SLT and NEPS may encounter practical barriers to collaboration. From a DST perspective, the complexity and state of flux which is apparent in legislation and policy serves to add a further layer of complexity to the interactions between SENCOs, SLT and NEPS in their everyday practice. Legislation and policy are essentially dynamic systems interacting with post-primary schools and NEPS systems (Larsen-Freeman, 2012). Tensions identified in policy may have varied effects on the processes and interactions within and between these two systems. NEPS, SENCOs and SLT could hold different views of special and inclusive education, and different understandings of how and whether consultation and/or collaboration should occur, or their positionality could be closely aligned; many iterations are possible. Therefore, it is necessary to systematically

examine primary research to identify barriers and facilitators to collaboration between SENCOs, SLT and NEPS.

2.4 Systematic Review of Research

The systemic and theoretical tangle discussed above necessitates examination of the relationship between SENCOs, SLT and NEPS in post-primary schools. Research examining this relationship in the context of special and/or inclusive education in Ireland is scarce; a systematic review of relevant Irish and international primary research is necessary to begin to identify barriers and facilitators to collaboration between SENCOs, SLT, and NEPS. The systematic review asks: what is known about the experiences of SENCOs, SLT and EPs regarding barriers and facilitators to collaboration? This systematic review seeks to clarify and synthesise current knowledge regarding collaboration between SENCOs, SLT and NEPS. Outcomes will be examined in terms of the themes outlined above: special and inclusive education, and consultation and collaboration.

2.4.1 Search Strategy

Searches were conducted on 22/7/2020 of four databases through EBSCO Host: ERIC, PsycInfo, PsycArticles and Academic Search Complete. Three searches were conducted to identify research about the experiences of SENCOs, SLT and EPs of collaboration and/or consultation; see Table 2. Database filters were used to restrict results to peer-reviewed English-language journal articles between 1/1/2010 and 22/7/2020, and to exclude dissertations and theses.

Table 2

Database Search Terms

Focus of search	Search terms
Special educational needs co-ordinator	(“interprofessional” OR “collaborat*” OR “consultat*”) AND (“SENCO” OR “special educational needs coordinator”) AND (“special education” OR “inclusive education” OR “inclusion”)
Senior Leadership team member	(“interprofessional” OR “collaborat*” OR “consultat*”) AND (“school management”) AND (“special education” OR “inclusive education” OR “inclusion”)
Educational psychologist	(“interprofessional collaborat*” OR “consultat*”) AND (“educational psycholog*” OR “school psycholog*”) AND (“inclusion” OR “inclusive education” OR “special education” OR “special educational needs” OR “disabilit*”)

The articles identified following the searches outlined above were screened according to review-specific inclusion and exclusion criteria. Appendix B summarises the search and screening process. Fourteen articles were selected for review; see Appendices C and D for full references and a summary of the selected articles. Appendix E includes references and rationale for studies which were excluded following full-text screening.

2.5 Literature Review

Gough’s Weight of Evidence (WoE) framework was used to assess the methodological quality of the selected studies, and their relevance to the review question (Gough, 2007). Methodological quality (WoE A) was evaluated using criteria relevant to the methodology of each study, namely survey designs (Mertens, 2014), case studies (Hyett et al., 2014), qualitative designs (Brantlinger et al., 2005; Letts et al., 2007a) and mixed-methods studies (Hong et al., 2018). The relevance of the methodology to the review question (WoE B) and the relevance of the evidence generated by each study (WoE C) were determined according to review-specific criteria; an overall rating for each study (WoE D) was formed by combining WoE A, B, and C; see Appendix F and Table 3.

Table 3

Summary of Weight of Evidence Ratings

Author(s)	WoE A	WoE B	WoE C	WoE D
Ahtola & Kiiski-Mäki (2014)	Low (1)	Low (1)	Low (1)	Low (1)
Berger et al. (2014)	Low (1)	Medium (2)	Low (1)	Low (1.33)
Boesley & Crane (2018)	Medium (2)	Medium (2)	Medium (2)	Medium (2)
Hamre et al. (2018)	Medium (2)	Low (1)	Medium (2)	Medium (1.67)
Hartmann (2016)	Low (1)	Medium (2)	Low (1)	Low (1.33)
Kearney et al. (2017)	Low (1)	Low (1)	Low (1)	Low (1)
Kjaer & Dannesboe (2019)	Medium (2)	Medium (2)	Medium (2)	Medium (2)
Newman et al. (2018a)	High (3)	Medium (2)	Medium (2)	Medium (2.33)
Norwich et al. (2018)	Medium (2)	Medium (2)	Low (1)	Medium (1.67)
O'Farrell & Kinsella (2018)	High (3)	Low (1)	Medium (2)	Medium (2)
Rose et al. (2018)	Medium (2)	Medium (2)	Low (1)	Medium (1.67)
Szulevicz & Tanggaard (2014)	Medium (2)	Low (1)	Medium (2)	Medium (1.67)
Thornberg (2014)	High (3)	Medium (2)	Medium (2)	Medium (2.33)

2.5.1 Participants

No studies included SENCOs, SLT and EPs in post-primary mainstream schools. Two studies included principals and other school professionals including mainstream and special education teachers (Ahtola & Kiiski-Mäki, 2014; Berger et al., 2014). Two studies recruited SENCOs in both mainstream primary and post-primary school contexts (Boesley & Crane, 2018; Kearney et al., 2017). One study involved principals only (J. Rose et al., 2018). Three studies involved EPs only (Hamre et al., 2018a; Newman et al., 2018a; Szulevicz & Tanggaard, 2014). Hartmann's (2016) study involved members of two elementary school IEP teams, including parents, therapists, EPs, teachers, paraprofessionals, and administrators. Kjaer and Dannesboe (2019) recruited EPs and school staff members, while Norwich et al. (2018) recruited Lesson Study teams, including EPs, SENCOs, and teachers. O'Farrell and Kinsella's (2018) study recruited EPs, teachers and parents and was the only selected study conducted in Ireland. Participants in Thornberg's (2014a) research included principals, teachers, parents, students, social workers and special educators.

2.5.2 Design and Methodology

Three of the studies achieved high WoE A ratings for methodological quality (Newman et al., 2018a; O'Farrell & Kinsella, 2018; Thornberg, 2014a), but none achieved a high WoE B rating for relevance of methodology to the review question. The type and quality of research designs were inconsistent across the selected studies. One study used a quantitative survey design (Ahtola & Kiiski-Mäki, 2014). Three studies used mixed-methods designs, two of which used open-ended survey questions as the qualitative element and closed survey questions as the quantitative element (Kearney et al., 2017; Newman et al., 2018a). One mixed-methods study used surveys and case illustrations (Berger et al., 2014). Six studies used qualitative designs (Boesley & Crane, 2018; Hamre et al., 2018a; Kjaer & Dannesboe, 2019; J. Rose et al., 2018; Szulevicz & Tanggaard, 2014; Thornberg, 2014a). Of the qualitative studies, three used semi-structured interviews (Boesley & Crane, 2018; Hamre et al., 2018a; Thornberg, 2014a). The remainder combined semi-structured interviews with other data sources including field observations (Hamre et al., 2018a; Kjaer & Dannesboe, 2019; J. Rose et al., 2018; Szulevicz & Tanggaard, 2014). Three

studies used case study designs; one of the case studies used semi-structured interviews (O'Farrell & Kinsella, 2018). Two case studies combined interviews with other sources including observations, email exchanges, and recordings of meetings (Hartmann, 2016; Norwich et al., 2018).

2.5.3 Data Analysis

A variety of qualitative data analysis methods were employed. Five studies used thematic analysis, with varying coding process (Boesley & Crane, 2018; Kearney et al., 2017; Norwich et al., 2018; O'Farrell & Kinsella, 2018; J. Rose et al., 2018). One study implemented Foucauldian ethnographic methods (Kjaer & Dannesboe, 2019). One study used a Foucauldian phenomenological approach (Hamre et al., 2018a), while another used a phenomenological approach (Szulevicz & Tanggaard, 2014). One study used grounded theory (Thornberg, 2014a) while another used a constant comparative approach similar to grounded theory (Newman et al., 2018a). One study rooted its data analysis in the Community of Practice framework (Hartmann, 2016). All quantitative elements involved surveys (Ahtola & Kiiski-Mäki, 2014; Berger et al., 2014; Kearney et al., 2017; Newman et al., 2018a). The majority utilised descriptive statistics to analyse quantitative data (Berger et al., 2014; Kearney et al., 2017; Newman et al., 2018a). One study used multilevel regression modelling (Ahtola & Kiiski-Mäki, 2014).

Validity and reliability were not explicitly addressed in Ahtola and Kiiksi-Mäki's quantitative study (2014). There was considerable inconsistency in the approach taken in qualitative studies regarding confirmability, transferability, creditability, and dependability, which reduces confidence in the evidence generated by these studies (Guba & Lincoln, 2008). Some studies explicitly addressed transferability. Boesley and Crane (2018) and Thornberg (2014a) observed that the voluntary nature of participation might limit the transferability of conclusions, as participants' experiences might be systematically different to non-participants. Similarly O'Farrell and Kinsella (2018) noted that their small sample size limited generalisability. Newman et al. (2018a) addressed transferability by describing participants and the research context in detail, enabling readers to generalise to their own contexts. Some studies provided evidence of confirmability, creditability, and dependability, although these concepts were not explicitly addressed. Most studies

had codes checked by more than one researcher (Boesley & Crane, 2018; Hamre et al., 2018a; Hartmann, 2016; Kjaer & Dannesboe, 2019; Newman et al., 2018a; O'Farrell & Kinsella, 2018; J. Rose et al., 2018). Some studies checked interpretations with participants (Hamre et al., 2018a; Thornberg, 2014a), explicitly outlined researchers' attitudes and role (Hartmann, 2016; Kjaer & Dannesboe, 2019; Thornberg, 2014a), and recorded decisions regarding data collection and analysis (Hartmann, 2016). Newman et al. (2018a) also engaged in a systematic triangulation process to identify similarities and mismatches between quantitative and qualitative data.

2.6 Synthesis of Findings

Tensions between consultation and collaboration imply a need for policy to clearly contextualise interactions between post-primary schools and NEPS within special and/or inclusive education. Irish policy does not clearly distinguish between special and inclusive education, although a shift is evident in the terminology used from the 1990s onwards (Fitzgerald & Radford, 2020; Griffin & Shevlin, 2011).

2.6.1 Consultation and Collaboration

As in policy, the terms consultation and collaboration were often synonymised in research. Evidence indicated that consultative frameworks had the potential to facilitate meaningful collaboration, but this potential was not always realised. DST facilitates a nuanced perspective on barriers and facilitators to collaboration between SENCOs, SLT and EPs at the interpersonal and systemic levels.

2.6.1.1 Interpersonal Barriers and Facilitators.

Selected studies indicated that many interacting factors acted as barriers and facilitators to collaboration between SENCOs, SLT and EPs. One barrier involved individuals' difficulty in integrating other professional viewpoints with their own. Each professional approached situations with different perceptions and priorities, and this friction reinforced professionals' beliefs that their own conceptualisation of the presenting difficulty was superior (Thornberg, 2014a). Kjaer and Dannesboe (2019) found that professional differences elicited strong emotional reactions in school professionals and EPs, adding complexity to the collaborative process. Thornberg

(2014a) described this as a process of change resistance which reinforces professional boundaries, precluding the possibility of meaningful collaboration. Resistance to consultation was conceptualised as an interpersonal process, causing a lack of integration between different professionals' contributions and reducing EPs' ability to earn credibility in schools (Newman et al., 2018a; Thornberg, 2014a). In DST terms, change resistance constituted a barrier between individuals working in different systems.

Another interpersonal barrier arose from stakeholders' understanding of others' roles in collaboration. In DST terms, changing roles and different understandings regarding those roles exacerbated gaps between schools and EPs. SENCOs engaging in the Education, Health and Care planning process reported that external professionals did not understand their role in this collaborative multi-agency process, resulting in an increased workload for SENCOs (Boesley & Crane, 2018). Varying understandings of the EP role appeared to cause particular friction. EPs viewed themselves as facilitators or capacity builders, and preferred to focus on meeting children's needs in inclusive contexts (Hamre et al., 2018a; O'Farrell & Kinsella, 2018). EPs reported a transition away from engaging in consultation as experts and focusing on psychological testing and diagnosis; however, this transition was incomplete and some EPs continued to focus on within-child diagnoses (Hamre et al., 2018a; Szulevicz & Tanggaard, 2014). Conversely, teachers viewed EPs as experts providing resources or advice, and completing assessments (Kjaer & Dannesboe, 2019; O'Farrell & Kinsella, 2018; Szulevicz & Tanggaard, 2014). The shift in EPs' role required a shift in other professionals' roles towards a more self-reflective approach; this may be challenging for some individuals who may be reluctant to share examples of challenges experienced in their practice (Kjaer & Dannesboe, 2019). Essentially, misunderstandings regarding stakeholders' roles meant that consultation rather than collaboration occurred.

In contrast, positive relationships with teachers meant that consultation could facilitate collaboration (Szulevicz & Tanggaard, 2014). Interpersonal factors which facilitated collaborative relationships between families, schools and EPs included trust, a feeling of equality, and an entry process to address differences in understanding between teachers and EPs (Norwich et al., 2018; O'Farrell & Kinsella, 2018). EPs' role involved asking questions and using consultation skills to prompt

deeper thinking about barriers to learning experienced by pupils, and focusing on children's learning rather than simply suggesting teaching resources (Norwich et al., 2018). EPs reported that demand for systemic consultation was increasing, although many schools continued to seek resources (Norwich et al., 2018). Few studies addressed the SLT role, although one study indicated that leadership for inclusion was an important factor in changing school cultures (J. Rose et al., 2018). The principal's role was crucial in embedding consultative practices in schools; it was difficult for teachers to engage if principals did not value consultation (O'Farrell & Kinsella, 2018). In DST terms, friction between different professions constitutes a mismatch between different dynamic systems, while positive relationships facilitate a smooth interchange between schools and EPs.

2.6.1.2 Systemic Barriers and Facilitators.

Collaboration was shaped and constrained by systemic factors. Some systemic factors identified in the current review centred on questions of power. When working with psychiatrists, EPs reported a power imbalance; EPs felt that their role was reduced to mediating psychiatric diagnoses to teachers, restricting the potential for flexible, responsive collaboration (Hamre et al., 2018a). Furthermore, competing demands reduced EPs' power to facilitate collaboration: economic constraints were seen as a barrier to consultation, although consultation was simultaneously seen as an effective use of time and resources in economically constrained circumstances (O'Farrell & Kinsella, 2018; Szulevicz & Tanggaard, 2014). Administrative tasks were often perceived as a barrier to the collaboration which they are intended to document (Newman et al., 2018a). Some EPs noted that paperwork and templates restricted their practice due to excessive focus on diagnostic information, reducing EPs' ability to engage in inclusive, collaborative work (Hamre et al., 2018a). Paperwork-related challenges also added to SENCOs' workload. This can be clearly mapped on to DST: working in a system which is in a state of flux meant that administrative requirements changed regularly in response to policy changes, causing significant procedural challenges (Boesley & Crane, 2018; Karimi-Aghdam, 2017). It is unclear how changes in Irish policy have affected collaboration between EPs working with NEPS, SLT, and SENCOs.

Some barriers discussed above on the interpersonal level also appear at the systemic level. The transition of the EP role from an expert gatekeeper to a facilitator

of collaboration requires systemic change; for instance, in order to facilitate an interprofessional Lesson Study process, teachers in mainstream primary and post-primary schools needed to make contextual changes (Norwich et al., 2018). The previously discussed power differential which can constitute a barrier between professions also arose on a systemic level. For instance, Kjaer and Dannesboe (2019) found that consultation was initiated by schools but largely led by the EP advisory service. Consultative work was rooted in a power relationship, affording more authority to EPs than school professionals (Kjaer & Dannesboe, 2019). Conversely, Rose et al. (2018) found that schools in a partnership demonstrated commitment and shared goals regarding a transferred inclusion programme, which were seen as important prerequisites for inclusion.

2.6.2 Collaboration and Inclusive Education

Thus far, a DST lens has been used to examine SENCOs, SLT and EPs as members of separate but interacting systems. These systems are operating within larger dynamic systems such as the policy context. This reflects the DST concept of dynamic flux occurring between and within nested systems (Larsen-Freeman, 2012). It is therefore necessary to position consultation and collaboration within the context of tension between special and inclusive education. Considerable variability is evident in the approaches taken to special and inclusive education by the studies included in this review.

Some studies indicated that the potential for consultation to be collaborative was shaped by policy around special and/or inclusive education. One study found that the focus of consultation was shifting from within-child factors towards an ecological perspective, mirroring the shift from special to inclusive education in UK policy (Thornberg, 2014a). A similar transition from special to inclusive education emerged in Denmark, where EPs' role was moving towards consultation rather than assessment and referral (Hamre et al., 2018a; Kjaer & Dannesboe, 2019). Tensions arose from this transition: collaboration was conceptualised as being necessary to achieve inclusion, but also potentially problematic, depending on power balances within the relationship (Hamre et al., 2018a; Kjaer & Dannesboe, 2019). This tension was exemplified in another UK study examining transferred inclusion, whereby students with challenging behaviour attended another school for a set period as an

alternative sanction to home suspension: describing this practice as inclusive was problematic from a social justice perspective, as it removed students from their own schools (J. Rose et al., 2018; Szulevicz & Tanggaard, 2014). Inclusion also demonstrated economic underpinnings. Economic constraints constricted EPs' consultative work, and inclusion could be misused as an excuse to justify budget cuts, but EPs also reported that budget cuts sometimes prompted creative ways of approaching inclusion (Szulevicz & Tanggaard, 2014). Tensions inherent within the transition from special to inclusive education arguably mirrored tensions in the collaborative process.

Some studies did not discuss special or inclusive education as a contextual backdrop. Boesley and Crane (2018) grounded their study in the SEND code of practice, which states that the purpose of collaboration is to ensure that education, health and care services provide appropriate support to children with SEN (Boesley & Crane, 2018). This could be interpreted as referring to either special or inclusive education. Similarly, an examination of interprofessional Lesson Study in the UK did not explicitly distinguish between special and inclusive education (Norwich et al., 2018). One study conducted in the USA hinted at but did not explicitly explore inclusion: consultation was positioned as an indirect service with an ecological focus and a reciprocal consultant-consultee relationship (Newman et al., 2018a). O'Farrell and Kinsella's (2018) study in the Irish context did not reference the special and inclusive education debate. Instead consultation was positioned within ecological theory, which could be broadly aligned with inclusive education (O'Farrell & Kinsella, 2018). Consultation was defined as a problem-solving process between EPs, parents, and teachers to improve outcomes for children, but it was acknowledged that definitions of and practices within consultation varied considerably (O'Farrell & Kinsella, 2018). However, the CoS was not mentioned, although according to NEPS policy it is the consultative bridge between schools, families and EPs (O'Farrell & Kinsella, 2018). While this study provided a useful preliminary insight into consultative practices in Ireland, tensions between consultation and collaboration or between special and inclusive education were not explored. It was also unclear how consultation and/or collaboration are facilitated by the CoS.

2.7 Overall Synthesis

Bringing the systematic and thematic elements of the review into conversation with one another highlights research gaps at theoretical and policy levels; tensions arise in the intersection between consultation and collaboration, and between special and inclusive education. The thematic and systematic components highlighted that a process of change has been occurring regarding collaboration within the context of special and inclusive education (Larsen-Freeman, 2019). The Irish policy response to the international inclusion agenda thus far has been to maintain a systemic boundary between special and mainstream education (Shevlin & Banks, 2021a). The thematic element found that remnants of a specialised, diagnosis-led approach to SEN provision may still be seen in a system which uses the terminology of inclusion (Griffin & Shevlin, 2011). Given the disjointedness in Irish legislation, any education policies layered on top of these could not be considered truly inclusive, or consistent with inclusive special education, as an explicit explanation of underpinning philosophy is absent (Kauffman & Hornby, 2020; Shevlin & Banks, 2021a). Elements of special and inclusive education are combined in a somewhat ad hoc manner (Griffin & Shevlin, 2011). Irish policy is currently at a crossroads; a full inclusion model would require a radical overhaul of the education system, making inclusive education a truly mainstream concern (NCSE, 2019). Tensions arise as resourcing issues and the risk of overlooking some children's needs must be balanced with an ambition for every child to participate in education and society (Florian, 2019; Hornby, 2015; NCSE, 2019).

2.7.1 Systemic Factors

Tensions around special and inclusive education and around consultation and collaboration which arise in theory and policy can be traced through to corresponding practice-level tensions. In DST terms, disjointedness in the policy and legislative systems, and in broader international contexts, interacts with the granular, interpersonal interactions between SENCOs, SLT, and NEPS as they attempt to work together in day-to-day practice (Larsen-Freeman, 2019). The thematic review highlighted that the introduction of the CoS and subsequent changes to the resource allocation model constitute key drivers of practice; however collaboration between SENCOs, SLT, and NEPS across the CoS has not been adequately addressed in

research (Fitzgerald & Radford, 2020). The systematic review highlighted that potential for consultation to be collaborative was shaped by policy around special and/or inclusive education (Thornberg, 2014a). Systemic barriers arising from policy changes were highlighted in the systematic review, including paperwork and administrative demands which created procedural challenges for collaboration (Boesley & Crane, 2018; Hamre et al., 2018a). This reflects the thematic review finding that systems are reciprocally influential; mismatches at any systemic level create barriers to meaningful collaboration while seamless integration between systems facilitates productive, meaningful collaboration (Fitzgerald et al., 2021; Larsen-Freeman, 2012). Relationships between SENCOs, SLT and NEPS is a practical issue which manifests in interactions between NEPS and post-primary schools, and is central to the debate around inclusive and special education (Fitzgerald & Radford, 2017). Collaboration across the CoS represents the intersection between special and inclusive education, and consultation and collaboration; research is necessary to explore this relationship.

2.7.2 Interpersonal Factors

The systematic review found that interpersonal barriers and facilitators occurred within systemic contexts, reflecting a DST view of nested dynamic systems (Larsen-Freeman, 2019). Shifts in policy towards a needs-led approach with more inclusive elements than heretofore have reconceptualised the NEPS role as one of whole-school consultation rather than gatekeeping (Shevlin & Banks, 2021a). Systematic review findings indicated that changes over time in the philosophy of policy influence the focus of collaboration between post-primary schools and EPs. For instance, in Denmark the focus of consultation was observed to shift from an within-child deficits and difficulties towards biopsychosocial and whole-school factors (Hamre et al., 2018a; Kjaer & Dannesboe, 2019). Different understandings of each other's roles also emerged in changing policy contexts, with some EPs seeing themselves as capacity builders while schools viewed them as gatekeepers (Hamre et al., 2018a; O'Farrell & Kinsella, 2018). Unclear language and absence of definitions in Irish policy could be linked to diverging interpretations of policy; interpersonal relationships could thereby be compromised due to different understandings and expectations of consultation (Larsen-Freeman, 2019; Skerritt, O'Hara, et al., 2021). The scarcity of research in the Irish context makes it difficult to conjecture how the

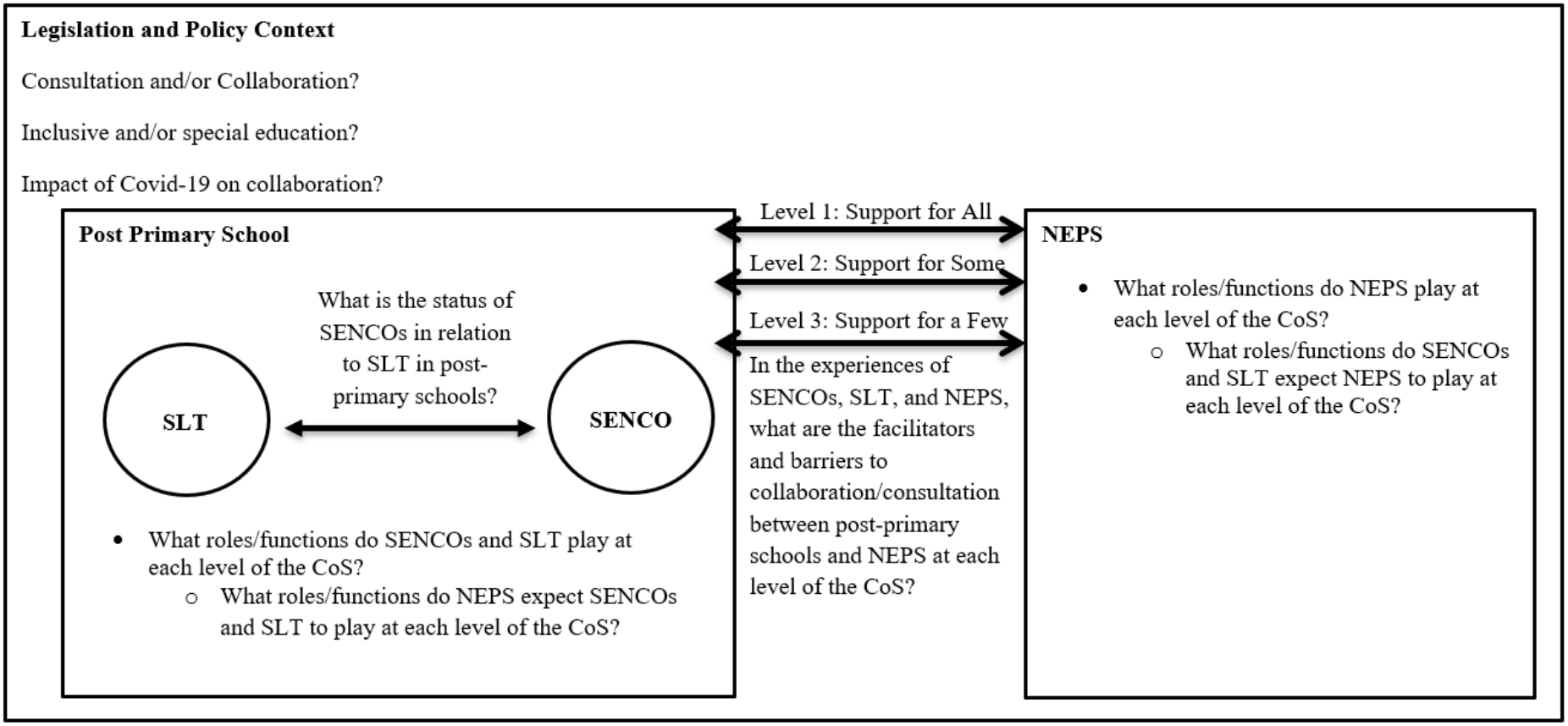
complex interactions between special and inclusive education in policy affect collaboration between SENCOs, SLT, and NEPS. The thematic review indicated ways in which the changing policy context regarding special and inclusive education could shape collaboration between SENCOs, SLT, and NEPS, and the systematic review illuminated ways in which this dynamic process has played out in international contexts.

2.7.3 Gaps and Tensions in Theory, Policy, and Research

It is difficult to form robust conclusions about the relationship between post-primary schools and NEPS due to gaps between policy, theory, and research. These gaps appear partly in the research results that were highlighted in the systematic review and partly in implicit aspects of research which speak as clearly as the explicit conclusions reached by researchers. No studies were identified which explore how the NEPS consultative model and the CoS facilitate collaboration between SENCOs, SLT and NEPS in Irish post-primary schools. It is difficult to conjecture how changing Irish policy shapes collaboration: none of the studies identified in the systematic review examined collaboration within the context of special and/or inclusive education in Ireland (O'Farrell & Kinsella, 2018). Given the disparity in international contexts regarding special educational provision, the generalisations which can be made from the studies reviewed here are limited. The systematic review indicated that an explicit teasing out of collaboration in light of the special/inclusive education context is often absent from research. The thematic review highlighted theoretical work in the Irish context, proposing inclusive special education as a potential model, but the evidence base is currently insufficient to provide a clear understanding of barriers and facilitators to collaboration in practice (Fitzgerald & Radford, 2017). Addressing this gap would have considerable implications for EP research and practice in Ireland and in international contexts: many countries are attempting to navigate pathways through special and inclusive education (Fitzgerald & Radford, 2020). The evidence discussed here is therefore at an inferential stage and does not allow definitive conclusions to be drawn about the experiences of SENCOs, SLT and NEPS when they endeavour to collaborate with one another in an Irish context; see Figure 3 for DST-informed future research directions.

Figure 3

A DST Perspective on Future Research Questions



2.7.4 Methodological Implications

Based on this review, it is necessary to examine barriers and facilitators to collaboration at the interpersonal and systemic levels; mixed-methods facilitates exploration of both context-specific factors and general trends (Mertens, 2014). In the current review, qualitative methodologies facilitated an in-depth, granular exploration of individuals' experiences of barriers and facilitators to collaboration, providing a valuable insight into schools' unique contexts, cultures and dynamics (Newman et al., 2018a; O'Farrell & Kinsella, 2018). In contrast, quantitative surveys provided an overview of barriers and facilitators to collaboration, enabling a greater degree of generalisation than qualitative studies. Using semi-structured interviews as the qualitative element would enable further probing for additional information and clarification of participants' understanding of questions (Mertens, 2014). This would strengthen dependability and creditability in comparison to the qualitative survey questions used by the mixed-methods studies in this review (Berger et al., 2014; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Triangulating qualitative and quantitative data strengthens the validity and reliability of the research as a whole (Mertens, 2014; Newman et al., 2018a). Qualitative components are necessary in order to provide rich detail, while quantitative survey methods allow generalisations to be made about barriers and facilitators experienced by SENCOs, SLT and NEPS psychologists in Ireland (Mertens, 2014). From a DST perspective, using mixed-methods provides an overview of systemic barriers and facilitators to collaboration as well as a rich picture of individuals' experiences of working within and between the systems of post-primary schools, NEPS, and the overall policy context.

2.7.5 Conclusion

Current evidence does not explain how, or whether, collaboration occurs between SENCOs, SLT and NEPS in post-primary schools. This warrants examination, as NEPS, SENCOs and SLT are navigating practice within a complex policy context. It is unsurprising that practice is so variable and inconsistent, given the backdrop of disjointed and constantly changing policy, and uncertainty regarding Ireland's future direction in the context of the international inclusion agenda. The tensions around transition to a collaborative way of working arguably mirror the tensions around the previously discussed shift from special education to an inclusive

agenda. Essentially it appears that the interchangeable use of consultation and collaboration in policy, combined with the absence of a definition of the SENCO role and considerable changes in the NEPS role, considerably hampers any efforts to rigorously analyse collaboration between SENCOs, SLT and NEPS. This has implications in terms of interpersonal and systemic barriers and facilitators which came up in the systematic review. Research is required to address this gap in understanding. Given the paucity of evidence available, it is necessary to begin with a quantitative element to survey each group's perceptions of consultation and collaboration, expectations regarding their own and others' roles, and barriers and facilitators to consultation and collaboration. The resultant overview should be enriched by a qualitative element in order to provide a granular, individual-level insight into personal experiences of barriers and facilitators to collaboration (Mertens, 2014). This mixed-methods approach facilitates examination of collaboration both on a systemic and on an individual level. Research is needed to elicit the views of SENCOs, SLT, and NEPS on their own role, and to explore the experiences of each group regarding collaboration between post-primary schools and NEPS at all three levels of the CoS.

Chapter 3: Empirical Paper

3.1 Introduction

Educational provision for children with SEN in Ireland has undergone considerable changes, and remains in a state of flux (Fitzgerald & Radford, 2017; Shevlin & Banks, 2021a). Irish policy previously espoused special education, with separate SEN and mainstream provision (Shevlin & Banks, 2021a). Future directions of Irish educational policy are influenced by an inclusive agenda in international policy; the Irish government ratified the UNCRPD in 2018 (Shevlin & Banks, 2021a). Accordingly, the NCSE is considering all options, including a full inclusion model with all children attending mainstream schools (NCSE, 2019). The NCSE is an independent statutory body which organises the allocation of additional supports to schools and is involved in research and policy advice (NCSE, 2022). Transitioning between special and inclusive education is highly complex; tensions arise around resourcing and the risk of overlooking some children's needs (Hornby, 2014b; NCSE, 2019). These tensions must be balanced with an ambition for every child to participate in education and society (Florian, 2019; Hornby, 2015).

Policy changes require post-primary schools to support all students' needs and necessitate effective linkages between post-primary schools and external agencies such as NEPS. SETAM underpins these changes, allocating support based on school-level profiles of needs rather than diagnosis (DES, 2017a; NCSE, 2014). SETAM is mediated by the CoS, an MTSS providing layered support for students' common, distinct, and unique needs (NEPS, 2010). Consultation between NEPS and post-primary schools across the CoS focuses on systemic, whole-school work at Level 1, and on groups or individuals with more complex needs at Levels 2 and 3 (NEPS, 2010). Consultation is intended to facilitate collaboration whereby multiple disciplines work together co-create solutions and all stakeholders' views are equally valued (Wagner, 2017). Consultation could also occur in the absence of collaboration, depending on interpersonal and systemic factors (Gonzalez et al., 2004). Interpersonal barriers include difficulty in integrating other professional viewpoints and understanding others' roles; for example, EPs may view themselves as capacity builders while teachers view them as expert gatekeepers (Hamre et al.,

2018b). Collaboration is facilitated by positive interpersonal relationships involving trust, a feeling of equality, and an entry process to create shared understandings (O'Farrell & Kinsella, 2018). Systemic barriers include power imbalances, excessive administrative tasks, and economic constraints (Newman et al., 2018a).

It is difficult to clarify whether consultation between SENCOs, SLT, and NEPS is collaborative in nature and how post-primary schools and NEPS are linked across the CoS due to the absence of the SENCO role from policy (Fitzgerald & Radford, 2017, 2020). This contrasts with international contexts; in England, the SENCO role is underpinned by the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice and the National Award for SEN Co-ordination (Curran, 2019; DfE & DoH, 2015; Petersen, 2010). SENCO status within Irish post-primary school structures and the degree of congruence between SENCOs and SLT are unclear, although in practice SENCOs operate in many Irish post-primary schools and sometimes complete SENCO duties as part of a middle leadership Assistant Principal I or II post (DES, 2018; Fitzgerald & Radford, 2020). The relationship between SENCOs, SLT, and NEPS manifests in the everyday work of NEPS and post-primary schools and is central to the debate around inclusive and special education. Studies in England and Denmark found that as policy shifted from special to inclusive education, the focus of consultation between EPs and schools shifted away from a deficit-oriented focus on within-child factors towards an ecological perspective, taking account of interacting biopsychosocial factors influencing children's development (Kjaer & Dannesboe, 2019). When these three groups work together within the framework of the CoS, they represent the intersection between special and inclusive education, and consultation and collaboration.

3.1.1 Research Aims

Current evidence does not explain how, or whether, collaboration occurs between SENCOs, SLT and NEPS in post-primary schools. The SENCO role is not explicitly defined in policy, and a psychological lens on collaboration between NEPS and SENCOs is largely absent from research (DES, 2017b; Fitzgerald & Radford, 2017). The evidence-base is insufficient to yield definitive conclusions about barriers and facilitators to collaboration between SENCOs, SLT, and NEPS; no Irish study has explored the experiences of all three groups. Addressing this gap has

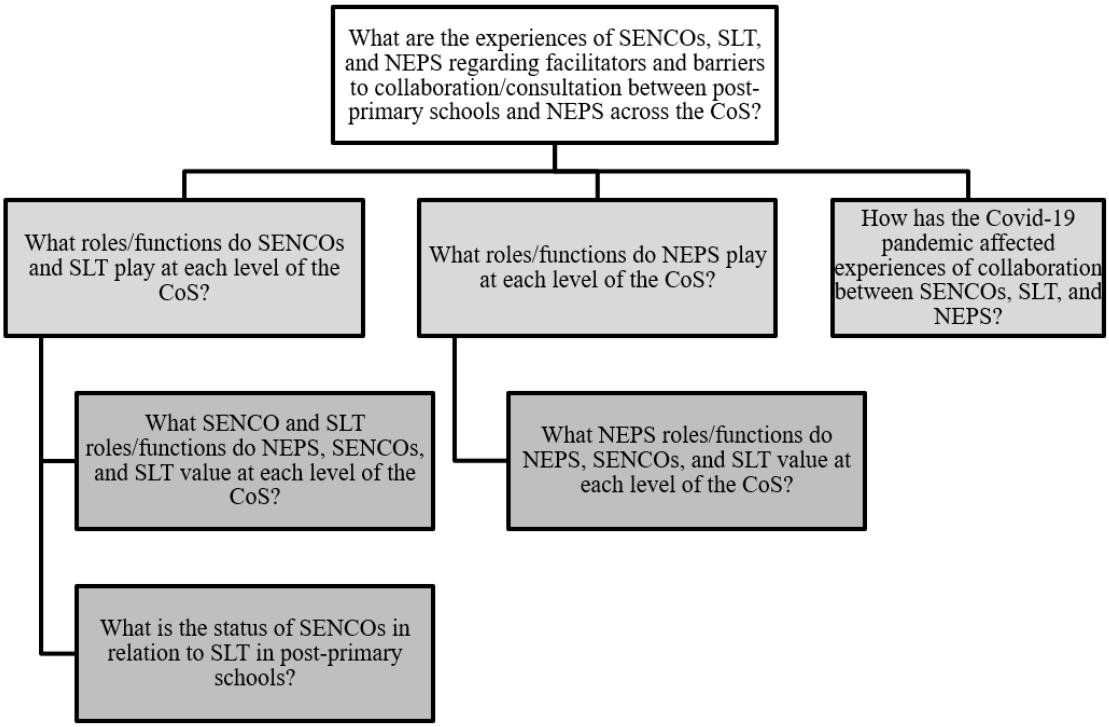
implications for research and practice. This research sought to explore experiences of collaboration between SENCOs, SLT and NEPS in Irish post-primary schools across the CoS.

3.1.1.1 Theoretical Framework.

Dynamic Systems Theory (DST) facilitates examination of the theoretical and systemic tangle presented thus far (Karimi-Aghdam, 2017). DST posits that systems are in a constant state of flux and are recursively influenced by interactions within and between systems (Karimi-Aghdam, 2017). This reflects the concept of an inclusive school being one which is dynamic and on-the-move (Booth & Ainscow, 2011). Because DST examines interpersonal and systemic linkages, it facilitates exploration of the interacting systemic and interpersonal factors which shape collaboration between NEPS and post-primary schools. While surface-level structures such as policy documents may change quickly, deeper structures such as attitudes and ingrained practices change more slowly (Thomas, 2009). DST framed the current research questions; Figure 4.

Figure 4

DST-informed Research Questions on Collaboration between SENCOs, SLT and NEPS



3.2 Methods

3.2.1 Design

A mixed-methods sequential explanatory design was used to explore individual experiences and general trends (Mertens, 2014). Phase 1 involved a cross-sectional survey design to gather contextual information about collaboration between SENCOs, SLT, and NEPS and to inform themes for Phase 2. In Phase 2, semi-structured interviews with SENCOs, SLT and NEPS provided a granular insight into personal experiences of barriers and facilitators to collaboration (Mertens, 2014). The interviews were framed by interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). The idiographic and hermeneutic nature of IPA facilitated a granular exploration of participants' experiences; the researcher aimed to make sense of the way in which participants understood their experiences (Smith et al., 2022). A multi-perspectival directly-related group design was used; SENCOs, SLT, and NEPS constitute subgroups immersed in a common experience but engaging in and viewing the situation from different perspectives (Larkin et al., 2019).

3.2.2 Quality and Validity

A pilot was undertaken to enhance the quality of the Phase 1 survey, with a focus on question clarity and ecological validity. A quality checklist for survey research was used during the design phase to enhance the quality of the survey (Mertens, 2014). In qualitative research, including IPA, validity involves an evaluation of the fitness for purpose of the research design and methodology (Smith et al., 2022). Quality appraisal builds upon validity; a high-quality IPA study exceeds the minimum standard for validity (Smith et al., 2022). Essentially, validity is conceptualised in terms of a rigorous approach to quality; the approach to quality is embedded in study design and is reflected upon throughout the design and analysis processes (Smith et al., 2022). Therefore Phase 2 adhered to quality markers for IPA research, which was particularly important because the use of IPA in mixed-methods studies is at an emergent stage (Smith et al., 2022; Yardley, 2015). Sensitivity to context was enhanced by Phase 1 data and the Phase 2 pilot (Yardley, 2015). The written narrative account centralised participants' voices and acknowledged diverse practice contexts; this also facilitated transferability (Smith et al., 2022). Commitment and rigour were achieved by describing the sampling process,

developing an IPA-compatible interview schedule, and following a rigorous analysis process (Smith et al., 2022). Coherence and transparency were enhanced by highlighting a clear narrative from literature review, through methodological and analytical decisions, to the discussion; DST provided an overarching framework (Yardley, 2015). Impact and importance were addressed by outlining clear, practical implications of the research (Yardley, 2015). Making the research paradigm explicit ensured confirmability; dependability was achieved by documenting research procedures, and member checking enhanced creditability (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Written reflections were used at all stages from the Phase 1 pilot through to Phase 2 data analysis. See Appendix G for research timeline, quality appraisals, and details of the role of reflections in enhancing quality.

3.2.3 Participants

Participants included NEPS psychologists, SLT and SENCOs. In both phases, participants were asked to indicate whether they undertook a dual SLT/SENCO role. SLT and SENCOs were working in post-primary schools with experience of working with NEPS. NEPS psychologists were qualified educational psychologists, employed by NEPS, with post-primary schools on their caseloads.

3.2.4 Sampling

In Phase 1, list-based sampling was used; all units of the sampling frame were invited to participate, to maximise the sample (n = 278). All post-primary schools were contacted by email using the database on the DoE website. All NEPS psychologists were contacted by email using the internal NEPS database, with permission from the NEPS Research Advisory Committee. The surveys were disseminated via social media, post-primary management bodies, and SENCO forums (professional learning networks for post-primary SENCOs). In Phase 2, purposive sampling was used to identify three participants from each group (Oxley, 2016). Participants were contacted by email.

3.2.5 Ethics

Ethical approval was obtained from MIC Research Ethics Committee in December 2020 (reference A20-055; Appendix H) and from NEPS in February 2021; data storage followed GDPR and MIC's Data Retention Schedule. In Phase 1 the

information sheet and consent form were built into the survey. In Phase 2 participants received information sheets and consent forms at least one week before interviews. To avoid compromising relationships where criticism or sensitive issues may arise, care was taken to ensure that Phase 2 participants were not working together. Second-order member checking ensured that selected quotes were acceptable to participants from a confidentiality perspective (Birt et al., 2016; Brear, 2019). Participants could amend or withdraw any or all of their data during the member-checking process.

3.2.6 Data Collection

In both phases, the data collection processes reflected the principles of commitment and rigour (Yardley, 2015).

3.2.6.1 Phase 1.

A bespoke cross-sectional questionnaire was designed to answer the research questions. Adapted versions of the survey were disseminated to SENCOs, SLT and NEPS in April 2021 using Qualtrics. The Phase 1 questionnaire was piloted with two participants from each group (NEPS, SENCOs and SLT). The NEPS questionnaire was piloted with an additional third psychologist due to inconsistent feedback from the original two participants. Piloting helped to maximise validity by ensuring alignment between the researcher's and participants' understanding of what the questions were asking (Mertens, 2014). The survey asked participants to provide demographics, rate the importance of their own and each other's roles, and describe and rate barriers and facilitators to collaboration. See Appendix I for Phase 1 surveys, pilot information, and informed consent materials.

3.2.6.2 Phase 2.

The interview schedule was based on themes identified in Phase 1, policy, and the literature review. Semi-structured interviews were piloted with one member of each group: participants completed the interview via Microsoft Teams and provided feedback verbally, with the option to provide written feedback later if desired. This data was not included in the final analysis. Piloting ensured that the semi-structured interview schedule facilitated rapport building and a meaningful exploration of participants' experiences, thereby yielding data suitable for IPA (Smith et al., 2022).

Phase 2 interviews took place in June 2021. Interviews were recorded using Microsoft Teams, which facilitated repeated watching during transcription; the researcher could reflect on interviewing technique and demeanour and observe non-verbal features of participants' responses. See Appendix J for Phase 2 interview schedules, pilot information, and informed consent materials.

3.2.7 Data Analysis

Results were analysed using a Dynamic Systems Theory lens (Larsen-Freeman, 2012). In the overall synthesis, more weight was placed on Phase 2 than Phase 1 data.

3.2.7.1 Phase 1.

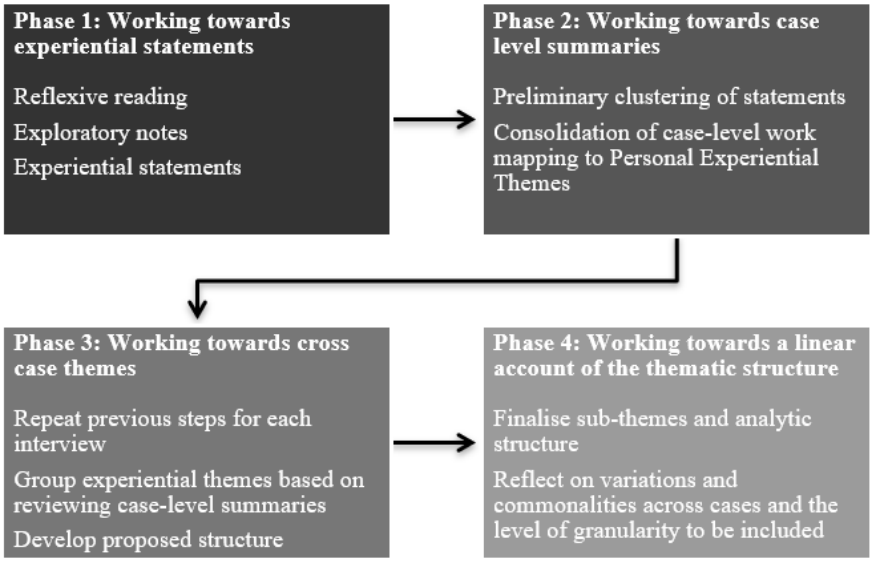
Descriptive statistics were used to identify barriers and facilitators to collaboration between SENCOs, SLT and NEPS. Quantitative data were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 26. Qualitative data were coded using NVivo 12.

3.2.7.2 Phase 2.

IPA was used to explore individual experiences and patterns across the data set. Both perspectives were necessary to answer the research questions in a nuanced way (Smith et al., 2022); see Figure 5. Appendix K provides an overview of the analysis process and Appendix L provides an annotated sample.

Figure 5

Phase 2 analysis process



3.3 Phase 1 Results

Blank responses and responses with only demographics completed were removed, leaving 278 participants (NEPS: *n* = 43, SENCOs: *n* = 137, SLT: *n* = 98). Participants reported variation in terms of urban and rural contexts, co-educational and single-sex schools, patronage, DEIS status and school size. There was no gender imbalance among SLT, but more female than male SENCOs and NEPS psychologists participated. Just over half (53.49%) of NEPS participants were previously primary school teachers, while 16.28% were post-primary teachers. Approximately half had five or fewer years' experience with NEPS. There was an approximately even split between Principals and Deputy Principals among SLT participants. From qualitative data, the only theme identified for participants holding a dual SLT-SENCO role involved insufficient time to complete both. Most SLT (97.96%) said that their school had a SENCO. Most NEPS participants (86.05%) said that all or most of their schools had SENCOs. There was considerable variation in SENCO status; see Table 4.

Table 4

SENCO Status Reported by SENCOs and SLT

	Subject teacher	SET	Dual SLT/ SENCO	AP I	AP II	SENCO (non-AP)	Other (unspecified)
SENCO	24.09%	19%	0.73%	25.54%	13.13%	5.11%	12.41%
SLT	17.35%	25.51%	4.08%	27.55%	17.35%	2.04%	6.12%

3.4 Barriers and Facilitators to Collaboration

3.4.1 Continuum of Support

Most NEPS participants (78.05%) felt that SENCOs were interested in SEN provision across all three levels of the CoS, while fewer (56.76%) reported SLT being similarly involved. Most SENCOs (88.14%) said that SLT are involved in SEN provision across the CoS. Most SLT (95.12%) SLT agreed that SENCOs are involved in SEN provision across the CoS. Results indicated that the CoS is used in many but not all post-primary schools; see Table 5.

Table 5

Percentage of Schools using the Continuum of Support

	SENCO	SLT	NEPS
CoS used all or most of the time	79.56%	88.78%	62.79%

Participants were asked to rate the importance of possible roles undertaken by SENCOs, SLT, and NEPS across the CoS on a five-point Likert scale. Examination of mean ratings of importance indicated differences in the importance which each group ascribed to certain roles across the CoS. Although not part of the original design, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to explore these differences. The dependent variables were continuous, and the independent variable comprised three separate, independent groups. Sample size was adequate, with no univariate outliers. Group sizes were unequal, compromising validity. Multivariate outliers were identified using Mahalanobis distance and removed. The Shapiro-Wilk test of multivariate normality indicated that the assumption of normality was violated for all dependent variables. However, MANOVA is reasonably robust to assumption violations and was being used in an exploratory manner; results were interpreted with caution.

3.4.1.1 NEPS roles.

There was a statistically significant difference in ratings given by SENCOs, SLT and NEPS to the importance of NEPS roles, F (34, 434) = 5.635, $p < .0001$; Wilk's $\Lambda = 0.481$, partial $\eta^2 = .306$. The Bonferroni correction was applied, resulting in an adjusted p level of .003. See Table 6 for non-significant role ratings.

At Level 1 of the CoS, SLT and SENCOs rated providing whole-school in-service training for staff as significantly more important than NEPS (F (2, 233) = 6.009; $p = .003$; partial $\eta^2 = .049$; SLT $p = .004$, $M = 1.93$, $SD = .918$; SENCO $p = .004$, $M = 1.96$, $SD = .968$; NEPS $M = 2.54$, $SD = .919$). SLT rated conducting research into SEN provision as more important than NEPS (F (2, 233) = 7.124; $p = .001$; partial $\eta^2 = .058$; SLT $p = .001$, $M = 2.08$, $SD = 1.043$; NEPS $M = 2.89$, $SD = 1.157$). SLT and SENCOs rated supporting school self-evaluation as more important than NEPS (F (2, 233) = 21.362; $p < .0005$; partial $\eta^2 = .155$; SENCO $p < .0005$, $M = 2.37$, $SD = 1.021$; SLT $p < .0005$, $M = 2.35$, $SD = 1.06$; NEPS $M = 3.6$, $SD = 1.006$).

At Level 2 and 3 of the CoS, NEPS rated consultation with parents as more important than SLT (F (2, 233) = 6.900; p = .001; partial η^2 = .056; NEPS p = .001, M = 1.23, SD = .490; SLT M = 1.77, SD = .850). SENCOs and SLT rated giving access to resources as significantly more important than NEPS (F (2, 233) = 26.846; p < .0005; partial η^2 = .187; SLT p < .0005, M = 1.71, SD = .893; SENCO p < .0005, M = 1.94, SD = 1.003; NEPS M = 3.14, SD = 1.192). SENCOs rated engaging in direct work with students as significantly more important than NEPS (F (2, 233) = 6.789; p = .001; partial η^2 = .055; SENCO p = .001, M = 1.7, SD = .917; NEPS M = 2.43, SD = 1.313). SENCOs and SLT rated conducting psychoeducational assessments as significantly more important than NEPS (F (2, 233) = 18.370; p < .0005; partial η^2 = .136; SENCO p < .0005, M = 1.39, SD = .710; SLT p < .0005, M = 1.31, SD = .707; NEPS M = 2.17, SD = .891). Indeed 50% of SENCOs and 69.1% of SLT said that NEPS are not doing enough assessments.

Table 6

Mean and Median Ratings for NEPS Roles with Non-significant Differences

	Mean	Median
Assisting with school development and planning for SEN provision	1.91	2
Providing whole-school in-service training for staff	2.05	2
Providing information and/or training about evidence-based interventions for use with individuals or small groups	1.69	1
Recommending school-based assessments e.g. screening/intake tests, diagnostic tests	1.94	2
Supporting schools to process and analyse test results to inform intervention and resource allocation	2.00	2
Engaging in consultation with SENCOs	1.46	1
Engaging in consultation with parents	1.60	1
Engaging in consultation with SLT	1.64	1
Carrying out classroom observations	2.63	3
Liaising with other external agencies on behalf of students e.g. disability services	1.89	2
Helping school staff with individualised planning	2.14	2
Providing support in the event of a critical incident	1.28	1

3.4.1.2 SENCO roles.

There was a statistically significant difference in importance which SENCOs, SLT and NEPS ascribed to SENCO roles (F (42, 416) = 2.538, $p < .0005$; Wilk's Λ = 0.634, partial η^2 = .204). The Bonferroni correction led to an adjusted p level of .002. Table 7 contains non-significant role ratings. At Level 2 and 3 of the CoS, SLT rated liaising with other staff as more important than SENCOs (F (2, 228) = 8.305; $p <$ .0005; partial η^2 = .068; SLT p = .001, M = 1.16, SD = .400; SENCOs M = 1.41, SD = .544). SLT rated individualised planning as more important than SENCOs (F (2, 228) = 9.426; $p < .0005$; partial η^2 = .076; SLT $p < .0005$, M = 1.21, SD = .437; SENCO M = 1.57, SD = .689). SLT rated arranging for psychoeducational assessments to be conducted as more important than NEPS (F (2, 228) = 10.092; $p <$

.0005; partial η^2 = .081; SLT p < .0005,M = 1.37, SD = .533; NEPS M = 2.00, SD = .921).

Table 7

Mean and Median Ratings for SENCO Roles with Non-significant Differences

	Mean	Median
Identifying students whose needs require support at Level 2 or 3 of the CoS	1.25	1
Intake screening and collecting information from primary schools including student passport	1.28	1
Arranging standardised tests and/or diagnostic tests of literacy and numeracy	1.42	1
Advocating on behalf of students	1.29	1
Applying for resources e.g. SET/SNA allocations	1.47	1
Applying for accommodations for students e.g. RACE, DARE, HEAR	1.31	1
Individual work with students e.g. planning, implementing and reviewing interventions	1.49	1
Co-ordinating SEN team	1.43	1
Collaborating with outside agencies e.g. NEPS	1.40	1
Directing the work of SNAs in the school	1.81	2
Developing policies and procedures	2.05	2
Putting whole-school initiatives and interventions into place	1.83	2
Identifying relevant CPD and providing CPD to staff	1.99	2
Provision mapping and allocating resources	1.78	2
Supporting students' transitions to and from post-primary school	1.48	1
Organising reasonable accommodations in school-based examinations/tests	1.52	1
Liaising with other schools	1.95	2
Liaising with parents	1.27	1

3.4.1.3 SLT roles.

There was a statistically significant difference in the ratings of the importance of SLT functions by SLT, SENCO and NEPS (F (24, 394) = 2.298, p = .001; Wilk's Λ = 0.769, partial η^2 = .123). The Bonferroni correction resulted in an adjusted p level of .004. At Level 2 and 3, SLT rated allocating resources and timetabling for students with SEN as significantly more important than NEPS (F (2, 208) = 10.113; $p < .0005$; partial η^2 = .089; SLT $p < .0005$, M = 1.18, SD = .417; NEPS M = 1.63, SD = .690). See Table 8 for roles with non-significant differences.

Table 8

Mean and Median Ratings for SLT Roles with Non-Significant Differences

	Mean	Median
Facilitating CPD for all teachers in relation to the education of students with SEN	1.36	1
Ensuring that systems are in place for effective sharing of relevant information on students' needs with all subject teachers	1.38	1
Ensuring effective engagement with feeder schools to support the transition of students with SEN	1.41	1
Using the school development planning process so that the models of organisation necessary for the inclusion of students with SEN are agreed and implemented	1.41	1
Leading the establishment of the SEN team	1.41	1
Overseeing a whole-school approach to assessment and screening to identify needs and to guide the allocation of appropriate supports	1.43	1
Organising early intervention and prevention	1.64	1
Facilitating meetings between parents and various support services	1.71	1.50
Consulting and liaising with relevant external bodies such as NEPS	1.72	2
Identifying and keeping records of students who need support at Level 2 or 3 of the CoS	1.34	1
Monitoring, recording and reviewing students' outcomes at group, class, and whole-school level	1.88	2

3.4.2 Systems

Most SENCOs (91.24%) had an SEN team in their school, ranging in size from one to 15 people in addition to the SENCO. Most SLT (93.88%) said that their school had an SEN team. No NEPS psychologists reported that all or most of their schools had an SEN team; 86.05% reported that about half of their schools had an SEN team, 6.98% said that some of their schools had an SEN team and 6.98% were unsure. Most SENCOs (68.75%) and SLT (75.79%) reported that there was a timetabled slot for SEN team meetings and 48.06% of SENCOs reported sharing co-ordination duties with SEN teams. Qualitative data indicated that NEPS found it easier to work with SENCOs when systems existed to facilitate links within the school, and SENCOs valued NEPS' role in facilitating links between the school and different stakeholders. Effective communication and clear role definitions were important for SLT and SENCOs, particularly considering policy changes affecting the NEPS role.

3.4.3 Working Relationships

Most participants reported positive working relationships between SENCOs, SLT, and NEPS; Table 9. Most SENCOs (77.17%) and 53.61% of SLT said that it was easy to make their voices heard through consultation and most SENCOs (76.38%) and SLT (65.98%) said that consultation is effective in meeting students' needs across the CoS. Most SENCOs (77.95%) and SLT (69.79%) said that consultation is an effective use of time and resources. Most SENCOs (85.16%) and SLT (70.1%) reported that NEPS are familiar with the post-primary context; more SENCOs (71.65%) than SLT (57.73%) agreed that the NEPS psychologist knows what their school needs. Interpersonal relationships were identified as a theme in qualitative data for SENCOs, SLT, and NEPS. SLT reported working well with NEPS psychologists who understood the post-primary context, while NEPS psychologists felt their role was shaped by school culture around SEN.

Table 9

Working Relationships between SENCOs, SLT, and NEPS

	Positive relationship with SENCOs	Positive relationship with SLT	Positive relationships with NEPS
SENCO	-	95.76%	87.40%
SLT	96.34%	-	69.07%
NEPS	90.48%	78.38%	-

Qualitative data indicated that NEPS, SLT, and SENCOs found it easier to work together when they had shared vision and priorities, while it was more difficult when they felt that different priorities or goals were being pursued; see Table 10 for quantitative data.

Table 10

Shared Goals between SENCOs, SLT, and NEPS

	Shared goals with SENCOs	Shared goals with SLT	Shared goals with NEPS
SENCO	-	87.29%	66.93%
SLT	96.34%	-	40.21%
NEPS	80.49%	52.78%	-

3.4.4 Time

Insufficient time was identified as a barrier in qualitative data; see Table 11 for quantitative data. Time was particularly important for SENCOs; those who had time allocated to their role by SLT valued this highly. Sufficient time was seen as necessary to enable SENCOs and NEPS to build relationships with each other. NEPS and SLT acknowledged each other's heavy workloads and noted that this limited the time available for collaborating and relationship building.

Table 11

Sufficient Time to Work Together

	Sufficient time to work with SENCOs	Sufficient time to work with SLT	Sufficient time to work with NEPS
SENCO	-	66.1%	58.59%
SLT	63.41%	-	51.54%
NEPS	52.5%	41.67%	-

3.4.5 Continuous Professional Development

Most SENCOs (90.51%) reported having an additional qualification in SEN. Only 4.5% of SENCOs reported that no other SEN team members had an additional qualification in SEN. Qualitative data indicated that NEPS found it easier to work with SENCOs who had good knowledge of SEN and access to CPD, and SENCOs found it helpful when NEPS psychologists shared specialised knowledge and resources.

3.4.6 Impact of Covid-19

This question was answered by qualitative data. Two main themes were identified, namely communication and no change, with NEPS also identifying a third theme, role change. The themes were identified by coding the qualitative responses provided by participants. See Table 12 for a summary.

Table 12

Qualitative Data on the Impact of Covid-19

Communication	Reductions in the quantity and quality of communication involved delays to NEPS assessments and inability to carry over incomplete assessments to the following year, less direct contact with NEPS, trying to balance relationships between SENCOs, SLT and NEPS while working online, and difficulties around matching the NEPS service to school needs during school closures. NEPS reported reduced quantity of communication with SLT as they mainly liaised with SENCOs. Positive changes for some participants included closer co-operation, and the establishment of explicit systems for communication. SENCOs experienced barriers due to timetabling changes necessitated by Covid-19. Some participants found online communication challenging while others found that it made communication more efficient.
No change	Many participants reported that the quality of relationships did not change due to Covid-19, or that changes were due to other reasons such as staff changes or starting a new role during Covid-19.
Role change	Some NEPS psychologists found their role broadening towards a whole-school approach with more emphasis on wellbeing than academics. Others reported feeling forced into an expert role with an emphasis on assessments, limiting the opportunity for meaningful collaboration and systemic work during Covid-19.

3.5 Phase 2 Results

Three themes were identified, each with three subthemes (Table 13). Both common and divergent experiences are highlighted within themes, highlighting participants' experiences of solution-building (Larkin & Griffiths, 2004). Details omitted to protect confidentiality are marked […]. Appendix M shows representation of participants across themes and Appendix N presents member-checking information. See Tables 14-16 for pen pictures depicting participant characteristics.

Table 13

Overarching Themes

Theme 1: Interpersonal connections	From battle to luck
	Far and beyond
	Holding hands
Theme 2: Expertise in managing layers	SENCO as filter
	SLT as overseers of layers
	NEPS as hub
Theme 3: Working around silos	Silo v deliberately constructed organism
	Language shapes silos
	The value of collaboration

Table 14

SENCO Pen Pictures

Saoirse is a SENCO in a mixed rural DEIS school serving a large town and surrounding rural area. Almost half of the school's 300 students are on the SEN register, with one-third experiencing complex needs. The school has an ASD class. The SENCO role is part of an AP I post which includes other leadership duties. Saoirse holds an AP II post but is currently acting AP I. She has completed the postgraduate diploma in SEN. Saoirse has four hours per week assigned to AP I duties, with two hours assigned to the SENCO role.
Síle works in an all-girls private fee-paying school with approximately 365 students, with around 20 on the SEN register. The school does not currently have an SEN team. Síle has completed the postgraduate diploma in SEN. Síle holds an AP I post which does not include SENCO duties.
Sinéad works in a DEIS school in a city, with a linguistically and culturally diverse student population. All students are on the Additional Educational Needs (AEN) register, with records kept of students receiving support across the CoS. Sinéad has completed the Postgraduate Diploma in SEN and holds an AP II position. Sinéad and the AEN team have flexibility within their timetables to complete their duties.

Table 15

SLT Pen Pictures

Peadar has a post-graduate qualification in educational leadership and is the principal of a mixed DEIS school. He joined the school four years ago as principal, when enrolment was in decline; numbers have since increased. The school serves a large town and surrounding rural area. Of the 320 students in the school, 30% are on the SEN register and there are two classes for students with ASD. There is a SENCO in the school.
Paula is the deputy principal of a rural DEIS school with 380 students. The SENCO role is distributed across one AP I post and two AP II posts. Approximately 30% of students have psychological reports and there is an ASD class in the school.
Patricia is the principal of a mixed school in a large town with 800 students. She completed the postgraduate diploma in SEN and has worked in the school for almost 40 years, becoming principal in 2014. There is an SEN team and a SENCO who is an AP II post-holder. The school has two ASD classes and includes students with a variety of complex needs.

Table 16

NEPS Pen Pictures

Neasa completed a psychology degree and post-graduate qualification in primary teaching. She taught in primary school junior classes. She qualified as an EP via a master's degree. Neasa previously worked with an all-girls city school with a reputation for academic achievement, and with a mixed Educate Together city school. She currently works with a large mixed DEIS school.
Nóra trained as a primary school teacher and taught in a special school for children with mild General Learning Disabilities. She completed a psychology degree and qualified as an EP via a doctoral programme in the UK. She worked in England before returning to NEPS. There was an emphasis on consultation in her training and when she joined NEPS. Nóra has worked with her current two post-primary schools for the past 9-10 years (both mixed post-primary schools with 300-350 pupils, one rural and one near a city).
Nuala worked as a primary school teacher in the UK before qualifying as an EP via a doctoral programme. She worked as a senior EP in England with children and families from diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds and with a mix of large/small, rural/urban post-primary schools; most were academy schools. Nuala returned to Ireland some years ago and has been working with NEPS since then; she has worked with one private post-primary school and two large rural post-primary schools.

3.6 Interpersonal Connections

3.6.1 From Battle to Luck

Many participants, particularly SENCOs, felt lucky if conditions for positive interpersonal relationships were present. Saoirse used the word 'lucky' ten times altogether, including feeling lucky to have an AP I position with time allocated to SENCO duties, although 'it's not enough.' Feeling lucky to have insufficient time indicates the precarious nature of the role. Saoirse, Síle, and Paula all felt 'lucky' in their relationship with their NEPS psychologists, as did Patricia:

> *It wasn't for the good of the child, d'you know. It wasn't. With [current psychologist] it always is. So I'm very lucky and I hope that we still have her, I got a letter the other day to say she's appointed to us for next year again. Thank God. I'm very lucky.*

This indicates that Patricia values a student-centred relationship between the school and NEPS . The repetition of ‘lucky’ suggests that there is a sense that effective NEPS support is not guaranteed.

Síle, Patricia, and Neasa described interpersonal challenges leading to battles or uncertainty. Síle felt that having an SEN team could resolve the ‘big battle’ in her school; hers was the only school without an SEN team:

> *I'd like a team, because then you could, you know, have an expert in maybe all of those areas or a few of us could have a few of the skills that we could share. So quite often I feel it's the tail wagging the dog. You know, rather than the other way around. But look, we’ll fight the good fight and we’ll keep asking for it. I might get it from private prayer.*

The image of the tail wagging the dog suggests that SEN agenda is not currently being led by relevant expertise but by other agendas; an SEN team would facilitate the development and dissemination of expertise across the school. An interpersonal battle, and possibly divine intervention, are needed to create the relationships and systems necessary to distribute specialised expertise across the school. Neasa said that interpersonal mismatches can also lead to uncertainty due to ‘confidence’ issues and an absence of reciprocity from the relationship with SLT: ‘it’s easier when they come to you.’

All three SLT members spoke about their role in managing interpersonal relationships to minimise conflict. Patricia resolved a battle situation in the SEN team by assuming certain characteristics to engage in the complex process of managing personalities: ‘I’m not a ruthless person, but I have to be because otherwise I’d be left with a whole lot of dodos. So, dodos are extinct.’ Patricia values staff members who can evolve and change, and whose work is effective and functional; an inclusive school is on-the-move (Booth & Ainscow, 2011). Patricia is driving this evolution; she employed specific behaviours and used AP posts to transform a ‘battle’ into a calm environment, and now feels ‘lucky’ to have an ‘excellent’ SENCO. Luck is intentionally created, but this does not minimise the barriers posed by interpersonal challenges, particularly around the SENCO role.

3.6.2 Far and Beyond

Many participants expressed the view that meaningful collaboration between SENCOs, SLT and NEPS required all involved to go above and beyond designated role expectations to achieve support for students through collaboration. This was prominent in Patricia's interview:

> *When we closed in January, we asked them [SNAs and SETs] to phone on a regular basis all of their students because they weren't the type that were going to engage too much with school anyway. Some of them went far and beyond what they were called to do.*

'Far and beyond' encapsulates the experience of transcending role requirements through personal commitment; there is a sense of moving past barriers to support students. The idea of surpassing role requirements is particularly interesting regarding SENCOs, who have to transcend a nebulous role which is absent from policy. A personal toll was common; each SENCO discussed the personal consequences of working beyond role requirements. Síle's experience is typical; she described feeling 'burnt out' due to 'relentless' work:

> *I have to say I'm tired. […] It's like a piece of elastic really, and I don't seem to have the personality to say, well I can't do that because if it's not done I'm looking at a child's face and I can't sleep at night then. I mean, I can't, you know. So by our nature I suppose in the role we're not as kind of I suppose strict or as disciplined as we could be if you like.*

This positions the SENCO role as requiring elasticity; Síle is flexible and accommodating when meeting children's needs. Elastic breaks if stretched too far; this reflects Síle's experience of tiredness. Síle feels that she does not have a choice about working far beyond role requirements: her underpinning motivation is meeting the children's needs. Síle uses 'we' and 'our', giving the impression that Síle believes that this is a shared experience among SENCOs. Patricia attributed this personal toll to the absence of the SENCO role in policy:

> *It's not mentioned, it's not catered for, it can be an AP II post, it can be an AP I post. It can have hours, it can have no hours and no money. It can be anything. It can be enough for teachers to resign from it.*

This captures the variability of the SENCO role, and the personal burden carried by SENCOs. Many participants described factors which shaped their ability to work beyond role requirements. Patricia described the development of the SEN department as her 'baby,' requiring collective, transcendent commitment from staff who are 'willing to put the same amount of time and effort and commitments into it that I am.' SEN provision, like a baby, needs careful nurturing, reflecting the idea of leadership for inclusion; there is an individual element relating to Patricia's values, and an interpersonal element around recruiting equally committed staff. NEPS participants also felt that collective commitment is necessary to transcend role requirements; Neasa said that 'as one person walking in, it's really hard to change the system.' Patricia and Síle used the image of box-ticking to illustrate the opposite of someone who goes 'far and beyond,' as Patricia described:

> *You can't have box-tickers. You have to have people who look beyond the 40-minute class or the one-hour class and see the big picture. And it's becoming more complicated.*

Box-ticking involves a narrow view of children; conversely, the SEN department's role transcends school because students' needs extend beyond the classroom. Patricia said that staff members might become box-tickers if their reasons for actions or non-actions arose from adhering to union edicts. Síle felt that box-ticking arose from many functions being transferred to schools by policies such as the Irish exemption policy. These policy decisions are requiring her to continue working beyond her role requirements, which as SENCO are not formally recognised in policy. Going 'far and beyond' implies action; looking beyond constraining factors such as a time-bound class implies that practice must be reflective, and the 'big picture' is changing and becoming more complicated as one reflects on it. This aligns with DST (Larsen-Freeman, 2019); time is a dynamic factor which interacts with the systems of individual children, classes, staff, and overall school structures.

Many participants described factors which enhanced their ability to 'go far and beyond'. Sinéad said that as a 'disgruntled AP II post-holder,' the financial rewards for her personal commitment are miniscule: 'It's the coffee I drink to keep the job going. It's gone in coffee.' This creates a simultaneous image of negligible financial gains and the challenges of an exhausting, demanding job. It also highlights the dissonance between the practical demands of the SENCO role and AP structures.

Sinéad defines the rewards of her role as achieving effective support for all students, and incrementally developing a shared understanding with the principal:

> *Instead of getting a bunch of carrots, or all the carrots, I may have got half the carrots, but I'm very happy to take half the carrots and the next time I'd like to - because now he's getting, he's really starting to get it as well, am, and then the next time, then I'll get a little bit more and we'll build it.*

Sinéad is reaping the rewards which her work has sown; notably there is no stick accompanying the carrot, suggesting that the dynamic between SLT and SENCO and perhaps the wider staff is based on positive interpersonal relationships. There is a sense of collective progress towards collaboratively building AEN support; Sinéad is thinking ahead to 'next time.'

3.6.3 Holding Hands

While participants' experiences of interpersonal relationships varied considerably, many felt that SENCOs, SLT, and NEPS have a role in holding each other within relationships and in holding families' hands while supporting students' needs. Nuala applied her reflections on working with SENCOs in England to the potential SENCO role in Ireland:

> *The SENCO is the person that mediates it for the family and explains it and helps them and supports them and is that little light in the tunnel that helps them see the other side when people are giving them names and labels and talking about their child in very deficit-oriented language, because that's just the nature of the job. The SENCO is the person that holds their hands kind of through the process and helps them see the journey and the path forward and helps them see you know, this is how we're gonna help you, help your child achieve their potential. And they sound like real catch words and buzz words, but they actually really mean something when you, when you're in the middle of this and you want someone to say, but what can we do to help? They're the person that helps you with the help. That's quite an inspiring role, isn't it? I don't know how you capture that in a job description.*

Nuala describes her vision of a transformative SENCO role, juxtaposed with her statement that she cannot capture this in a tightly defined and standardised job description. The SENCO is positioned as a guiding light providing comfort and

security against potentially threatening labels and language. The definition-resistant, transcendent nature of the SENCO role is captured in the idea that SENCOs help families with the help provided by schools; the SENCO role is intrinsic to the work of the school and is potentially transformative, for families and other professionals including NEPS. Most participants also described the NEPS role in trustful, collaborative relationships, 'providing a safe space for teachers who are very stressed' (Nóra). Sinéad and Síle described the relationship with NEPS as essential to their work and school-wide SEN provision; this relationship is 'one of the saviours of our system' because 'we'd be lost without her' (Saoirse). There is a sense that the NEPS psychologist provides security and direction for the school system. Together with Nuala's experiences, this creates a symbiotic image of NEPS and SENCOs holding one another in trustful, transformative relationships.

Nóra's description of maintaining relationships with schools and parents illuminates this image of co-collaborators holding each other safely: 'it is a tightrope that you have to walk there sometimes.' This image of non-optional tightrope-walking positions collaboration as a tense, risky process; imbalances could be dangerous. Qualities inherent within trustful relationships included honesty (Sinéad), respect (Paula), and open communication to avoid being 'on your own' (Saoirse). All participants said that training for SLT and SENCOs and explicit role recognition for SENCOs was an important solution.

3.7 Expertise in Managing Layers

3.7.1 SENCO as Filter

Participants described the expertise and skills required by SENCOs. Nuala captured this intersection between the systemic, expert, and leadership aspects of the SENCO role:

> *You want them to be at the table where the decisions are made and you want that voice to be heard and you want somebody with a really good knowledge of, just of special needs and where it's going and to be able to filter that policy throughout the school.*

This view of the SENCO as a filter involves an intersection between specialist and whole-school work. SEN expertise is seen as a dynamic system which is evolving and 'going' in specific directions. The SENCO role was formalised in

most participants' schools, unlike national policy. Duties included co-ordinating SNAs, screening for incoming first years, liaising with SLT, SET timetabling, applications for reasonable accommodations in certificate examinations (RACE) and assistive technology, meeting parents and teachers, and working with SEN and student support teams. Each SENCO also taught some mainstream classes. Sinéad mentioned providing guidance to teachers around topics such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Each SENCO described the information management system used in their school to gather and share information among staff; these systems represented the translation of the CoS into everyday practice. Sinéad said that 'my AEN register is for every student,' illustrating the whole-school, systemic nature of her role across the CoS. SENCOs liaised with external agencies including private therapists, NEPS, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), and disability services.

Sinéad's experience of filtering is purposeful; she is trying to achieve change through her role, 'bit by bit' and incrementally: 'every year it will grow.' Her role was changed following SETAM:

> *I feel it more now. You know that kind of draw, where I've realised the job is so administrative and operational that that link to kind of the student isn't as strong as it would have been previous to the new model, but then you do have more – because you have to have more stronger links to the teachers and the SNAs and parents. You know, but the actively like going in and doing, you know, you know, supporting students with dyslexia or supporting students with behavioural – or you know that support which would have been the traditional role of the SENCO. That has kind of become more for the team.*

Administration is positioned on a pole opposite connections with students, Sinéad is pulled between systemic work and specialist expertise. Time is an active and dynamic element of the filtering relationship between the SENCO and layers in the school, such as students, teachers, SNAs, and parents, illustrated by Sinéad's use of temporal markers. While Sinéad now has stronger links with teachers, SNAs and parents, her role is less actively involved with students and the traditional SENCO role is now distributed among the team, which is a new layer created following SETAM. Policy-practice tensions are therefore actively experienced. Neasa

described the confusion that can occur among policy-practice tensions around the SENCO role:

> *Is part of their role to link with NEPS and has that been made explicitly a part their role that they'll kind of take that on? I'm not sure you know, or is it just that they need an assessment and ring that person you know, who can do the assessment for you?*

Neasa's two questions present contrasting visions of the SENCO role: the first conceptualises liaison with NEPS as an explicit part of the role, reflecting the image of the SENCO as a filter, while the second presents a narrow, assessment-focused view of NEPS. Nóra describes a different experience of the actual and potential SENCO role, which is unsurprising given variability in practice among schools.

> *It's a really important role 'cause they do oversee not just, you know, I think it's not just about overseeing the needs for some and for a few. It's also about good preventative approaches and supporting staff with the implementation of those preventative approaches and liaising, you know, looking up to us, and to the NCSE or the NBSS or whatever for you know information like that so and and time should be given to that role.*

Preventative approaches align with Level 1 of the CoS, reinforcing the image of the SENCO as a filter across layers. There is a contrast in Nóra's description of the relationship between SENCOs and NEPS: 'looking up' to external agencies such as NEPS could indicate an expertise hierarchy, while 'liaising' implies collaborating and exchanging information on an equal footing. This contrast could reflect the complexity of having different types of expertise without setting one above the other. Both Saoirse and Sinéad said that training and role recognition could ensure that SENCOs have the requisite skills to engage in both the interpersonal and systemic work.

3.7.2 SLT Oversight of Layers

While SENCOs act as filters across systemic layers, a sense of layered accountability was experienced by all three SLT members, described by Peadar:

> *In a sterile world of governance in schools I'm the accountable officer to all that exists in the school. But I suppose first and foremost I'm primarily motivated that all children em irrespective*

> *of background need, when you come into this school, achieve the potential. So there's a, there's a deeper ideological viewpoint there, you know. So every child's achieving their potential, wherever that potential is at, then we use, start to use the infrastructure and instruments of the school to try and meet those needs. And, it's my view that I identify, see where the potential shortcomings are, whether that be within the infrastructure of the school, or the channels of communication or recording spaces, and then having the suitable candidates, personnel in terms of the right roles and responsibilities.*

Peadar's oversight ensures that school infrastructure is intentionally constructed, including channels and spaces for communication. Accountability requirements contrast with deeper ideology, highlighting layers within the school. The governance layer is at a shallower level; the deeper ideological viewpoint underpins Peadar's primary motivation and is a meaningful driver in the school. Similarly, Paula oversees the implementation of the CoS, which involves 'layers of learning support for all.' There is a sense that external policy obligations are taken seriously, but the school's foundations exist because of intrinsic motivations and values, set by Peadar.

Each SLT member described challenges in achieving effective oversight. Peadar and Patricia described a process of transformation in their schools, which Peadar said was 'damn hard work' and necessitated 'recalibrating the whole value system of the school, and where we need to be going.' This suggests that meaningful change requires transforming the school system from its core in an ongoing rather than once-off manner. Peadar was aware of both official and unofficial layers as part of his oversight of the school, including avoiding populism or alignment with a 'particular group'; Paula and Patricia reported similar experiences. For Patricia, the formalisation of middle management structures in Circular 03/2018 enabled her to 'bypass all of the other rubbish' and appoint an appropriate staff member to the SENCO role, which had previously been challenging due to legacy issues, thereby reducing conflict.

3.7.3 NEPS as Hub

Many participants spoke about NEPS supporting management and the systems level of the school, across the CoS. Nóra described creating linkages with stakeholders:

> *Our role is often just providing a space, a respectful space where people can slow down and reflect and think about, you know, rather than just running around all the time in a stressed state. Because often you know a lot of our work involves, you know, kids in some form of stress, and teachers stressed as well.*

The contrast between unhurried and reflective 'space' and being rushed and tense positions collaboration as a deliberate, agentic process; Nóra creates a hub for stakeholders to meet with and engage with one another. Participants' experiences indicate that SETAM was a key turning point, as described by Neasa:

> *NEPS started out doing a lot of assessments, you know that kind of a way. And we started out as being gatekeepers and the resource hours and things. So, so trying to change any kind of a system like that is going to be really hard and take a really long time.*

This adds to the sense of space discussed above, and to the sense of roles shifting over time. Similarly, Sinéad described a 'little state of flux' following SETAM; this transition has been experienced differently across participants' schools, although the introduction of SETAM was a common thread. Neasa described a situation whereby an increase in mental health concerns among students during Covid-19 school closures prompted closer engagement between Neasa and SLT, leading to the creation of space for easier engagement:

> *It's [wellbeing] given us a way in, it's given us something else to talk about rather than resources and we're seen in a kind of a different light now.*

Wellbeing is positioned as a doorway by which Neasa and SLT entered a shared space; while Nóra described an aspect of the NEPS role as being a creator of space, Neasa observed that EPs must have access to a shared space to be able to create and hold space for other stakeholders.

Peadar described the role of the 'brilliant' NEPS psychologist in supporting systemic change at Level 1; the school closed a number of times during the school

year to run a series of workshops comprising targeted CPD for the staff including adolescent neurological development, trauma, secondary behaviours and the CoS.

> *And that's getting into the nucleus of, the nerve centre of the school and saying okay, how do we get in here and sort of shape and influence at a systems level the decision making, the influence of the school community. As opposed to starting, coming in at a case level, just on the ground to respond.*

This reflects DST, which originally developed within the field of biology to examine complex relationships from the cellular level to the inter-organism level (Larsen-Freeman, 2019). This positions the school as a complex, multi-layered living organism: systemic interdependence within the school and between the school and NEPS is essential. This positions NEPS as a hub, creating and supporting connections at a deep, nucleus-like level within the school, and between schools and other agencies and resources. Like the manifold intra- and inter-cellular systems in an organism, systemic interdependence within the school and between the school and NEPS is essential.

3.8 Working Around Silos

3.8.1 Silo v Deliberately Constructed Organism

Experiences of cohesive co-working varied considerably. Nuala and Neasa said that in some post-primary schools, the NEPS role is placed in a silo along with the person undertaking the SENCO role, as described by Nuala:

> *The absence maybe of an SEN role and an SEN coordinator's role – you can, you can really see how how how you're very siloed into that SEN department. You're a department, you're one little, tiny piece of the secondary school.*

The verb 'siloed' indicates an active rather than static separation between SEN and mainstream, with a power differential indicated by 'little, tiny.' Nuala said that being siloed means that 'the right arm doesn't know what the left arm is doing.' Arguably, two arms belonging to the same body, or systems within a school, should be co-ordinated. Different, potentially contradictory, things are happening in each silo, unknown to each other. Paula provided an alternative experience: her school is 'seen as the provider of SEN in our area,' which is 'unfair.' Paula's experiences indicates that a whole school can be siloed; Patricia described a similar experience.

Like Neasa and Nuala, there is a sense of an unwanted narrative being imposed by others (perhaps parents and other schools). Neasa's description of being 'funnelled into that special needs space kind of straight away' implies difficulty in reaching beyond the higher tiers of the CoS; Neasa does not wish to restricted to a narrow, 'diluted' role. This reflects Síle's experience; she undertakes the SENCO role as an individual rather than as part of an SEN team: 'everything then is landed on my desk.' The experience of being siloed by others is common to Paula, Síle, Neasa and Nuala, whereby SEN and mainstream provision are in separate silos with little cohesion between them.

Peadar's experience illuminates the way in which he is leading his school's transition from working in silos to a more cohesive approach, together with the school's NEPS psychologist:

> *Schools are organic sort of organisations, they ebb and flow and where, where there's human life we have to be flexible to meet these different needs and so, but then we need systems to operate in that space because if we don't then things can fall pretty easily and the most vulnerable, in particular children with SEN lose out in that space. So quite right, we need to have appropriate infrastructure and systems operating in and through that process. But equally we need the right personnel in and around that process. But fundamentally we need to have all of this built on proper foundations, and that speaks to having core values and having a very clear sense of purpose of vision of what we want to achieve in participating in this space.*

There is a juxtaposition between architectural images of structures, space, and infrastructure, and flexible images of living organisms. Peadar evokes ocean imagery: while the ocean is powerful, it ripples and rolls rather than being fixed or rigid, and supports living creatures. This suggests that the school's strength arises from flexibility, and that schools are living structures which exist to support students' development. This complex balancing of built infrastructure and living, evolving processes reflects DST, and is encapsulated by Peadar's description of the process of creating space for students with SEN; saying that appropriate systems must be operating 'in' that process implies that suitable infrastructure and systems must be present, and 'through that process' suggests that infrastructure and systems are active in seeing the process through. Furthermore, staff work both 'in and around' the

process of supporting students with SEN: this is a whole-school process, rather than an add-on or a separate silo. The process of constructing a living organism was intentional and effortful; when Peadar joined the school as principal, there were challenges around communication, supporting students' needs, and retaining students. Paula and Patricia also described periods of transition. Peadar described the role of NEPS in supporting this evolution:

> *We have to feed all of that by reliable and sound information. So we rely on outside agencies like our NEPS psychologist, like the NCSE, Junior Cycle, PDST, all these to come in and speak to us, so it's just not just Peadar off on a rant here, but that it's, this is, guys, where we need to go as a school.*

The NEPS role involves helping to nourish the whole system and is no longer siloed at the top of the CoS. There is a sense that Peadar is trying to avoid personal agendas: although he is leading the value-setting agenda, it is based on the best available information. Overall, participants value and strive to create close links between SENCOs, NEPS, and SLT across all levels of the CoS.

3.8.2 Language Shapes Silos

Many participants described links between their experiences and the language which is used in everyday practice and policy. In some cases, differences in language indicated differing practices, while in others, similar practices were described using different language. Both Paula and Sinéad emphasised strongly that the 'support for all' layer of the CoS underpinned their practice, although Paula's school used SEN terminology while Sinéad's school used AEN. Paula distinguished between language and action:

> *People like to talk about nurture groups and all that sort of stuff and they like to talk about restorative practice. Really what you're doing is you're just doing the right thing for those children, and so we would have gone after that actively.*

There is a contrast here between 'talk' and actively 'doing'; practical actions are presented as more useful than discourse in supporting students. In contrast, Sinéad sees language as part of action:

> *A few of us have done the post grad in SEN and would have all come to the conclusion that we were uneasy with the term [special]. I think*

> *also within the – so we've been using additional, maybe for last three years, and actually probably since maybe 2017 is when we eliminated the term special altogether, and that came in in line with the new model, the circular there, we decided that was going to be our our linguistical change.*

This decision represents an intersection between emotions, research, and policy; from a DST perspective, discourse and action could be seen as dynamic systems feeding into the overall school system (Larsen-Freeman, 2019). For Sinéad and Patricia, the language of additional needs used in the school, including school policies, is intertwined in inclusive practice. Despite differences in language, it is notable that the school systems described by both Paula and Sinéad reflect an inclusive special education approach (Hornby, 2015). Both schools have programmes and systems based on identified needs across the CoS, suggesting that there is not a single, correct form of language associated with effective support for students' needs.

For Síle and Neasa, changes in discourse and language are linked with changes in practice, as described by Neasa:

> *Our conversations were always so narrow, like that they had a very strong agenda about getting an assessment or whatever, so that's, it seemed to be from the get-go, that's what they wanted to use their NEPS time for, and there was kind of very little negotiation.*

Narrow, assessment-focused conversations contrast with 'open discussion' around what the potential NEPS role, including whole-school work. The absence of negotiation indicates that the relationship was not reciprocal but transactional and resource-focused. Síle said that her 'new job this year' was to simultaneously change the school's language and practice:

> *Resource is the word we had been using, but we're now trying to do better because we know better and we're trying to call it learning support. I'm doing my best, but it'll take a while for that to establish.*

Repetition of 'trying' indicates that change is difficult: Síle is striving to enact improvements in her school and changing language is an element of this move towards 'inclusivity.' Síle is working in a silo whereby she is almost solely responsible for SEN provision. In changing language, which is a surface-level feature, Síle is attempting to drive deeper structural change to create a more open space for supporting students' needs.

3.8.3 The Value of Collaboration

Participants spoke about the interplay between values and the economic value placed on psychology. The socioeconomic context of Saoirse's DEIS school contrasts with Síle's private, fee-paying school. In Saoirse's school, more students are identified as needing psychoeducational assessments than can access such assessments via NEPS; most families in Saoirse's school 'wouldn't be able to afford the full assessments on their own. And so then we provide half the cost, and they provide half the cost' of a private EP assessment. Parents in Síle's school are 'wealthy' and can afford to pay for assessments, for instance to access exemptions for students with literacy difficulties from the study of Irish:

> *They still feel they can buy their way into something. You know, the child's at home giving out about Irish – oh, we'll take out the Irish and we'll do a subject outside of school. You know my own children went through school, they weren't mad about Irish but they had to do it. You know, or I'll think of the child whose mother isn't giving out. So you're trying to level the playing field, but like you're also trying to keep the integrity of the exam going.*

Further illuminating the link between values and financial value, Síle said that the 'culture' in her fee-paying school positions education as 'kind of a business.' This exemplifies the outworking of school culture in practice. Síle described a 'cosy cartel' whereby parents 'go to the EP who sends them to her friend who owns the OT business who sent them to their other friend who does the Irlen glasses.' There is a sense that the private practitioners work in a mutually beneficial and comfortable manner. The examples described here represent an intersection between personal values and financial and economic value. Síle is attempting to balance her personal values against the value placed on assessments by parents, and their capacity to purchase EP assessments. Although the contexts of Saoirse's and Síle's schools are markedly different, psychology is commodified in both: there is an economic and financial element to identifying students' needs.

Sinéad, Neasa, and Nuala spoke about the value placed on NEPS' time. Sinéad said that her school was able to access eight rather than four NEPS assessments because 'we have half the work done and because we have the systems in place that easily identify it.' The 'value' which Sinéad and her school places on

NEPS time prompted change in school systems. There is a sense of NEPS time being both a finite and flexible commodity. There is an indication of the value placed by Sinéad's NEPS psychologist on her capacity to produce quality data to inform assessments; this constitutes meaningful collaboration.

Neasa and Nuala spoke about how the value placed on cognitive assessments by some schools can narrow the role of the NEPS psychologist. Nuala said that some SENCOs present NEPS assessments as 'the free service, the free Dyslexia service that came into school and they didn't ever conceptualise it as a systemic role.' The repetition of monetary language reinforces the image of psychology as a commodity. Positioning NEPS as an external service entering the school in the absence of a purposeful systemic role reinforces the idea of NEPS being placed in an assessment silo by schools. When financial value becomes entwined with school values, silos could emerge, reducing the potential for whole-school systemic collaboration. Care must be taken to ensure that this analysis does not portray cognitive assessments as inherently negative. As described by Neasa, there is 'huge value' in assessment work: it enables EPs to 'sit down and spend an hour and a half with a child' and to generate evidence around the child's profile of strengths and needs. Challenges around assessment silos appear to emerge when assessments are valued at the expense of consultation or other systemic work; for instance, Neasa said that schools see consultation 'as a chat. They don't really see it as like an intervention.' Nuala provided an insight into the factors necessary to broaden the NEPS role to include consultation:

> *You really have to be there a while to have developed the relationships that they trust you enough to say, we're going to put the [cognitive assessment] aside for now, we're gonna try this way, and just see if we get the same information.*

Time and trust are positioned as prerequisites for secure relationships with schools, which in turn facilitate collaboration. Nuala also said that she spends 'a lot of time investing in the relationships with parents and teachers and principals.' Instead of a financial return on investment, there is an image of a broader NEPS role as a return for investing in interpersonal relationships. This broader role aligns with the idea of NEPS as a collaborative hub, where silos have been opened up by interpersonal relationship-building. Assessments are not removed from this space but

are no longer seen as 'magic,' as described by Nuala, and broader aspects are added which would facilitate multi-faceted work across the CoS.

3.9 Discussion

This study explored collaboration between SENCOs, SLT, and NEPS across the CoS in Irish post-primary schools, against the special/inclusive education policy context. Findings highlight the potential for high-quality collaborative practice across the CoS, reflecting existing research finding that consultative frameworks may facilitate meaningful collaboration (Hamre et al., 2018b; Kjaer & Dannesboe, 2019; Thornberg, 2014b). Findings aligned with previous research identifying barriers and facilitators to collaboration. Facilitators included an entry process, shared understanding between stakeholders, knowledge of SEN and understanding of school contexts; barriers included diverging understandings of collaboration, insufficient time, and excessive workloads (Newman et al., 2018a; O'Farrell & Kinsella, 2018; Thornberg, 2014b). This study enhances the theoretical framing of collaboration between NEPS and post-primary schools and suggests a theoretical underpinning of the SENCO role, which was a gap in previous research (Fitzgerald et al., 2021; Fitzgerald & Radford, 2020). Like previous research, this study found that the SENCO role is nebulous and highly variable across schools (Fitzgerald & Radford, 2017). A conceptualisation of the SENCO role incorporating both specialised and systemic elements, embedded both in the SLT and the SEN team, was proposed by Fitzgerald and Radford (2020). The current research identified similar duality in SENCOs' experiences, conceptualising SENCOs as an active filter, channelling specialised knowledge across the layers of the school and driving organisational evolution in collaboration with SLT and NEPS. The novel perspective in the current study brings SENCOs out of an atheoretical bubble (Hallett, 2021).

Applying DST to participants' experiences of collaboration generated a conceptualisation of post-primary schools as complex organisms, whereby flexibility strengthens schools' ability to adapt and meet all students' needs across the CoS (Karimi-Aghdam, 2017). This dynamic view of post-primary schools positions NEPS as co-creators of hubs, constructing space for active collaboration across the CoS. The NEPS role now spans the CoS (NEPS, 2010); findings indicated that where the NEPS role broadened to include the whole-school level, collaborative practice was

effective in supporting individual needs and organisational change. Barriers to collaboration arose where systems and relationships between NEPS and post-primary schools were restricted to the top of the CoS. Conceptualising post-primary schools as robust, flexible organisms requires SLT to have oversight of the complex layered processes occurring within the school, and between the school and NEPS, underpinned by all layers of the CoS.

This study was framed against tensions between special and inclusive education. Participants' experiences indicated that more positive and effective collaboration occurred when SEN was an integral part of the school system, across the CoS, rather than being siloed. While Irish policy is in the process of transitioning away from a purely special education approach, results indicated that the extent to which collaborative practice reflects this policy shift varies considerably across schools. This aligns with previous research suggesting that policy transitions from special to inclusive education are mirrored slowly and inconsistently in practice (Hamre et al., 2018b; Kjaer & Dannesboe, 2019; Thornberg, 2014b).

3.10 Implications

Implications for policy, practice, and future research are presented here. Implications and recommendations for policy, practice, theory, and research are further developed in the Critical Review; see Chapter 4.

3.10.1 NEPS Facilitating Collaboration

Findings highlighted the importance of NEPS psychologists being familiar with SENCO status in relation to middle management structures in each school. There are implications for NEPS' approach to collaboration with post-primary schools including investing time into relationship building, and actively listening to clarify priorities and ensure that all stakeholders' expertise is equally valued (O'Farrell & Kinsella, 2018; Thornberg, 2014b). The study highlighted a need for NEPS psychologists to access ongoing professional learning to support skills in facilitating collaboration and to ensure that the shift in role focus from gatekeeper to collaborator becomes meaningfully embedded (Thomas, 2009).

3.10.2 Formalising the SENCO Role

This study adds to the body of research highlighting implications for the SENCO role. Clarity is needed around the collaborative co-leadership relationships between SENCOs and SLT. Utilising middle management structures is currently the only way of formalising the SENCO role (Skerritt, McNamara, et al., 2021). The competencies outlined in policy for AP positions are broadly focused on leadership, while this study and extant research found that SENCOs require both specialised knowledge and interpersonal and leadership competence (DES, 2018; Fitzgerald & Radford, 2017). Existing PoR structures are too general; SLT need to be able to appoint suitably skilled and qualified SENCOs whose role status enhances their capacity to achieve change (Fitzgerald & Radford, 2020). This would position SENCOs as crucial policy actors involved in translating school and national policies into everyday practice (Skerritt, McNamara, et al., 2021). Findings highlighted the importance of allocating time to the SENCO role, with the possibility of flexibly sharing co-ordination duties between the SENCO and SEN team.

Findings highlighted the importance of a recognised SEN qualification and relevant CPD for SENCOs, reflecting the dual specialised and systemic aspects of the role. This study highlighted the personal toll of the expanding SENCO role, reflecting previous research (Fitzgerald & Radford, 2020; Skerritt, McNamara, et al., 2021). This has implications for SENCOs around prioritising self-care, and for SLT to be cognisant of staff members' workloads. There is potential for the support and development aspect of the NEPS role in terms of facilitating supervision for SENCOs, or peer supervision through SENCO cluster meetings.

3.10.3 Teacher Professional Learning

The complexity of collaboration across the CoS has implications for teacher professional learning (TPL) for SENCOs and SLT. TPL involves meaningful activities which support teachers to reflect on and meaningfully improve practice (OECD, 2015; Rawdon et al., 2020). TPL in Ireland is self-directed rather than mandatory. SENCOs and SLT have a role in upskilling themselves and staff to create channels for knowledge and skills to filter through the school. This skill development would allow for innovative approaches to inter-professional collaboration. NEPS psychologists have the capacity to support schools to develop collaboration skills

through the support and development aspect of their role (Hamre et al., 2018b). Findings highlighted that schools' needs should be identified jointly with schools to avoid input being imposed upon schools (Fitzgerald et al., 2021). Given recent changes, clarity on the NEPS role is necessary to facilitate shared understanding of consultative models which have the potential to achieve collaboration.

3.11 Future research

This study has implications for the way in which inclusive special education is researched in the Irish context. Using multi-perspectival IPA in a mixed-methods study is an innovative approach which points towards methodological pathways for future research in this area; findings highlighted the importance of exploring varying experiences of collaboration. Future research could explore initial teacher education (ITE) as this is the foundation of TPL for post-primary school teachers, including SENCOs and SLT; this was outside the scope of the current study. Formalising the SENCO role should be explicated in future research before being incorporated into policy and practice. There are implications for the possible role of existing SENCO forums in connecting policy, research, and practice (Fitzgerald et al., 2021). Findings highlight the potential of the research aspect of the NEPS role, including facilitating SENCO forums and contributing to a theoretical conceptualisation of the SENCO role.

3.12 Conclusion

Previous research indicated possible barriers and facilitators to collaboration, but not what it was like to be immersed in the experience of navigating these barriers and facilitators, against a changing policy context (Fitzgerald & Radford, 2020; O'Farrell & Kinsella, 2018). While previous research examined the SENCO role individually or in conjunction with SLT (Fitzgerald et al., 2021; Fitzgerald & Radford, 2020), this study begins to capture the additional complexity of collaboration as a process occurring not only within schools, but also between schools and NEPS. This study provides an insight into the relationship between research, practice, and policy regarding the SENCO role. Schools are attempting to implement evidence-based practice in the absence of evidence around best practice for collaboration between SENCOs, SLT and NEPS. It is necessary to gather and examine practice-based evidence, to which this study has contributed, to identify

effective practices which SENCOs, SLT and NEPS have developed within the current policy vacuum (Gulliford, 2015). Larger-scale research is necessary to clarify what policy for the SENCO role should look like, how TPL may be structured to ensure that SENCOs and SLT are equipped to engage in collaboration, and how the NEPS role can be further clarified and communicated to schools to ensure that collaboration can create space within which all students can be appropriately supported across the CoS.

Chapter 4: Critical Review and Impact Statement

4.1 Reflection on Paradigmatic Positionality

The study utilised a mixed-methods, sequential explanatory design. Much mixed-methods research is situated within the pragmatic paradigm as it is methodologically eclectic (Mertens, 2014; Meyer, 2021). Pragmatic sequential mixed-methods studies seek to answer research questions by gathering different types of data (Mertens, 2014). A combination of qualitative and quantitative methods yield data which are both accurate and experientially rich, facilitating a nuanced understanding of stakeholders' experiences of collaboration between post-primary schools and NEPS (Mertens, 2014). This is particularly relevant given the scarcity of research into collaboration between post-primary schools and NEPS, and the likely diversity of these experiences: research findings were not simplified to a single understanding (Mertens, 2014). This study involved two phases. Phase 1 comprised a survey which used qualitative and quantitative data to identify barriers and facilitators to collaboration. Phase 2 involved semi-structured interviews with SENCOs, SLT, and NEPS; IPA facilitated exploration of participants' experiences of collaboration between the three groups. The overall design sought to achieve complementarity and development (Mertens, 2014): Phase 1 findings informed the interview schedule for Phase 2, and Phase 2 aimed to explore participants' experiences of barriers and facilitators identified in Phase 1.

4.1.1 Ontology

Ontology involves the understanding of reality within a particular paradigm (Mertens, 2014). Pragmatism acknowledges the possibility of an objective reality in addition to individual constructions of social reality; by holding both in tension with one another, pragmatism aims to capture the richness of people's experiences within real-world contexts (Mertens, 2014; Meyer, 2021). This view reflects my understanding of collaboration between SENCOs, SLT, and NEPS. All are working within specific policy, school, and temporal contexts, but experiences of individual SENCOs, SLT, and NEPS vary considerably, and individuals ascribe their own meanings to these experiences. In pragmatism, research questions are more important than the methods; different forms of inquiry are not viewed hierarchically, thereby enabling me to study the topic in a manner consistent with my own values and

worldview (Mertens, 2014; Meyer, 2021). Pragmatism also aligns with the scientist-practitioner model which underpins my practice as a trainee EP; pragmatic researchers are active scholars-in-practice rather than detached observers (Meyer, 2021). I became interested in the SENCO role and collaboration between post-primary schools and NEPS after observing excellent collaborative practice on placement. Given that my interest in the topic stemmed from my experiences as a trainee EP, I considered it impractical to adopt a paradigm such as post-positivism which would assume objectivity and preclude individual constructions or interpretations of reality (Mertens, 2014).

4.1.2 Axiology

Axiology involves values and ethics; pragmatism aims to synthesise multiple theories to generate useful, practical knowledge, being cognisant of the role of power and politics (Mertens, 2014). Pragmatic research is particularly appropriate for practical and/or social issues involving organisational change (Meyer, 2021). IPA facilitated the gathering of participants' experiences, including challenges and effective practice, so that the interpretations of these experiences could be useful to practitioners and policymakers examining the SENCO role, SEN provision, and collaboration between SENCOs, SLT, and NEPS. The intention was to contribute to the body of research around the SENCO role, which is currently absent from policy (Fitzgerald & Radford, 2017). The importance of this topic became clear both in my practice while working with post-primary schools during my NEPS placement and through engagement with extant literature. Exploring experiences of collaboration between SENCOs, SLT, and NEPS indicates ways in which EPs can improve their own practice and support their collaborative partners in post-primary schools.

4.1.3 Epistemology

Epistemology refers to definitions of knowledge. Pragmatic epistemology involves researchers interacting directly with participants, who are viewed as active and agentic; researchers' values can influence, but not bias, the research (Mertens, 2014). This aligns with IPA whereby researchers are expected to bracket their assumptions and values; assumptions should be noticed and made explicit through reflective practice, but it is acknowledged that it is impossible to entirely extricate the researcher's underlying assumptions and beliefs from the research process

(Oxley, 2016; Smith et al., 2022). Pragmatic research acknowledges that both quantitative and qualitative data yield useful knowledge. This study sought to interweave an overview of barriers and facilitators to collaboration from Phase 1 with rich, experiential Phase 2 data. While both strands were valued in the final analysis, more weight was placed on Phase 2 because the absence of participants' experiences was a gap in previous research.

4.1.4 Dynamic Systems Theory

DST constitutes a framework for examining the theoretical and systemic tangle involved in collaboration between SENCOs, SLT, and NEPS (Karimi-Aghdam, 2017). DST posits that systems are constantly in flux and are recursively influenced by interactions within and between systems (Karimi-Aghdam, 2017). This reflects the concept of inclusive schools being dynamic and on-the-move (Booth & Ainscow, 2011). DST facilitates exploration of the interacting systemic and interpersonal factors which shape collaboration between NEPS and post-primary schools. While surface-level structures such as policy documents may change quickly, deeper structures such as attitudes and ingrained practices may change more slowly (Thomas, 2009). Policy may be seen as a dynamic system in itself; policy is both a written document and an active discourse which is translated and interpreted differently across schools (Skerritt, O'Hara, et al., 2021). SENCOs, SLT, and NEPS are conceptualised as translators of policy, each bringing individual interpretations and meanings to their enaction of policy (Skerritt, McNamara, et al., 2021).

4.2 Strengths and Limitations of the Literature Review

The review paper included thematic and systematic components. Each had strengths and limitations; the overall review provided a nuanced understanding of current developments in theory, policy, and research, and indicated gaps in extant research which this study sought to address. The thematic component facilitated an exploration of Irish and international theory and policy, which was necessary given tensions between special and inclusive education, the changing NEPS role, and the absence of the SENCO role from Irish policy (Fitzgerald et al., 2021). This enhanced the study's potential to yield implications for policy and practice, and novel theoretical understandings of collaboration and special and inclusive education. A systematic review alone would not have sufficiently captured the richness of these

policy and theoretical factors (Gough et al., 2012). The thematic review was potentially limited by the search strategy's purposive nature, although this idiographic approach aligns with IPA (Smith et al., 2022). The subsequent systematic component sought to balance this (Gough, 2007). The systematic review facilitated identification of research questions by highlighting gaps in research regarding collaboration between SENCOs, SLT, and NEPS, particularly in the Irish context. The rigorous WoE process facilitated examination of methodological quality in extant research and the identification of an appropriate, robust design for the current study (Gough, 2007). The interplay between theory, policy, and practice was captured between the thematic and systematic elements of the review. This interplay was reflected in the DST-informed research questions which enabled the study to explore participants' experiences within a specific policy and practice context.

4.3 Strengths and Limitations of Design, Methods, and Analysis

The research paradigm informed the design and methodology. The analysis process followed the most recent iteration of IPA and reflected the phenomenological, hermeneutic, and idiographic nature of IPA (Smith et al., 2022). In IPA research, validity is defined in terms of adherence to rigorous quality standards from the initial design through to data analysis (Smith et al., 2022). The research adhered to the four pillars of quality: sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, coherence and transparency, and impact and importance (Smith et al., 2022; Yardley, 2015). During the research process, I continuously reflected on these markers for quality by writing reflections in my research journal, engaging in peer support with classmates, keeping abreast of current developments highlighted in IPA online forums, and by attending training on advanced data analysis with Dr Elena Gil-Rodriguez (2021). The implications of reflections are outlined below within each of the four pillars of quality. See Appendix G for reflections on pillars of quality and Appendix J for sample reflections on interviews.

4.3.1 Sensitivity to Context

Given the paucity of extant research, it was challenging to adhere to sensitivity to context despite a thorough literature review (Yardley, 2015). Phase 1 provided insight into the context in which SENCO, SLT and NEPS are working and enhanced the sensitivity of Phase 2 interview schedules. For instance, reflecting on

the highly variable opinions and experiences expressed in the survey prompted me to adjust the framing of my questions and prompts for Phase 2 interviews to ensure that the interview would be a validating and non-judgemental experience for participants regardless of their viewpoints, school context, and experiences. Furthermore, reflecting on Phase 1 data prompted me to de-emphasise the impact of Covid-19 on collaboration in Phase 2 interviews as participants indicated that Covid-19 simply highlighted existing challenges or positive relationships. The recruitment process added to sensitivity to context through the purposive sampling procedure as varying experiences were sought; while this does not constitute generalisability, the diversity of experiences captured reflects the variability in practice indicated by previous research and Phase 1 data (Yardley, 2015). The analysis and written narrative account emphasised participants' voices; interpretations were sensitive to the complexity of the wider policy and practice context and to the settings where individual participants were working (Smith et al., 2022; Yardley, 2015). Interpretations were also non-judgemental, and both convergent and divergent experiences were represented within each theme. The representation of divergent experiences in a non-evaluative manner was enhanced by reflections and bracketing of personal assumptions; while IPA does not require personal values to be completely disregarded, the explicit identification on personal values and assumptions through the reflective process meant that participants' divergent and sometimes contradictory experiences could be represented in an authentic and faithful manner. Essentially, while it is impossible to stand in participants' shoes, the aim was to stand as closely beside participants as possible (Smith et al., 2022).

4.3.2 Commitment and Rigour

Commitment and rigour were achieved by describing the sampling procedures and parameters and by ensuring that the interview schedule was designed to elicit data suitable for IPA (Yardley, 2015); insights from Phase 1 and the Phase 2 pilot were useful here. Making the research paradigm and assumptions around ontology and epistemology explicit ensured confirmability (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The analysis process aligned with criteria for high-quality IPA research (Smith et al., 2022). Steps taken to ensure that the analysis was idiographic, hermeneutic, and achieved appropriate depth and quality were explicitly outlined (Yardley, 2015). Rigour was enhanced through writing reflections throughout the

research process, for example identifying and bracketing my personal experiences and beliefs about supporting all students including those with SEN, reflecting on my interviewing technique after re-watching Phase 2 interviews (particularly pilot interviews), and making connections between participants' experiences to identify convergent and divergent experiences. See Appendix G for sample reflections.

4.3.3 Coherence and Transparency

A coherent and transparent approach was taken to developing a clear narrative from literature review, through methodological and analytical decisions, to the current reflection; DST provided an overarching framework (Larsen-Freeman, 2019; Yardley, 2015). Dependability was achieved by documenting the research procedures. Transferability was facilitated by the presentation of data and interpretations (Korstjens & Moser, 2018): convergent and divergent experiences were represented in a non-judgemental manner, and interpretations and themes were rooted firmly in data, as outlined in Appendices K through N. The clear and non-evaluative presentation and interpretation of participants' experiences enables readers to determine the extent to which the research is transferable to their own practice. The member-checking process was useful in achieving creditability (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

4.3.4 Impact and Importance

The literature review was designed to identify substantial research questions, and the research design sought to answer these questions in a manner useful to policy, practice, and research. This current section of the thesis aims to reflect on the impact and importance of the research.

4.3.5 Rationale for Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

The phenomenological, idiographic, and hermeneutic nature of IPA facilitates granular exploration of the convergent and divergent lived experiences of SENCOs, SLT and NEPS, flexibly informed by my interpretations of these experiences (Smith et al., 2022). IPA was more appropriate for the current study than alternative approaches such as thematic analysis (TA). Like IPA, TA is flexible from a theoretical standpoint; however, its primary focus is identifying and analysing patterns across the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021). Some branches of TA,

particularly reflexive TA, aim to explore participants' lived experiences while explicitly incorporating researchers' reflections. While reflexive TA and IPA both sit within a broadly phenomenological approach, the process of theme development distinguishes them (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Smith et al., 2022). Reflexive TA looks across all cases within the data set to identify themes, whereas IPA involves an idiographic exploration of each case before taking an overall view across cases (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Smith et al., 2022). This approach was appropriate given the nebulous policy and practice context: it was arguably inappropriate to attempt to identify consistent themes across participants without first examining individual experiences. Traditionally, a limitation of IPA was that it did not allow for heterogeneity in participants' perspectives (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The inherent variability of the target population was challenging; additional individual variation was expected due to the absence of the SENCO role in policy and changes in the NEPS role (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Fitzgerald & Radford, 2017; Smith et al., 2022). The emergence of multi-perspectival designs enabled this study to explore the experiences of SENCOs, SLT, and NEPS, providing different perspectives on the shared experience of collaboration (Smith et al., 2022).

4.3.5.1 Quality of the Phenomenological Approach.

IPA required the overall design and analysis to be phenomenological; the comprehensive unit of analysis was participants' experiences of collaboration between SENCOs, SLT, and NEPS (Mertens, 2014; Smith et al., 2022). The study facilitated a granular exploration of how participants made sense of their experiences of navigating policy gaps in practice. Previous research suggested that experiences would vary considerably; given the scope and time available, it was unfeasible to undertake a quantitative study which would be sufficiently large in scale to facilitate generalisation. A flexible data collection approach was adopted; the pilot was useful for becoming more skilled in interviewing in a flexible way and following up on experiences which were important to participants while being sensitive to stressful experiences (Smith et al., 2022).

4.3.5.2 Quality of the Idiographic Approach.

The idiographic aspect of IPA was fulfilled by detailed examination of each case. I re-watched the video recordings while transcribing to capture verbal and non-verbal communication, before completing an in-depth reading and re-reading of the

transcripts. I completed a detailed annotating process using Microsoft Word for each participant, with colour-coded descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual comments in one column alongside the transcription, and personal experiential statements for each participant in the third column. I compiled the personal experiential themes in a separate summary document for each participant. This detailed idiographic work was completed before identifying group experiential themes (Smith et al., 2022). I interviewed three participants from each group to avoid compromising the depth of interpretation (Hefferon & Gil-Rodriguez, 2011). My identification of themes was rooted in the importance which participants ascribed to particular aspects of their experiences; as part of this commitment to honouring participants' priorities I decided not to use prevalence tables (Hefferon & Gil-Rodriguez, 2011; Smith et al., 2022). See Appendix L for an annotated sample.

4.3.5.3 Quality of the Hermeneutic Approach.

My work aligns with pragmatist hermeneutics (Côté & Huebner, 2021). Hermeneutics is the theory of interpretation and IPA involves a double hermeneutic; researchers attempt to make sense of the way in which participants make sense of their experiences (Smith et al., 2022). Both pragmatism and hermeneutics involve a practical philosophy which spotlights the interpretation of meaning within particular contexts (Côté & Huebner, 2021). The double hermeneutic acknowledges that access to participants' experiences is second-order; researchers stand closely beside participants rather than in their shoes (Smith et al., 2022). This involved bracketing my preconceptions: reflecting on Phase 1 results was useful here, for instance I became aware that some NEPS psychologists might prefer assessment-led working to consultative work (Oxley, 2016). IPA focuses on lived experience, potentially limiting implications for policy (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

The second aspect of the double hermeneutic involves bringing participants' experiences into conversation with theory and the researcher's reflections. While DST was pre-selected as a theoretical framework for the literature review and Phase 1, its use in Phase 2 was based on participants' experiences, particularly their descriptions of schools as living organisms, which reflected DST's roots in biology. I had been prepared to incorporate other theoretical frameworks, depending on the experiences described, in line with IPA (Smith et al., 2022). It was a notable feature of participants' sense-making that they frequently linked their experiences to Irish

and international policy, including the inclusion agenda and UNCRPD, and to their own further study. This was challenging in terms of adding depth to my interpretations of participants' sense-making around their experiences. The pragmatist hermeneutic lens was useful here; this approach involves the intersection between discourse and the emotions and behaviours which are part of personal experiences (Côté & Huebner, 2021). The policy context was therefore an important part of participants' sense-making. The interpretations generated as part of IPA analysis in this study involved transferability, or theoretical generalisability; readers may determine the extent to which the findings add to their practice or their understanding of the practice context (Hefferon & Gil-Rodriguez, 2011).

4.3.6 Limitations and Future Research

While using IPA within a mixed-methods study enabled me to address the research questions in a nuanced way, there were some trade-offs (Smith et al., 2022). The scope of Phase 1 was limited because Phase 2 constituted the principal component of the study. It was necessary to maintain the integrity of the IPA component as being led by participants' experiences; Phase 1 therefore had to align with this experiential approach (Smith et al., 2022). Future research should examine both overarching, generalisable trends and the experiences of working in such a complex context. This research arguably addressed both, but with an emphasis on the latter. This dual pathway for future research is necessary to address limitations around generalisability inherent within IPA (Mertens, 2014). Future research should also capture the experiences of other key stakeholders, including post-primary teachers, parents, and students; including these groups was beyond the scope of this study. These groups could provide valuable insights into their experiences of collaboration and of providing and accessing support across the CoS.

There was a limited sample size in Phase 1 with unequal group sizes, perhaps because the survey was distributed while post-primary schools were in the process of reopening after Covid-19 closures. It was unfeasible to postpone the survey due to time constraints regarding my progression through the DECPsy programme. There were also tensions around the Phase 2 sample size: there is no clear-cut answer to sample size in IPA. Sample sizes of 6-10 are recommended for professional doctorates (Smith et al., 2022). This study recruited nine in total, with three

participants from each group. Fewer participants would have allowed more space for each participant in the final write-up but would have reduced opportunities for exploring divergence and convergence between experiential accounts; this was important to answer the research questions (Hefferon & Gil-Rodriguez, 2011). IPA studies generally aim to have homogenous samples to allow deeper exploration of shared experiences (Smith et al., 2022). It was difficult to achieve homogeneity within the three groups, partly due to the lack of clarity around the SENCO role, and the scarcity of previous research into collaboration between post-primary schools and NEPS. The purposive sampling strategy helped to mitigate against this challenge as participants were identified who were interested in collaboration between post-primary schools and NEPS. Purposive sampling also involves potential self-selection bias: people with particular interests or characteristics may be more likely to agree to participate (Mertens, 2014). As in all IPA research, this sample is not representative of all SENCOs, SLT, and NEPS but rather explores particular experiences which other practitioners can transfer to their own practice (Hefferon & Gil-Rodriguez, 2011; Smith et al., 2022).

4.4 Reflection on Ethical Dilemmas

Preserving relationships emerged as a prominent ethical concern during the research process. At an advisory panel, NEPS requested that NEPS psychologists recruited for Phase 2 would not be working with any SENCOs/SLT who participated, to avoid compromising relationships if sensitive issues or criticism arose. I originally planned to recruit SENCOs and SLT from the same school to understand the school system from both perspectives (Fitzgerald & Radford, 2020). Following pilot interviews, I decided to adopt the same approach as advised by NEPS: SENCOs and SLT participating in Phase 2 did not work in the same school. This was because in the pilot interviews, the principal indicated that she experienced challenges in the relationship with the SENCO in her school (the SENCO interviewed in the pilot was working in a different school). Ensuring that participants were not working together, without revealing participants' identities to each other, required great care. In some cases, I knew by the participant's location that (s)he was not working with other participants, but some participants were from the same general area. I completed the SENCO and SLT interviews first, in early June 2021, and all participants who were from the same region mentioned the name of their NEPS psychologist without

prompting. I asked NEPS psychologists who their schools were to rule out any overlap.

It was necessary to balance faithfulness to participants' accounts with confidentiality during analysis. For instance, some participants spoke about personal or family experiences, or about significant interpersonal challenges. While these were important elements of participants' experiences, I had to remove some details from the analysis to maintain anonymity. I did not include participants' locations in the pen pictures to protect confidentiality. Member-checking helped with this, although I had to be clear that I was asking participants to check their data from an anonymity perspective as against checking my interpretations: the latter is inconsistent with IPA (Brear, 2019; Oxley, 2016; Smith et al., 2022). I referred to previous examples of high-quality IPA research while reflecting on how to navigate this balance (Smith et al., 2022). See Appendix M for a summary of changes made during member-checking.

4.5 Theoretical Implications

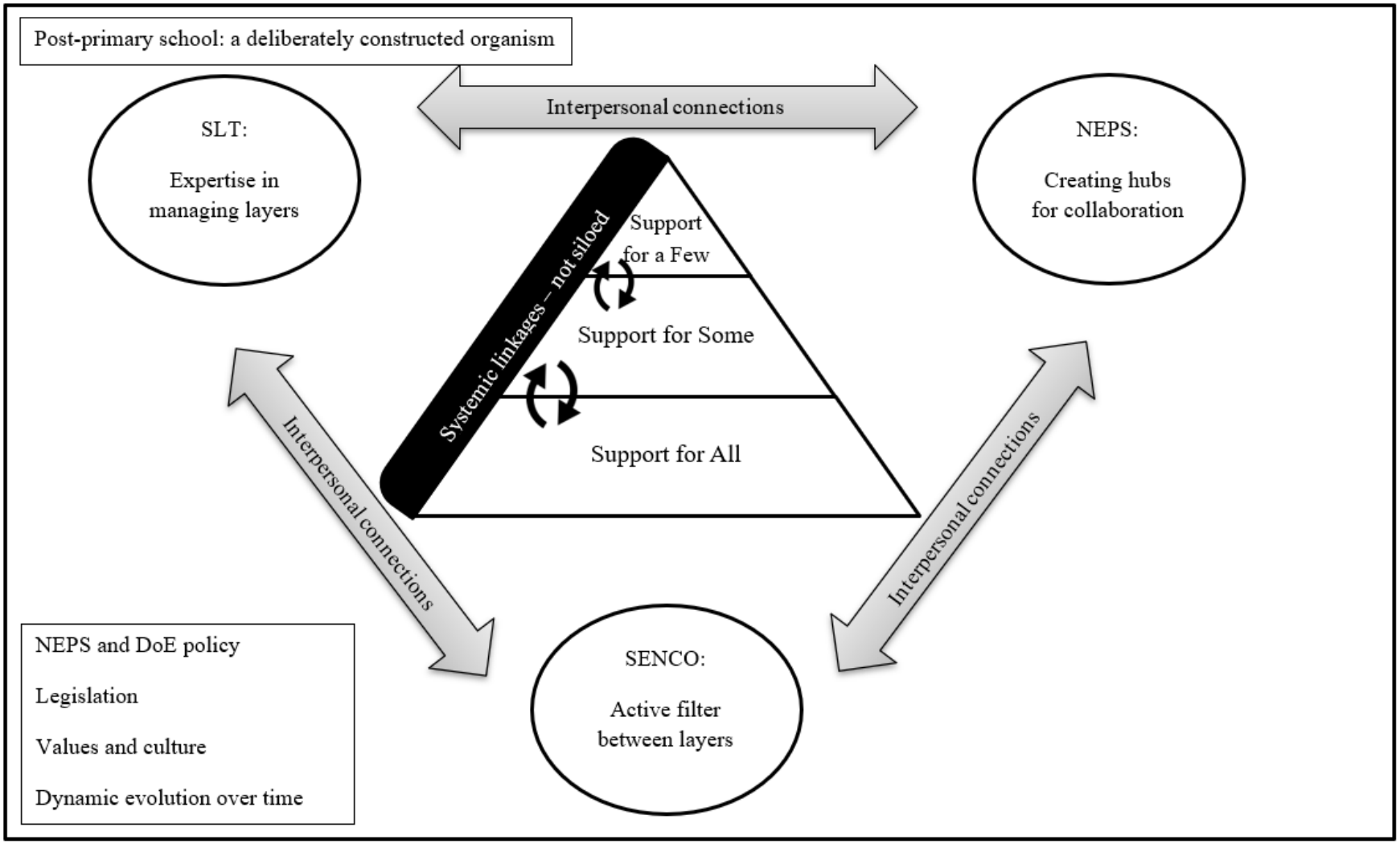
The current study examined a timely and pressing issue, situated within wider debates around Ireland's future direction regarding special and inclusive education. Data collection took place in Spring-Summer 2021; SETAM is expected to be embedded in practice at this point. The scarcity of research in this area means that discourse around the SENCO role and collaboration between SENCOs, SLT, and NEPS relies on a small evidence-base, some of which was completed before or soon after SETAM was introduced (Fitzgerald & Radford, 2017). This study sits at the intersection of policy, practice, research, and theory and can inform the wider debate from this intersectional perspective (Côté & Huebner, 2021). The blend of DST and IPA used in this study provides a psychological lens for examining collaboration between SENCOs, SLT, and NEPS (Larsen-Freeman, 2019). This was largely absent from previous research and yielded a novel way of understanding participants' experiences of collaboration between SENCOs, SLT, and NEPS.

This study begins to illuminate a theoretical conceptualisation for each role and for collaboration between the three groups; collaboration between all three groups had not been explored in previous research. Based on previous research looking at collaboration between SENCOs and SLT or between SENCOs, NEPS and

parents, it was possible to tentatively identify what the barriers and facilitators to collaboration might be (Fitzgerald & Radford, 2020; Kjaer & Dannesboe, 2019; O'Farrell & Kinsella, 2018). The DST lens used in this study goes beyond a theoretical framing of what the barriers and facilitators are by adding the 'how' to the 'what' (Larsen-Freeman, 2019). Temporal change cuts across each theme identified in Phase 2, developing a conceptualisation of participants' experiences of navigating barriers and facilitators over time to improve practice; see Figure 6. In the first theme participants described navigating interpersonal battlegrounds to establish positive relationships and transcending their role requirements as outlined in policy; this was associated with both personal tolls such as exhaustion and a sense of collective endeavour. The second theme illuminated participants' experiences of working between the many layers which make up post-primary school and NEPS systems and skills required by SENCOs, SLT, and NEPS to facilitate smooth linkages between systemic layers. The third theme identified an image of post-primary schools as living, flexible organisms which are founded upon strong infrastructure. This dynamic understanding of post-primary schools as organisms requires SENCOs, SLT members and NEPS psychologists to understand their role as dynamic participants in this system (Larsen-Freeman, 2019).

Figure 6

Conceptualisation of Post-primary Schools as Dynamic Systems



This study illuminates the interactions between collaborative practice and the special and inclusive education context; participants described experiences of implementing policy changes where policy is in a state of flux, and where practice and culture vary considerably across schools. Participants' understanding of their experience cannot be untangled from the context in which these experiences are occurring (Smith et al., 2022). The study also highlighted the considerable variation and interchangeability of language around special and inclusive education, and the fraught nature of the underlying concepts which this language attempts to describe, both in policy and in practice as found in both phases of this study. This study found considerable variation in practice and in the language used to describe practice. Participants' experiences indicated that effective practice included an intentional blend of universal approaches for all students and specialised interventions for individual needs, with a focus on participation and inclusion in schools and communities. This approach aligns with inclusive special education and highlights the necessity of elements of both inclusive and special education, although participants used varying language to describe these practices (Florian, 2019; Hornby, 2015). Shared language and conceptual clarity are closely intertwined; shared language is necessary to facilitate open conversations around SEN provision and the purpose of collaboration between SENCOs, SLT, and NEPS across the CoS (Fitzgerald & Radford, 2020). This is crucial given the fraught policy-level conversation which is currently occurring around future models of provision in Ireland.

4.6 Implications and Recommendations for Practice and Policy

4.6.1 NEPS Facilitating Collaboration

This study highlights the importance of shared understanding of school systems between NEPS and post-primary schools. NEPS psychologists should be familiar with SENCO status in relation to middle management structures and how the role is defined in each school, and with frameworks for practice such as SSE. This study highlights the importance of understanding how SLT and SENCOs experience collaboration and using these insights to ensure effective collaboration. This study highlights practical ways in which participants have achieved collaboration, which could be used by other NEPS psychologists in practice.

Effective approaches included an initial contracting process to establish the aims and process involved in collaboration, investing significant time into relationship-building with SENCOs, SLT, and parents, and actively listening to clarify priorities and ensure that all stakeholders' skills and expertise are equally valued. These approaches are relevant to the assessment and consultation elements of NEPS' role: meaningful collaboration can occur through stand-alone consultation and through consultation occurring around the assessment process.

The study highlighted a need for NEPS psychologists to have access to ongoing professional learning to support skill development in collaboration. Findings indicated considerable variability in NEPS psychologists' experiences of working with SLT, understanding of the SENCO role, and awareness of middle leadership including AP postholders' roles and implications for the SENCO role. It is important for NEPS psychologists to understand the operation of each school as a dynamic system, because NEPS are interacting with these school systems to effect positive change; this is particularly challenging without a shared understanding of the system (Larsen-Freeman, 2019). The NEPS role is still in transition from a gatekeeping role to a broader, collaborative role across the CoS: ongoing support and professional learning is necessary to ensure that this shift becomes meaningfully embedded rather than being a surface-level change (Thomas, 2009). Embedding change requires systemic alignment between NEPS and DoE policy and practice frameworks; for instance, recent Wellbeing Guidelines integrate SSE and the CoS (DES, 2019). Provision mapping also seeks to integrate SSE more broadly with the CoS (Fitzgerald et al., 2021). This need for increased alignment could inform NEPS support and development work in schools, including supporting schools to enhance their collaborative practice, for instance through provision mapping across the CoS.

4.6.2 Role Clarity for SLT and SENCOs

There are practical implications for schools in terms of creating conditions to facilitate effective collaboration with NEPS. It is important for SENCOs and SLT to understand the changes in the NEPS role; a lack of shared understanding emerged as a barrier in this study and previous research (O'Farrell & Kinsella, 2018; Thornberg, 2014b). Role clarity within schools is also crucial. While roles can be flexibly adapted to suit schools' individual needs, it is important for post-primary schools to

have clearly delineated roles for SLT and SENCOs regarding SEN provision across the CoS. Findings highlighted the importance of developing and defining these roles in school policy, although this is particularly challenging for the SENCO role as schools do not have an explicit national policy to rely on. Establishing these structures and communicating these to NEPS is necessary to develop shared vision and priorities between post-primary schools and NEPS. Clear role definitions also help to create a shared understanding within schools, enabling all teachers to understand their role in supporting students across the CoS.

4.6.3 Formalising the SENCO Role

This study aligns with previous research supporting formalisation of the SENCO role. Developing clear role definitions involves particular implications for SLT members as they are responsible for delineating AP roles, and for recruiting suitable staff to PoR (Skerritt, McNamara, et al., 2021). Findings indicated that utilising middle management structures is currently the only way of formalising the SENCO role in post-primary schools. There is no requirement for SLT to include the SENCO role in an AP post; this study found that some schools have not formalised the SENCO role in this way. SLT motivation and knowledge of inclusive education and SEN were found to be important factors in this study in determining SENCO status. Some schools in this study designated the SENCO role as an AP I or II position, or a combination of both with role functions shared by more than one person; this enhanced SENCO status and capacity to achieve change, consistent with extant research (Fitzgerald & Radford, 2020). Findings indicated that a disadvantage of this was that SENCOs holding an AP post are often required to undertake other leadership roles as part of this, such as Year Head. Furthermore, the competencies and skills outlined in policy for the appointment of AP positions focus on leadership in a broader sense, while this study and extant research found that SENCOs require both specialised skills and knowledge and broader interpersonal and leadership competence (DES, 2018; Fitzgerald & Radford, 2017). Existing PoR structures are not currently appropriate for the SENCO role; these structures are too general and SENCO status largely depends on the priority and value afforded to it by SLT. SLT need to be able to appoint a suitably skilled and qualified SENCO to a PoR, delineated separately from other AP roles allocated to the school.

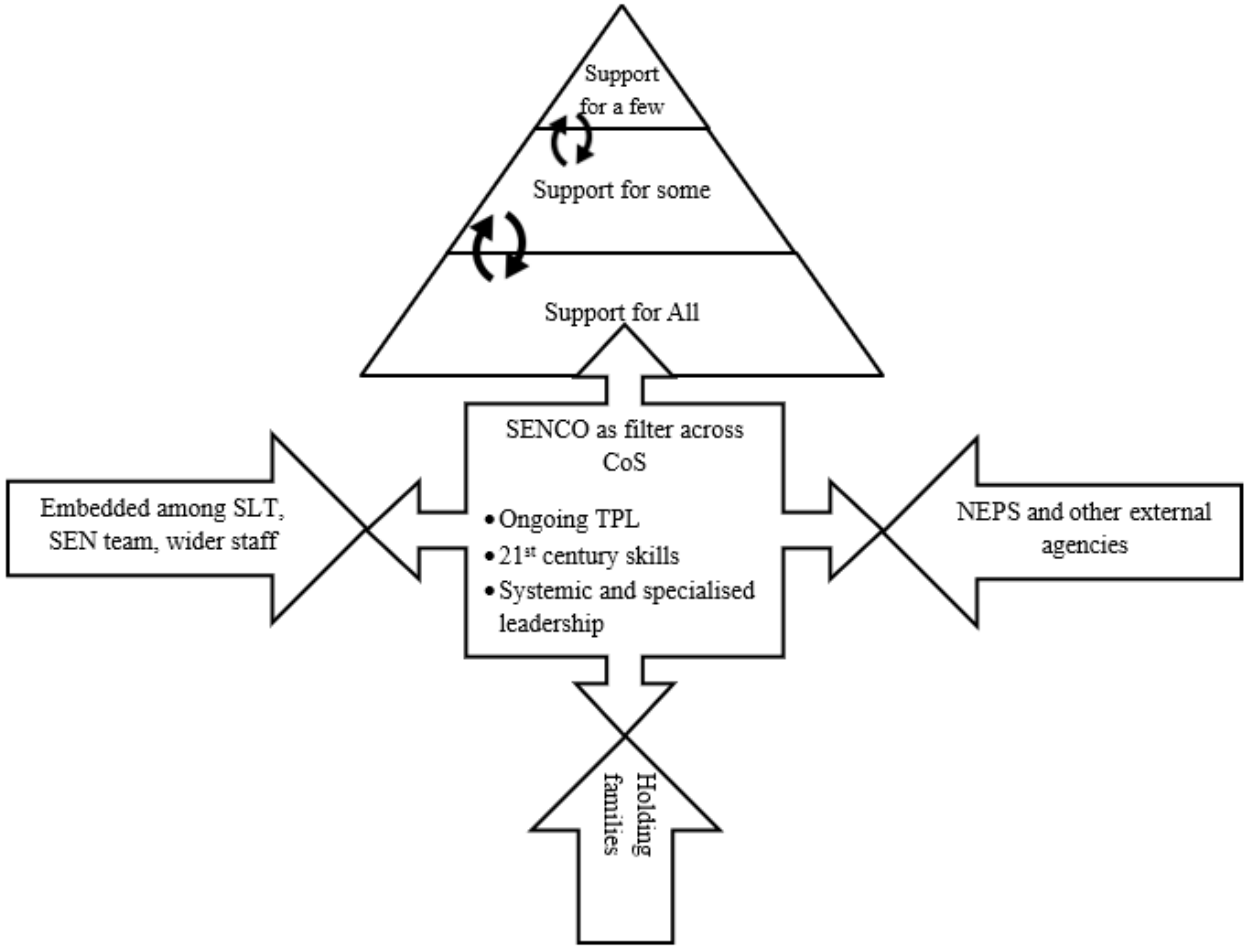
Current policy suggests that while some of schools' SETAM hours can be allocated to co-ordination, this should be kept to a minimum; explicit co-ordination time allocations are not provided (DES, 2017). Findings highlighted the importance of allocating time to the SENCO role, and possibly sharing co-ordination duties between SENCOs and SEN teams. Time should be formally reserved for the SENCO and SEN team, with a baseline threshold of co-ordination time for schools with particularly small SET allocations. In addition, positioning the SENCO role within middle management structures requires the SENCO role to incorporate both leadership and management (Skerritt, McNamara, et al., 2021). This would position the SENCO as a crucial policy actor involved in translating school and national policies into actions in everyday practice (Skerritt, McNamara, et al., 2021). This reflects the image of the SENCO as an active filter identified in this study, and emphasises that the SENCO role requires broader and deeper recognition; allocating co-ordination time is necessary, but insufficient alone to establish SENCO status in schools. One SENCO suggested a rotating SENCO role, which would require SLT to adopt a flexible approach to PoR appointments. Schools, and individuals within schools, may adopt varying positions in relation to policy; this positionality determines the priorities and agenda in a school and shapes the way in which policies such as middle management or the CoS are enacted (Skerritt, McNamara, et al., 2021). The SENCO role should be clearly defined, with inbuilt flexibility to facilitate adaptation to specific school contexts, aligned with the description of the co-ordinating teacher duties outlined in DES guidelines (DES, 2017b). The SENCO role requires formalisation to clarify its systemic and specialist nature, to give SENCOs recognition as co-leaders alongside SLT, and to facilitate collaborative linkages with external agencies such as NEPS.

Following on from the positioning of the SENCO role within leadership structures, there are implications for SENCOs regarding skills development. The dual nature of the SENCO role was identified in the current study, as in previous research (Oldham & Radford, 2011). Findings highlighted the importance of a recognised SEN qualification and relevant CPD for SENCOs, perhaps provided by universities or the NCSE support service, reflecting the dual specialised and systemic aspects of the SENCO role. Findings highlighted the importance of SENCOs developing skills and specialised knowledge around meeting students' individual

needs, and developing interpersonal, leadership, and management skills (Fitzgerald & Radford, 2020; Skerritt, McNamara, et al., 2021). Building SENCOs' leadership capacity should include supporting skill development in engaging in and facilitating inter-professional collaboration and facilitating change processes in school systems. This requires effective interpersonal skills, as highlighted in this study; SENCOs achieved change by engaging with colleagues in a strengths-focused manner, similar to humble or appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). This study highlighted that the SENCO role, although nebulous and poorly defined in policy, is expanding over time. This involved a personal toll for some participants in terms of tiredness and the emotional weight of the role, and many felt compelled to work after school hours and during holidays. This aligns with previous research indicating that staff members holding middle leadership roles often experience excessive workloads (Fitzgerald & Radford, 2020; Skerritt, McNamara, et al., 2021). This has implications for SENCOs in terms of prioritising self-care, and for SLT to be cognisant of staff members' workloads. There may also be a role for NEPS in facilitating supervision, including peer supervision through SENCO cluster meetings to support SENCOs with the emotional weight of their role. See Figure 7 for a DST-informed conceptualisation of the SENCO role.

Figure 7

DST-informed Conceptualisation of the SENCO Role



4.6.4 Teacher Professional Learning

The complex nature of the SENCO role necessitates a focus on TPL; there are also implications around TPL for SLT members who are working with SENCOs and NEPS. TPL involves continuing professional development, and any activities which support the ongoing professional learning and development of teachers (Rawdon et al., 2020). Embedding sustainable change in practice over time is central to TPL; TPL involves meaningful, often collaborative, activities which support teachers and schools to reflect on and meaningfully improve practice (OECD, 2015; Rawdon et al., 2020). TPL in Ireland is self-directed rather than mandatory, meaning that post-primary schools and teachers undertake TPL on their own initiative. Support and development input from NEPS forms part of TPL. Schools are not required to approach TPL in a strategic, data-informed manner and may not have systems to cascade and share TPL across the school. SENCOs and SLT have a role in upskilling themselves and staff and creating communication channels for knowledge and skills to filter through the school. This study identified areas for development which could be addressed by TPL including supporting students across the CoS in mainstream classes through UDL, implementing the CoS, and understanding policy around the NEPS role (NEPS, 2010; D. H. Rose et al., 2013). These areas of development correspond to 21st century skills: SENCOs and SLT need TPL around learning skills such as critical thinking and collaboration, literacy skills including digital literacy and information management, and life skills such as flexibility and leadership (Alhothali, 2021; Yilmaz, 2021). ITE may be considered part of TPL as it forms the foundation of knowledge, skills and attitudes for post-primary teachers who go on to hold SLT or SENCO roles. This ongoing, career-wide approach to developing 21st century skills through TPL reflects the dynamic, on-the-move nature of schools systems as explored in this study (Booth & Ainscow, 2011). Developing these skills would allow space for innovative approaches to inter-professional collaboration and work with parents, students, and school communities.

This study also has practical implications for the support and development aspect of the NEPS role, which contributes to TPL. As well as their own skills in facilitating collaboration, NEPS psychologists have the capacity to support schools to develop the skills necessary to engage in meaningful collaboration (Hamre et al., 2018b). As highlighted by the research findings, facilitating this capacity building in

schools is far more complex than simply delivering a support and development session about the CoS (Brodie, 2021; OECD, 2015). Support and development in this area should occur within the context of a reciprocal, strong working relationship with schools. Findings highlighted that needs and priorities of the school should be identified jointly with schools to facilitate collaboration and avoid imposing input on schools. Provision mapping was mentioned by some participants as having the potential to facilitate a collaborative conversation around identifying school needs, in a strengths-based manner. Notably, provision mapping, guided by the process of SSE, evaluates provision against the school's profile of needs across all three levels of the CoS, providing a pathway by which NEPS psychologists could engage in a data-informed broader role, rather than working in a silo at the top of the CoS (Fitzgerald et al., 2021). Areas for support and development identified in this study included problem-solving around the CoS, conducting and interpreting assessments, and using assessment information to inform planning. It is also necessary for NEPS psychologists to explicitly clarify the nature of the NEPS role, in light of recent changes, and to share an understanding of consultative models which have the potential to achieve collaboration.

4.7 Implications and Recommendations for Future Research

This study indicates directions for future research along both quantitative and qualitative pathways. This study demonstrated that an overarching view as well as individual-level experiences are important in understanding collaboration between SENCOs, SLT and NEPS. Future research should be on a larger scale, and longitudinal research would be appropriate because changes over time were identified as important in this study. This would facilitate a more nuanced understanding of the process of transitioning from barriers to facilitators regarding collaborative practice. IPA could be a valuable component of this longitudinal research; new developments in IPA as a methodology are indicating ways in which IPA can be incorporated into longitudinal research, for instance by interviewing a small number of participants at various time points (Smith et al., 2022). More large-scale research is needed around the SENCO role in particular, which would then inform policy. Some of this research should draw on practice-based evidence such as SENCO forums, or the formation of a SENCO working group as suggested by this study (Gulliford, 2015). Research should examine the SENCO role definition and

where it sits in relation to middle leadership structures and SLT. Future research should involve reflection on the title of the role (Oldham & Radford, 2011). For instance, early childhood settings in Ireland may have an Inclusion Co-ordinator while Welsh schools have Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinators (Education Wales, 2021; LINC Consortium, 2021), reflecting a broader role remit. It is unclear whether SENCO is the most appropriate term for the Irish context, especially if future policy adopts an inclusive special education approach.

Research is required to inform professional learning for SENCOs, SLT, and NEPS. The focus of this research should be identifying knowledge, skills, and attitudes which are necessary to create effective collaboration, and identifying effective ways of supporting SENCOs, SLT, and NEPS to embed these in practice. A broad, spiral approach should be taken to professional learning; for instance, for SENCOs and SLT, ITE constitutes the foundation for future professional learning and the process of TPL continues via a variety of learning activities throughout the career, with increasingly deeper engagement with the learning across the career-span. NEPS have a role in contributing to this research.

Future research also needs to take account of the complex and changing policy context regarding special and inclusive education. Given that the policy context in Ireland is, and will continue to be, in a state of flux, research will need to adhere to principles of sensitivity to context, and will need to be explicit around its positioning in relation to special and inclusive education (Shevlin & Banks, 2021a). This is particularly challenging given that there is currently little consistency around the usage of terms such as special and inclusive education (Shevlin & Banks, 2021b). This study has indicated that inclusive special education has the potential to be a suitable model for the Irish context, building on previous research (Fitzgerald & Radford, 2020). In a similar vein, research needs to explicitly clarify operational definitions of consultation and collaboration, as these are used interchangeably in policy and in practice, as indicated in this study. A key element of pragmatic research requires researchers to identify for whom their research is useful; the aim of inclusive special education is to provide individualised support to enable children's future independence (Hornby, 2015; Meyer, 2021). Therefore, it is necessary to explore the voices of children and their families in order to further understand

collaboration between SENCOs, SLT and NEPS, which is ultimately aimed at improving outcomes and experiences for these children and their families.

This study has methodological implications for future research. This research shows the potential for implementing innovative research designs using IPA, for instance, the current study was situated within a pragmatic paradigm and involved a mixed-methods, multi-perspectival IPA design (Larkin et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2022). These elements were combined so as not to compromise the quality and integrity of each component. This approach could be expanded and built upon in future research seeking to investigate the overall context and individual experiences of collaboration between SENCOs, SLT, and NEPS. The methodological approach outlined here could also be relevant to other areas of study seeking to explore a shared experience from multiple perspectives using a combination of methods (Larkin et al., 2019).

4.8 Distinct and Original Contribution to Knowledge

No previous studies have looked at SENCOs, SLT, and NEPS together to explore their experiences of working collectively. Previous research indicated what the barriers and facilitators to collaboration were likely to be, but not what it was like to be immersed in the experience of navigating these barriers and facilitators, against a changing policy context (Fitzgerald & Radford, 2020; O'Farrell & Kinsella, 2018). Using multi-perspectival IPA, in this case a directly related group design, in mixed methods was an innovative approach (Smith et al., 2022). This is a valuable approach for studying this topic, as discussed in implications for research.

This study has begun to clarify the theoretical framing of consultation and collaboration against the context of theory and policy around special and inclusive education. Collaboration must be examined within the context in which it is occurring, although some previous research omitted the policy context regarding special and/or inclusive education (Boesley & Crane, 2018; O'Farrell & Kinsella, 2018). The findings have added to the theoretical framing of the SENCO role which has been existing in an atheoretical bubble (Hallett, 2021). This study involved a novel application of DST to collaboration between SENCOs, NEPS, and SLT. DST ties together the experiences presented here and helps to intertwine theory and

practical experiences regarding collaboration against the changing policy context (Larsen-Freeman, 2019).

The study has contributed to practical knowledge as well as theoretical understandings. Phase 1 provided an insight into the overall background and context in which SENCOs, SLT and NEPS are working, and has also contributed to an understanding of variability in practice around the SENCO role. Little was known about the status of SENCOs in schools, the importance they place on their own and others' roles, how many schools have SEN teams, additional qualifications, awareness of NEPS in relation to SENCO roles, SEN teams and so on. The findings may also suggest that future research should explore collaboration between primary schools and NEPS, although this was beyond the scope of the current study. The measures taken to achieve transferability meant that practitioners could apply the experiences presented in Phase 2 to their own practice. In particular, a novel understanding provided by this study relates to the process of transitioning from challenging situations to effective collaborative practice. IPA facilitated a granular exploration of how this transition was achieved, adding a new facet to the overall understanding of collaboration between SENCOs, SLT, and NEPS in post-primary schools.

4.9 Impact Statement

The current study and its dissemination involve impact at local, national, and international levels, with implications for practice, policy, research, and theory. The research process has informed my development as an EP by enabling me to develop a nuanced understanding of leadership structures and policies in schools, the variability of the SENCO role across schools, the variability of the NEPS role, and navigating barriers and facilitators to collaboration. These insights will enhance my future reflective practice, which will in turn shape my approach to working with post-primary schools. The research process has also shaped my identity as a researcher; my previous research experience involved only quantitative research. The current research process involved a significant learning process in terms of becoming familiar with IPA, and implementing a complex mixed-methods, multi-perspectival IPA design while maintaining high-quality standards (Larkin et al., 2019; Smith et

al., 2022). This has changed my perspective on what constitutes valuable evidence and will inform any future research projects which I undertake.

The study has an immediate impact for practitioners, although this impact must be stated cautiously as the findings are transferable rather than generalisable. The experiences presented here may be relevant to SENCOs, SLT and NEPS who are engaging in and reflecting on collaboration, particularly if they are attempting to make collaboration in their own practice more effective. The findings could be a prompt for reflective practice for NEPS, SENCOs and SLT either individually or jointly if they are trying to bring about positive change. The SSE process, and its companion, the Looking At Our Schools (LAOS) Framework has the potential to support this collaborative reflection; for instance, provision mapping could link schools' implementation of the CoS as a graduated response to a continuum of need with their reflective practice as part of SSE (DES, 2016; Fitzgerald et al., 2021). This could also inform NEPS support and development work in schools.

Regarding policy-level impact, this study adds to the growing body of research finding that policy change is needed around the SENCO role. The potential for effective, meaningful collaboration already exists, particularly if schools take it upon themselves to define the SENCO role and embed it in their own school policies and structures. However, this potential is not always realised, and the policy gap around the SENCO role can make it difficult to achieve effective collaboration, or indeed clarity on the roles of collaborative partners.

Future research is needed to build on the theoretical understanding suggested in this study, and in turn influence future policy. The findings have contributed to the theoretical understanding of the SENCO role and of collaboration between SENCOs, SLT, and NEPS against the context of inclusive and special education; the DST lens was particularly valuable here (Larsen-Freeman, 2019). The findings align with and build upon previous research indicating that an inclusive special education model could be appropriate in the Irish context if explicitly incorporated into policy. There are also methodological implications: both quantitative and qualitative methods, including IPA, are needed to provide a nuanced, deep, and broad understanding of collaboration between NEPS, SENCOs, and SLT.

The dissemination of this research spans local, national, and international conferences. In 2021, the literature review was presented at the British Psychological Society Northern Ireland branch conference, at the Psychological Society of Ireland annual conference, and at the Shannon Region Postgraduate Conference. A research summary was published in the Educational Studies Association of Ireland (ESAI) inclusive education special interest group newsletter in January 2022. Findings were disseminated at the NEPS Trainee EP research symposium in November 2021 and at the Educational Studies Association of Ireland conference in April 2022, where the research won an Early Career Researcher Award of High Commendation. Findings will be presented at the International Research Methods Summer School in May 2022 and at the European Congress of Psychology in Ljubljana in July 2022. Dissemination will also be achieved through publication in a peer-reviewed journal. The dissemination process contributes to positioning research into the SENCO role and collaboration between SENCOs, SLT, and NEPS in the Irish context as being important in international discourse around collaboration and inclusive special education.

Overall, this study points towards future research which is required to inform policy change. Effective collaboration between SENCOs, SLT and NEPS has the potential to bring about positive change for post-primary students and school communities. In line with DST, post-primary schools are interacting with the wider community and society (Larsen-Freeman, 2019); harnessing collaboration to bring about high-quality inclusive special education in schools can contribute to wider societal moves towards inclusion.

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Appendix A: Thematic Search and Screening Process

Searches were conducted from September 2021 to January 2022 in order to capture a breadth and depth of theoretical perspectives across both pairs of themes. Filters and manual inspection were used to select theoretical papers and book chapters written in the English language. No limit was applied regarding publication date as it was considered necessary to include seminal papers and to trace the development of theory over time.

Table 1.

Sample Search terms

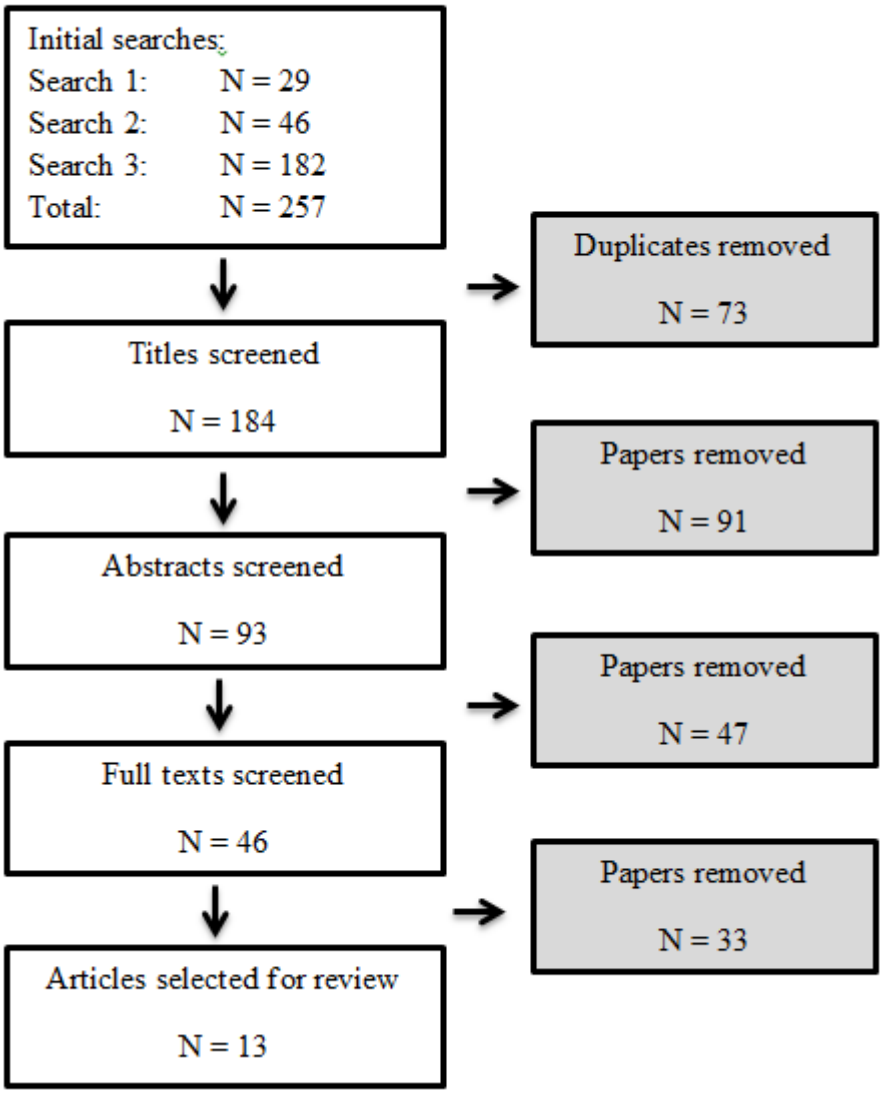
Consultation and collaboration	“interprofessional collaboration” AND educational psych* “models of consultation” “models of collaboration”
Special and inclusive education	“inclusive special education” "inclusive education" OR "inclusion" “model of special education” AND theory

Appendix B: Systematic Search and Screening Process

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

		Inclusion	Exclusion	Rationale
1	Publication type	Peer-reviewed journal	Publication other than a peer-reviewed journal	To ensure that high-quality research is included in the review.
2	Language	Published in English	Not published in English	Translation services are unavailable.
3	Date of publication	Published between 1st January 2010 and 21st July 2020	Not published between 1st January 2010 and 21st July 2020	To ensure that studies selected for review represent up-to-date research findings.
4	Study type	Primary research using data not previously reported	Secondary research or based on data that were previously reported Dissertations and theses	Empirical data is needed to answer the review question.
5	Participants	Participants are fully qualified and include at least one of: 1. SENCOs 2. Educational or school psychologists 3. SLT	Participants are not fully qualified and/or do not include at least one of: 1. SENCOs 2. Educational or school psychologists 3. SLT	To ensure that the studies selected for review are closely aligned with the review question.
6	Focus of study	The study examines collaboration and/or consultation involving at least one of the groups named in Criterion 5 in a mainstream school. Barriers and/or facilitators to collaboration or consultation are identified.	The study examines collaboration or consultation in a context other than a mainstream school such as a preschool or university. Barriers and/or facilitators to collaboration or consultation are not identified.	To ensure that the studies selected for review are closely aligned with the review question.

Search and screening process



Appendix C: References for Selected Studies

References for studies selected for review

1. Ahtola, A., & Kiiski-Mäki, H. (2014). What Do Schools Need? School Professionals' Perceptions of School Psychology. *International Journal of School & Educational Psychology*, *2*(2), 95–105. ERIC.

2. Berger, J., Yiu, H. L., Nelson, D., Vaganek, M., Rosenfield, S., Gravois, T., Gottfredson, G., Vu, P., Shanahan, K., & Hong, V. (2014). Teacher Utilization of Instructional Consultation Teams. *Journal of Educational & Psychological Consultation*, *24*(3), 211–238. ERIC.

3. Boesley, L., & Crane, L. (2018). 'Forget the Health and Care and Just Call Them Education Plans': SENCOs' Perspectives on Education, Health and Care Plans. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, *18*, 36–47. ERIC.

4. Hamre, B., Hedegaard-Sørensen, L., & Langager, S. (2018). Between Psychopathology and Inclusion: The Challenging Collaboration between Educational Psychologists and Child Psychiatrists. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *22*(6), 655–670. ERIC.

5. Hartmann, E. S. (2016). Understanding the Everyday Practice of Individualized Education Program Team Members. *Journal of Educational & Psychological Consultation*, *26*(1), 1–24. Academic Search Complete.

6. Kearney, A., Mentis, M., & Holley-Boen, W. (2017). Informal, Non-Formal, and Formal Networking: Ensuring Autonomy and Flexibility for Special Needs Coordinators. *New Zealand Journal of Teachers' Work*, *14*(2), 114–135. ERIC.

7. Kjaer, B., & Dannesboe, K. I. (2019). Reflexive Professional Subjects: Knowledge and Emotions in the Collaborations between Teachers and Educational-Psychological Consultants in a Danish School Context. *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, *28*(2), 168–185. ERIC.

8. Newman, D. S., Hazel, C. E., Barrett, C. A., Chaudhuri, S. D., & Fetterman, H. (2018). Early-Career School Psychologists' Perceptions of Consultative Service Delivery: The More Things Change, the More

They Stay the Same. *Journal of Educational & Psychological Consultation*, *28*(2), 105–136. Academic Search Complete.

9. Norwich, B., Fujita, T., Adlam, A., Milton, F., & Edwards-Jones, A. (2018). Lesson study: An inter-professional collaboration approach for Educational Psychologists to improve teaching and learning. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, *34*(4), 370–385. Academic Search Complete.

10. O'Farrell, P., & Kinsella, W. (2018). Research Exploring Parents', Teachers' and Educational Psychologists' Perceptions of Consultation in a Changing Irish Context. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, *34*(3), 315–328. ERIC.

11. Rose, J., Stanforth, A., Gilmore, G., & Bevan-Brown, J. (2018). "You have to do something beyond containing": Developing inclusive systems in a partnership of primary schools. *Emotional & Behavioural Difficulties*, *23*(3), 270–283. Academic Search Complete.

12. Szulevicz, T., & Tanggaard, L. (2014). Inclusion and budget cuts—The contours of educational psychology in the marketplace. *Nordic Psychology*, *66*(1), 36–52. APA PsycInfo. https://doi.org/10.1080/19012276.2014.885762

13. Thornberg, R. (2014). Consultation barriers between teachers and external consultants: A grounded theory of change resistance in school consultation. *Journal of Educational & Psychological Consultation*, *24*(3), 183–210. APA PsycInfo. https://doi.org/10.1080/10474412.2013.846188

Appendix D: Summary of Selected Articles

Mapping the field: Summary of selected studies

Author(s)	Location	Study Type	Participants	Concepts Examined	Main Results
Ahtola & Kiiski-Mäki (2014)	Finland	Quantitative survey design, analysed using multilevel regression modelling	Principals, regular classroom teachers, special education teachers (resource teachers), special education classroom teachers, subject teachers, school nurses, and school physicians in mainstream primary schools.	Co-operation with EPs was a key theme in this study. The study explored functions which school staff, including SLT team members, expect EPs to play. An explicit operational definition of consultation or collaboration was not provided. Special and inclusive education were not explicitly examined.	School professionals considered almost every function of EPs rather important, with whole-school seen as least important. Principals considered assessment to be the most important EP function, and individual therapy to be the least important. The perceptions of various professional groups within the school differed from each other. In addition, the amount of personal cooperation with the EP was positively related with the perceptions of the importance of assessment, consultative, and school-level functions. Where positive relationships exist between the school and the EP, all functions of the EP are rated as more important than in cases where the EP-school relationship was less positive.

Berger et al. (2014)	USA	Mixed-methods longitudinal design, analysed using descriptive statistics and case illustrations	Staff in seventeen mainstream schools in a suburban district (including principals)	The study examined teacher utilisation of Instructional Consultation Teams, which a support system within schools to help teachers to generate solutions for behaviour support issues in their classrooms. Special and inclusive education were not explicitly examined.	The study sought to examine the role of the principal in teachers' utilisation of the Instructional Consultation Team programme. Descriptive data and case illustrations suggested that schools with high utilisation among teachers had effective, stable Instructional Consultation team facilitators who worked in collaboration with their principals. Teachers were more likely to engage in consultation with the Instructional Consultative Teams when the principals were involved with and positive about the programme.
Boesley & Crane (2018)	England	Qualitative design; data from semi-structured telephone interviews were analysed using thematic analysis	Sixteen SENCOs (12 in a mainstream primary school context and four in a mainstream post-primary school context)	The study adopts the SEND Code definition of multi-agency working as collaboration between education, health and care services to ensure that children with SEN receive appropriate support. Multi-agency working requires active participation from all parties, support frameworks, sufficient funding and resources, role and responsibility clarity,	Thematic analysis of responses elicited three key themes: the SENCO's perceived role in the EHC plan process, procedural challenges, and challenges in obtaining an EHC plan for children with social, emotional and mental health needs. Some SENCOs reported that other professionals did not understand their role in the process and were not fully engaged in the process, which placed additional responsibility on SENCOs.

				training, supervision and meaningful family engagement. Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans are intended to involve collaboration between SENCOs, families, and health and care services. The study explored SENCOs perspectives on barriers and facilitators in the EHC planning process.	Challenges regarding paperwork and administration also added to SENCOs' workload. Working in a system which is in a state of flux in terms of reform of SEN provision added to the complexity of SENCOs' engagement in the EHC process.
Hamre et al. (2018)	Denmark	Qualitative design; data from semi-structured interviews were analysed using a Foucauldian, phenomenological approach.	Eight EPs	The study provides context in terms of a discussion of the shift in Danish education policy from special to inclusive education. Interprofessional collaboration is conceptualised as being potentially problematic as well as having the potential to enhance inclusive practices, depending on the nature of the relationship.	EPs would prefer to move away from an expert, troubleshooting role which is focused on psychological testing, and towards a role which is focused on meeting children's needs in inclusive contexts. However this transition was still underway and some EPs continued to focus on within-child diagnoses. Some EPs attributed this mismatch between aims and practice to the dominance of psychiatry in the interprofessional collaborative relationship. Some EPs reported experiencing a power imbalance in the diagnostic relationship; in some cases, EPs felt that they were simply

					mediating psychiatric diagnoses to teachers. Some EPs noted that paperwork and templates can restrict their practice as they are overly focused on diagnostic information, reducing EPs ability to engage in inclusive, collaborative work. Diagnoses could become prescriptive, also reducing the potential for collaboration.
Hartmann (2016)	USA	Qualitative case study design over the course of an academic year, with data analysed using the Community of Practice framework. Data included interviews, observations and email conversations.	Members of two elementary school IEP teams (28 participants in total), including parents, therapists, psychologists, teachers (general and special educators), paraprofessionals, administrators, and other related service providers.	In this study, collaboration is conceptualised as being necessary for schools to fulfil their legislative requirements relating to IEP planning. Legislation does not stipulate what form this collaboration should take; rather, the collaborative process is agreed by all stakeholders. The study defines IEP team member practice as the process of planning and delivering individualised instruction across different people, organisations, and settings. The study contextualises collaboration in terms of	Results contradicted idealistic conceptualisations of Individual Education Plan (IEP) team practice as being equitable and occurring in meetings. Instead, IEP team members' practice was strongly influenced by a few team members and occurred during concise, informal exchanges throughout the day rather than in pre-planned meetings. Results indicated that team work occurs on a continuum of collaboration, with four types of team member practice being identified. The highest level of collaboration was termed core practice, followed by integrated practice, intermittent practice, and the lowest level of collaboration was referred to as

				research into effective team practice, acknowledging social factors such as interpersonal relationships.	disconnected practice. EPs were seen as engaging in integrated practice. Integrated practice involved a combination of participation (engaging with other team members in day-to-day problem-solving), and reification (producing evidence to document the child's learning).
Kearney et al. (2017)	New Zealand	Mixed-methods survey design; quantitative data analysed using descriptive statistics and qualitative data analysed using thematic analysis.	Sixty-five SENCOs in a variety of settings, including mainstream primary and post-primary schools, intermediate schools, and special schools.	The study contextualises inclusive education within theories of equity and social justice. In New Zealand, the SENCO role has been adopted but not formalised within the education system. The SENCO role is intended to have a high degree of flexibility and autonomy, and is focused on increasing schools' capacity to support all learners.	SENCOs perceived their role to be mainly one of coordination, both within the school and with outside agencies. A supportive advocacy role was also perceived as important. A smaller number of SENCOs described themselves as being an interprofessional agent of change. All participants fulfilled another role in addition to SENCO duties, including class teacher, principal or deputy principal. Participants reported that the most significant challenges they experienced as part of the SENCO role included time pressures, lack of resources or funding, liaising with outside agencies, and excessive amounts of paperwork. In terms of facilitators which enabled SENCOs to carry out their role, the three most important

					factors identified included positive relationships with students, leadership which promotes inclusive practice, and inclusive values in the school.
Kjaer & Dannesboe (2019)	Denmark	Qualitative ethnographic design; data from observations and semi-structured interviews analysed using a Foucauldian approach to fieldwork	Semi-structured interviews: Sixteen EPs and 17 school staff members Ethnographically inspired fieldwork: Four schools in two Danish municipalities and members of the educational psychological advisory service teams which support these schools.	The inclusive agenda is conceptualised as a move away from practices such as segregation which are associated with special education. Collaboration between different professions and disciplines is seen as necessary in order to achieve inclusion. The inclusion agenda places a greater emphasis on the consultative role of the educational psychological advisory service than on functions such as assessment, testing and referral.	The consultation which occurred between schools and the educational psychological advisory service was described as being collaborative in nature. This consultation was initiated by schools but was largely led by the educational psychological advisory service. The consultative work was rooted a power relationship, which is afforded more authority to EPs than school professionals. EPs' role as expert had changed from providing diagnostic expertise to sharing expertise in the area of reflective collaboration and therapeutic conversational models. This meant that school professionals were required to reflect on their own attitudes and practice, which was challenging for school professionals as they felt reluctant to share examples of challenges which they experienced in their practice. Furthermore, school

					professionals continued to value traditional EP roles such as EP-led psychological assessment of individual children. The consultative work was based on a power relationship, which was organisationally asymmetrical. Engaging in the consultative process evoked strong emotions both for school professionals and EPs, particularly when different professions had varying ideas about how a situation should be approached.
Newman et al. (2018)	USA	Mixed-methods survey design, including quantitative data analysed using descriptive statistics and qualitative data analysed using a constant comparative method	Two hundred and sixty-two early career EPs (post-qualification of 1-5 years) working in preschool, elementary school, middle school and high school contexts.	Consultation is seen as an important competency which EPs should develop. Consultation involves indirect service delivery, systematic problem-solving, preventative work, and a reciprocal relationship with consultees. EPs should maintain an ecological, professional focus during the consultative process. Consultation is contextualised against a background of increasingly diverse	EPs identified the three least important components of consultation as (a) applying a formal consultation model, (b) working for social justice through consultation, and (c) receiving coaching or supervision for consultative work. A number of barriers to consultation emerged, including (a) excessive evaluations and insufficient time, (b) administrative support, (c) resistant consultees, (d) relationships, and (e) individual EP factors and the importance of earning credibility in schools.

				schools and changing policy in special education.	
Norwich et al. (2018)	England	Qualitative case study design, analysed using thematic analysis. Data included recordings of planning and review meetings, end-of-programme presentations, semi-structured interviews with EPs and teachers and evaluation questionnaires.	Lesson Study teams from three English urban schools (one primary school, one secondary school, and one special secondary school). Each Lesson Study team included one EP, one SENCO, and two teachers.	The study does not explicitly distinguish between special and inclusive education. The study is contextualised within Lesson Study research, extending this approach to involve interprofessional collaboration between teachers and EPs. The focus was on using Lesson Study to support children's working memory needs.	Overall, the Lesson Study process was evaluated positively by all stakeholders. Participants felt that collaboration had occurred as there was equality and a sense of trust between team members from different professions. The EP role appeared to involve asking questions and using consultation skills to prompt deeper thinking about the barriers to learning experienced by the case pupils, and focusing on children's learning and thinking rather than simply suggesting teaching resources. The Lesson Study process led to greater gains for the case pupils in secondary school than for those in the primary and special schools. Teachers in the primary and secondary schools reported the need to make contextual changes in order to facilitate the Lesson Study process. The exchange of knowledge and strategies around

					working memory was valued by all participant groups.
O'Farrell & Kinsella (2018)	Ireland	Qualitative case study design; data from semi-structured interviews was analysed using thematic analysis	Each of the three cases included a parent, teacher and EP (9 participants in total)	Consultation is defined as a problem-solving process between EPs, parents and teachers in order to improve the experiences and outcomes of children. Consultation is positioned within ecological theory. It is acknowledged that definitions of and practices within consultation vary considerably.	Parents and teachers reported that they felt supported throughout the consultative process, partly due to positive relationships and trust with the EP. The EPs considered consultation to be an effective use of time and resources. Teachers reported that limited understanding of the consultative process was a barrier to their participation in the process, while EPs reported that the entry and contracting process was an important preliminary step in order to address these differences in understanding. EPs viewed themselves as facilitators or capacity builders rather than experts, while teachers viewed them as experts who would provide advice and strategies to follow. The EPs reported that the demand for systemic consultation has increased in recent years, although many schools continue to seek resources rather than consultation. This can be a source of frustration for the EPs, as they do not see themselves in the role

					of gatekeeper. One psychologist reported that the principal's role is crucial in embedding consultative practices in schools; it can be difficult to obtain buy-in from teachers if principals do not value consultation.
Rose et al. (2018)	England	Qualitative design; data from semi-structured interviews and an open-ended survey analysed using thematic analysis.	Head teachers in six primary schools	The study focuses on partnerships as a means to support inclusion. Specifically, partnerships were formed between schools in order to replace fixed-term exclusions with transferred inclusion (attending a partner school instead of spending the fixed-term exclusion period at home). Tensions around describing transferred inclusion as an inclusive practice are acknowledged.	Transferred inclusion was introduced across a partnership of schools as a replacement for fixed term exclusions. Overall, participating in the transferred inclusion partnership led to a reduction in student numbers being referred for transferred inclusion, as the programme led schools to reflect on whole-school behaviour policies and to implement positive behaviour support strategies. Leadership for inclusion was found to be an important factor in changing school cultures. The schools in the partnership demonstrated commitment and shared goals, which were seen as important prerequisites for inclusion. The partnership also had sufficient funding, which facilitated the partnership schools to achieve their goals. Difficulties emerged

					regarding some students whose needs were not met by transferred inclusion and school-wide behaviour support strategies.
Szulevicz & Tanggaard (2014)	Denmark	Qualitative design; data from semi-structured interviews and observations analysed using phenomenological strategies of categorisation and condensation.	Eight EPs (one head of the EP services centre and seven EPs employed in the same centre); two of the EPs also acted as key informants and were observed twice per week for three months.	This study positions consultation within the inclusion agenda and within a restricted economic background. Inclusion is seen as including an element of social justice as well as an element of economics. This is seen to create tensions within EPs' work.	Two main themes emerged: (a) does the economy shape the consultative practice of educational psychologists, and (b) the budget cutbacks may be an invitation to rethink inclusive practices. Regarding theme (a), conflicting demands were seen as a barrier to consultative work; these demands included economic restrictions, limitations in resources, and differences between EP goals and teachers' goals. Budget cuts were seen as a barrier to consultation. Teachers were reported to view the EP as fulfilling a traditional, assessment-based role while EPs aimed to work more collaboratively and consultatively. A collaborative relationship with teachers was seen as a prerequisite for consultation. Regarding theme (b), EPs reported that in some cases, budget cuts prompted new and creative ways of approaching inclusion. However, there was a

					risk that inclusion could be misused as an excuse to justify budget cuts.
Thornberg (2014)	Sweden	Qualitative design; data from focus groups and semi-structured interviews analysed using grounded theory	Thirty participants in total, including principals, teachers, parents, students, and external resource team members (social workers and special educators).	The potential for consultation to be inclusive is conceptualised as depending on the focus of consultative interactions. Previously, consultation has focused on within-child factors rather than focusing on ecological barriers to learning. The focus of consultation is shifting slightly towards a more ecological perspective.	A grounded theory of change resistance with regard to school consultation emerged from the data. Professionals approached situations with different assumptions and conceptualisations of the problem, which led to professionals having different priorities in working with the child. Friction between professions arose in many cases and the professional cultural barriers that emerged were not bridged but rather reinforced professionals' beliefs that their own perspective was superior. This contributed to a lack of integration between external consultants and school personnel. Lack of integration contributed to the legitimacy loss and the maintenance of professional ethnocentricity. The social process of change resistance was centred in the interaction between professional ethnocentricity and lack of integration.

Appendix E: References and Rationale for Excluded Studies

Studies Excluded after Full-Text Screening and Rationale

	Excluded Study	Rationale
1	Bargerhuff, M. E. (2013). Meeting the Needs of Students with Disabilities in a Stem School. *American Secondary Education*, *41*(3), 3–20. Academic Search Complete.	Criterion 6: Not clearly focused on collaboration or consultation
2	Chapman, C., Lindsay, G., Muijs, D., Harris, A., Arweck, E., & Goodall, J. (2010). Governance, leadership, and management in federations of schools. *School Effectiveness & School Improvement*, *21*(1), 53–74. Academic Search Complete.	Criterion 4: Based on a previously reported data set
3	Dobson, E., & Gifford-Bryan, J. (2014). Collaborative-Consultation: A Pathway for Transition. *Kairaranga*, *15*(1), 11–19. ERIC.	Criterion 4: Not primary research and not empirical data
4	Doveston, M., & Keenaghan, M. (2010). Teachers and educational psychologists working together: What can we learn? *Support for Learning*, *25*(3), 131–137. APA PsycInfo. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9604.2010.01451.x	Criterion 6: Does not clearly identify barriers or facilitators to collaboration or consultation
5	Eiraldi, R., McCurdy, B., Khanna, M., Mautone, J., Jawad, A. F., Power, T., Cidav, Z., Cacia, J., & Sugai, G. (2014). A cluster randomized trial to evaluate external support for the implementation of positive behavioral interventions and supports by school personnel. *Implementation Science*, *9*(1), 1–28. Academic Search Complete.	Criterion 4: Not reporting on primary research
6	Fischer, A. J., Bloomfield, B. S., Clark, R. R., McClelland, A. L., & Erchul, W. P. (2019). Increasing Student Compliance with Teacher Instructions Using Telepresence Robot Problem-Solving Teleconsultation. *International*	Criterion 6: Not a mainstream school context

	Journal of School & Educational Psychology, *7*, 158–172. ERIC.	
7	Froiland, J. M. (2011). Response to intervention as a vehicle for powerful mental health interventions in the schools. *Contemporary School Psychology*, *15*, 35–42. APA PsycInfo.	Criterion 6: Not clearly focused on consultation or collaboration
8	Gathumbi, A., Ayot, H., Kimemia, J., & Ondigi, S. (2015). Teachers' and School Administrators' Preparedness in Handling Students with Special Needs in Inclusive Education in Kenya. *Journal of Education and Practice*, *6*(24), 129–138. ERIC.	Criterion 6: Not clearly focused on consultation or collaboration
9	Gelbar, N. W., Jaffery, R., Stein, R., & Cymbala, H. (2015). Case Study on the Implementation of School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports in an Alternative Educational Setting. *Journal of Educational & Psychological Consultation*, *25*(4), 287–313. Academic Search Complete.	Criterion 6: Not a mainstream school context
10	Ihorn, S. M., & Arora, P. (2018). Teleconsultation to Support the Education of Students with Visual Impairments: A Program Evaluation. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, *28*(3), 319–341. ERIC.	Criterion 5: Participants did not include SENCOs, SLT team members or EPs
11	Lu, J., Jiang, X., Yu, H., & Li, D. (2015). Building Collaborative Structures for Teachers' Autonomy and Self-Efficacy: The Mediating Role of Participative Management and Learning Culture. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, *26*(2), 240–257. ERIC.	Criterion 4: Based on a previously reported data set
12	Magare, I., Kitching, A. E., & Roos, V. (2010). Educators' Experiences of Inclusive Learning Contexts: An Exploration of Competencies. *Perspectives in Education*, *28*(1), 52–63. ERIC.	Criterion 4: Data collected for a dissertation
13	Massé, L., Couture, C., Levesque, V., & Bégin, J.-Y. (2013). Impact of a school consulting programme aimed at helping teachers integrate students with behavioural difficulties into secondary school: Actors' points of view. *Emotional & Behavioural Difficulties*, *18*(3), 327–343. APA PsycInfo. https://doi.org/10.1080/13632752.2013.775719	Criterion 6: Does not clearly identify barriers or facilitators to collaboration or consultation

14	McKenney, E. L. W., & Bristol, R. M. (2015). Supporting Intensive Interventions for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder: Performance Feedback and Discrete Trial Teaching. *School Psychology Quarterly*, *30*(1), 8–22. ERIC.	Criterion 6: Does not clearly identify barriers or facilitators to collaboration or consultation
15	McKenney, E. L. W., Mann, K. A., Brown, D. L., & Jewell, J. D. (2017). Addressing Cultural Responsiveness in Consultation: An Empirical Demonstration. *Journal of Educational & Psychological Consultation*, *27*(3), 289–316. Academic Search Complete.	Criterion 6: Does not clearly identify barriers or facilitators to collaboration or consultation
16	McKenney, E. L. W., Page, V., Lakota, J., Niekra, N., & Thompson, S. J. (2019). Supporting Integrity of Discrete Trial Teaching via Tiered Consultation: A Pilot Study. *Journal of Applied School Psychology*, *35*(1), 52–74. ERIC.	Criterion 6: Does not clearly identify barriers or facilitators to collaboration or consultation
17	Meyers, A. B., Tobin, R. M., Huber, B. J., Conway, D. E., & Shelvin, K. H. (2015). Interdisciplinary collaboration supporting social-emotional learning in rural school systems. *Journal of Educational & Psychological Consultation*, *25*(2–3), 109–128. APA PsycInfo. https://doi.org/10.1080/10474412.2014.929956	Criterion 4: Not primary research
18	Mueller, T. G., & Vick, A. M. (2019). Rebuilding the Family-Professional Partnership Through Facilitated Individualized Education Program Meetings: A Conflict Prevention and Resolution Practice. *Journal of Educational & Psychological Consultation*, *29*(2), 99–127. Academic Search Complete.	Criterion 5: Participants did not include SENCOs, SLT team members or EPs
19	Murray, S. D., Hurley, J., & Ahmed, S. R. (2015). Supporting the Whole Child Through Coordinated Policies, Processes, and Practices. *Journal of School Health*, *85*(11), 795–801. Academic Search Complete.	Criterion 4: Not primary research
20	Owusu-Bempah, J., Mahama, S., Gadegbeku, C., Owusu-Bempah, A., Brobbey, V. W., & Andam, A. (2018). Heart and Mind in Conflict: Teaching Special Needs Children in a	Criterion 5: Not explicitly focused on SENCOs, SLT

	Developing Nation. *Insights into Learning Disabilities*, *15*(1), 29–48. ERIC.	team members or EPs
21	Reddy, L. A., Kettler, R. J., & Kurz, A. (2015). School-Wide Educator Evaluation for Improving School Capacity and Student Achievement in High-Poverty Schools: Year 1 of the School System Improvement Project. *Journal of Educational & Psychological Consultation*, *25*(2/3), 90–108. Academic Search Complete.	Criterion 4: Not primary research
22	Reynolds, J. L., & Fisher, S. D. (2015). Multiple consultee consultation to modify behaviors in a student with autism spectrum disorder. *Contemporary School Psychology*, *19*(3), 128–135. APA PsycInfo. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40688-014-0017-7	Criterion 6: Does not clearly identify barriers or facilitators to collaboration or consultation
23	Rose, J. (2012). Building bridges with other schools: Educational partnerships in separate settings in England. *Support for Learning*, *27*(2), 84–90. APA PsycInfo. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9604.2012.01518.x	Criterion 5: Not based in a mainstream school context
24	Ruble, L., Birdwhistell, J., Toland, M. D., & McGrew, J. (2011). Analysis of parent, teacher, and consultant speech exchanges and educational outcomes of students with Autism during COMPASS consultation. *Journal of Educational & Psychological Consultation*, *21*(4), 259–283. APA PsycInfo. https://doi.org/10.1080/10474412.2011.620818	Criterion 4: Based on a previously reported data set
25	Sanetti, L. M. H., Chafouleas, S. M., Fallon, L. M., & Jaffrey, R. (2014). Increasing Teachers' Adherence to a Classwide Intervention through Performance Feedback Provided by a School-Based Consultant: A Case Study. *Journal of Educational & Psychological Consultation*, *24*(3), 239–260. ERIC.	Criterion 6: Does not clearly identify barriers or facilitators to collaboration or consultation
26	Schultz, B. K., Zoder-Martell, K. A., Fischer, A., Collier-Meek, M. A., Erchul, W. P., & Schoemann, A. M. (2018). When is teleconsultation acceptable to school psychologists? *Journal of Educational & Psychological Consultation*, *28*(3), 279–296. APA PsycInfo. https://doi.org/10.1080/10474412.2017.1385397	Criterion 5: Less than 20% of participants were fully qualified EPs
27	Shani, M., & Koss, C. (2015). Role perceptions of School Administration Team Members concerning inclusion of	Criterion 4: Based on a

	children with disabilities in elementary general schools in Israel. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *19*(1), 71–85. Academic Search Complete.	previously reported data set
28	Shani, M., & Ram, D. (2015). Perceptions of School Administration Team Members concerning inclusion in Israel: Are they in congruence with the ecological sustainable perspective? *British Journal of Special Education*, *42*(3), 301–318. Academic Search Complete.	Criterion 4: Based on a previously reported data set
29	Unruh, S., & Mckellar, N. A. (2013). Evolution, not revolution: School psychologists' changing practices in determining specific learning disabilities. *Psychology in the Schools*, *50*(4), 353–365. Academic Search Complete.	Criterion 6: Does not clearly identify barriers or facilitators to collaboration or consultation
30	Van de Putte, I., De Schauwer, E., Van Hove, G., & Davies, B. (2018). Rethinking Agency as an Assemblage from Change Management to Collaborative Work. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *22*(8), 885–901. ERIC.	Criterion 4: Based on previously a previously reported data set
31	Wanjiru, J. (2020). Post-conflict reconstruction: Negotiating school leadership practice for inclusive education of conflict-affected children in Kenya. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, *48*(3), 496–513. Academic Search Complete.	Criterion 4: Data collected for a thesis
32	Wodrich, D. L., Tarbox, J., Balles, J., & Gorin, J. (2010). Medical diagnostic consultation concerning mental retardation: An analogue study of school psychologists' attitudes. *Psychology in the Schools*, *47*(3), 246–256. Academic Search Complete.	Criterion 6: Not clearly focused on consultation or collaboration
33	Young, H. L., & Gaughan, E. (2010). A Multiple Method Longitudinal Investigation of Pre-Referral Intervention Team Functioning: Four Years in Rural Schools. *Journal of Educational & Psychological Consultation*, *20*(2), 106–138. ERIC.	Criterion 5: Research conducted by interns, not fully-qualified psychologists; not clear if fully-qualified psychologists participated.

Appendix F: Weight of Evidence

Summary of Weight of Evidence ratings

Author(s)	WoE A	WoE B	WoE C	WoE D
Ahtola & Kiiski-Mäki (2014)	Low (1)	Low (1)	Low (1)	Low (1)
Berger et al. (2014)	Low (1)	Medium (2)	Low (1)	Low (1.33)
Boesley & Crane (2018)	Medium (2)	Medium (2)	Medium (2)	Medium (2)
Hamre et al. (2018)	Medium (2)	Low (1)	Medium (2)	Medium (1.67)
Hartmann (2016)	Low (1)	Medium (2)	Low (1)	Low (1.33)
Kearney et al. (2017)	Low (1)	Low (1)	Low (1)	Low (1)
Kjaer & Dannesboe (2019)	Medium (2)	Medium (2)	Medium (2)	Medium (2)
Newman et al. (2018a)	High (3)	Medium (2)	Medium (2)	Medium (2.33)
Norwich et al. (2018)	Medium (2)	Medium (2)	Low (1)	Medium (1.67)
O'Farrell & Kinsella (2018)	High (3)	Low (1)	Medium (2)	Medium (2)
Rose et al. (2018)	Medium (2)	Medium (2)	Low (1)	Medium (1.67)
Szulevicz & Tanggaard (2014)	Medium (2)	Low (1)	Medium (2)	Medium (1.67)
Thornberg (2014)	High (3)	Medium (2)	Medium (2)	Medium (2.33)

Weight of Evidence A: Methodological Quality

Survey designs. Studies which implemented a survey design were evaluated using the an adapted version of the quality checklist for survey research outlined by Mertens (2014). A number of items were added to the coding protocol based on quality indicators which Mertens discussed but did not include in the quality checklist (Mertens, 2014). These included items 1, 2, 3, 4, 10, 11, 12, 13, 17 and 18. These items were added in order to increase the rigour of the coding protocol (Mertens, 2014). Based on Mertens' (2014) description of the necessary features of high-quality survey research, studies which scored 15-18 were considered to be of high quality, articles scoring 11-14 were considered to be of 'Medium' quality while articles scoring 0-10 were considered to be of 'Low' methodological quality. The following items were omitted as they were not relevant to the studies under review:

Item omitted	Rationale
Who answered the questions? Was it the person who experienced the phenomenon in question? Was it a proxy? How adequate were the proxies?	It was not possible to answer this question in a yes/no manner.
If interviews were used, were interviewers trained? What method was used to record the answers? Was it possible or desirable to 'blind' the interviewers to an 'experimental' condition?	Surveys in the studies under review were distributed online or via paper-and-pencil methods. Therefore this question was not applicable.
How did the surveyors handle differences between themselves and responders in terms of gender, race, or ethnicity, socioeconomic status or disability? What consideration was given to interviewer effects?	This item was not applicable as surveys were not conducted face to face, but rather were distributed online or via paper-and-pencil methods.
If the survey instrument was translated into another language, what type of translation process was used? What kind of assurance do you have that the two forms were conceptually appropriate? How was accommodation made for language differences based on country of origin, geographic region, and education level of the respondents?	All surveys in the studies under review were conducted through the medium of the language in which they were originally developed. Therefore this question was not applicable.

Case study designs. Papers which employed a case study design were assessed using an adapted version of the case study quality criteria outlined by Hyett et al. (2014). Three studies were evaluated using this coding protocol (Hartmann, 2016; Norwich et al., 2018; O'Farrell & Kinsella, 2018). The adaptations to the original criteria included omitting one question, 'Was it edited well, then again with a last minute polish?' This question was omitted because all studies reviewed were published in peer-reviewed journals; it is therefore expected that all studies underwent a rigorous editing process before publishing. Three items were combined and rephrased: (a) was the case study particular, (b) was the case study descriptive, and (c) was the case study heuristic. These three items formed Item 21 in the adapted criteria used in the current review, 'Does the case study make clear whether it is particular, descriptive or heuristic?' Based on the description of high-quality case study research provided by Hyett et al. (2014), studies which scored 20-22 were considered to be of 'High' quality, articles scoring 15-19 were considered to be of 'Medium' quality while articles scoring 0-14 were considered to be of 'Low' methodological quality.

Qualitative designs. The methodological quality of qualitative studies was evaluated using criteria for the critical review of qualitative studies developed by Letts et al. (2007a) and informed by accompanying guidelines (Letts et al., 2007b). Additional criteria suggested by Brantlinger et al. (2005) were also included. These additional criteria included items 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, and 34. These additional criteria were included to increase the rigour of the coding protocol. Six studies were evaluated using this adapted coding protocol (Boesley & Crane, 2018; Hamre et al., 2018a; Kjaer & Dannesboe, 2019; J. Rose et al., 2018; Szulevicz & Tanggaard, 2014; Thornberg, 2014a). Studies which scored 30-35 were considered to be of 'High' quality, articles scoring 20-29 were considered to be of 'Medium' quality while articles scoring 0-19 were considered to be of 'Low' methodological quality.

Mixed-methods designs. The methodological quality of mixed-methods studies was assessed using all relevant sections of the Mixed-Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) developed by Hong et al. (2018). Both mixed-methods studies were evaluated using the Qualitative, Quantitative Descriptive, and Mixed-Methods sections (Kearney et al., 2017; Newman et al., 2018a). Studies which scored 30-35 were considered to be of 'High' quality, articles scoring 20-29 were considered to be of 'Medium' quality while articles scoring 0-19 were considered to be of 'Low' methodological quality.

Scoring. As outlined above, the coding protocols yielded different maximum scores for each study type. It was necessary to apply a standardised rating system across different study types to generate a WoE A rating for each study. Therefore, studies which achieved a 'High' WoE A rating were assigned a rating of 3, studies which were rated as having a 'Medium' WoE A were assigned a rating of 2 while studies with a 'Low' WoE A were given a rating of 1.

Sample of WoE A Rating for Survey Designs

As discussed previously, an adapted coding protocol was used to evaluate the methodological quality of survey designs (Mertens, 2014). The following coding protocol yielded a score of 10, resulting in a 'Low' WoE A rating being assigned to the study conducted by Ahtola and Kiiksi-Mäki (2014).

	Yes	**No**	**Unclear**
Survey Design			
1. Does the survey have specific goals?	x		
2. Did the researcher(s) collect samples that well represent the population to be studied?	x		
3. Did the researcher(s) take care to match question wording to the concepts being measured and the population being studied?			x
4. Did the researcher(s) pilot questionnaires and procedures to identify problems prior to the survey?	x		
5. Did the researcher(s) disclose all methods of the survey to permit evaluation and replication?	x		
6. Does the research state whether the survey design is simple descriptive, cross-sectional or longitudinal? Does the research state how this design feature influenced the interpretation of the results?	x		
7. Could the wording of the questions cause bias because they are leading?			x
8. Was self-report bias addressed in this study?		x	
9. Were any other response pattern biases addressed such as question order effects, response order effects, acquiescence, no-opinion filter effects, or status quo alternative effects?		x	
10. Do the researcher(s) distinguish between the different types of questions which they have included in the questionnaire e.g. knowledge, attitudes, behavioural or demographic questions?			x
Participants and Sampling			
11. Did the researcher(s) carefully develop and fulfil pledges of confidentiality given to respondents?	x		
12. Did the researcher(s) select a method of data collection appropriate to the purpose of the survey, the nature of the data to be collected, cost factors and the size and characteristics of the sample?	x		
13. Did the researcher(s) adequately address response rate considerations e.g. maximising response rates within limits of ethical treatment of human subjects?			x
14. Was the response rate provided?	x		
15. Was a follow-up done with non-respondents?		x	
16. Did the researcher(s) explain and justify their sampling strategy?	x		
Data Analysis			
17. Did the researcher(s) use statistical analytic and reporting techniques appropriate to the data collected?	x		
18. Is the theoretical lens clearly stated and appropriate?			x
TOTAL	**10**	**3**	**5**

Sample of WoE A Rating for Case Study Designs

As discussed previously, an adapted coding protocol was used to evaluate the methodological quality of case study designs (Hyett et al., 2014). The following coding protocol yielded a score of 21, resulting in a 'High' WoE A rating being assigned to the study conducted by O'Farrell and Kinsella (2018).

	Yes	**No**	**Unclear**
1. Is this report easy to read?	X		
2. Does it fit together, each sentence contributing to the whole?	X		
3. Does this report have a conceptual structure (i.e., theory, themes or issues)?	X		
4. Are its issues developed in a series and scholarly way?	X		
5. Have quotations been used effectively?	X		
6. Has the writer made sound assertions, neither over- or under-interpreting?	X		
7. Are headings, figures, artefacts, appendices, indexes effectively used?	X		
9. Were sufficient raw data presented?	X		
10. Is the nature of the intended audience apparent?	X		
11. Does it appear that individuals were protected against risk?	X		
12. Is the case adequately defined?	X		
13. Is there a sense of story to the presentation?	X		
14. Is the reader provided some vicarious experience?	X		
15. Has adequate attention been paid to various contexts?	X		
16. Were data sources well-chosen and in sufficient number?	X		
17. Do observations and interpretations appear to have been triangulated?	X		
18. Is the role and point of view of the researcher clearly apparent?	X		
19. Is empathy shown for all sides?	X		
20. Are personal intentions examined?			X
21. Does the case study make clear whether it is particular, descriptive or heuristic?	X		
22. Was study design appropriate to methodology?	X		
Total	21		1

Sample of WoE A Rating for Qualitative Designs

As discussed previously, an adapted coding protocol was used to evaluate the methodological quality of qualitative studies (Brantlinger et al., 2005; Letts et al., 2007b, 2007a). The following coding protocol yielded a score of 33, resulting in a 'High' WoE A rating being assigned to the study conducted by Thornberg (2014a).

	Yes	No	Unclear
Study purpose			
1. Was the purpose and/or research question stated clearly?	X		
Literature			
2. Was relevant background literature reviewed?	X		
3. Was there a clear and compelling justification for the need for this study?	X		
Study Design			
4. Was the design appropriate for the study question? (i.e., rationale)	X		
5. Was a theoretical perspective identified?	X		
6. Are the methods congruent with the philosophical underpinnings and purpose?	X		
Sampling			
7. Was the process of purposeful selection described?	X		
8. Was the sampling method appropriate to the study purpose or research question?	X		
9. Was sampling done until redundancy in data was reached?	X		
10. Are the participants described in adequate detail?	X		
11. Was informed consent obtained?			X
Data Collection			
12. Was there a clear and complete description of the research site?	X		
13. Was there a clear and complete description of the participants?	X		
14. Was there a clear and complete description of the researcher and relationships with participants?	X		
15. Was there a clear and complete identification of the assumptions and biases of the researcher?	X		
16. Was there adequate procedural rigour i.e. do the researchers provide adequate information about data collection procedures such as gaining access to the site, field notes, training data gatherers?	X		
17. Were interview questions reasonable i.e. clearly worded, not leading, appropriate and sufficient for exploring domains of interest?	X		
18. Were adequate mechanisms used to record and transcribe interviews?	X		
19. Were participants represented sensitively and fairly in the report?	X		
20. Were sound measures used to ensure confidentiality?	X		
Data Analyses			
Analytical Rigour			
21. Were the findings consistent with and reflective of data?	X		
22. Were data analyses inductive?	X		
23. Were results sorted and coded in a systematic and meaningful way?	X		

24. Was a sufficient rationale provided for what was/was not included in the report?	X		
Auditability			
25. Was a decision trail developed?			X
26. Was the process of analysing the data described adequately?	X		
Theoretical Connections			
27. Did a meaningful picture of the phenomenon under study emerge?	X		
28. Were concepts under study clarified & refined, and relationships made clear?	x		
Overall Rigour			
29. Was there evidence of creditability?	X		
30. Was there evidence of transferability?	X		
31. Was there evidence of dependability?	X		
32. Was there evidence of confirmability?	X		
Conclusions and Implications			
33. Were the conclusions appropriate, given the study findings?	X		
34. Were conclusions substantiated by sufficient quotations from participants, field notes of observations, and/or evidence of documentation inspection?	X		
35. Did the findings contribute to theory development and future practice or research?	X		
Total	33		2

Sample of WoE A Rating for Mixed-Methods Designs

As discussed previously, the MMAT was used to evaluate the methodological quality of mixed-methods studies. The following coding protocol yielded a score of 15, resulting in a 'High' WoE A rating being assigned to the study conducted by Newman et al. (2018a).

Category of study designs	**Methodological quality criteria**	**Responses**		
		Yes	No	Unclear
Screening questions (for all types)	S1. Are there clear research questions?	x		
	S2. Do the collected data allow to address the research questions?	x		
Further appraisal may not be feasible or appropriate when the answer is 'No' or 'Can't tell' to one or both screening questions.				
1. Qualitative	1.1. Is the qualitative approach appropriate to answer the research question?	x		
	1.2. Are the qualitative data collection methods adequate to address the research question?	x		
	1.3. Are the findings adequately derived from the data?	x		
	1.4. Is the interpretation of results sufficiently substantiated by data?	x		
	1.5. Is there coherence between qualitative data sources, collection, analysis and interpretation?	x		
~~2. Quantitative randomized controlled trials~~	~~2.1. Is randomization appropriately performed?~~			
	~~2.2. Are the groups comparable at baseline?~~			
	~~2.3. Are there complete outcome data?~~			
	~~2.4. Are outcome assessors blinded to the intervention provided?~~			
	~~2.5 Did the participants adhere to the assigned intervention?~~			
~~3. Quantitative nonrandomized~~	~~3.1. Are the participants representative of the target population?~~			
	~~3.2. Are measurements appropriate regarding both the outcome and intervention (or exposure)?~~			

	~~3.3. Are there complete outcome data?~~			
	~~3.4. Are the confounders accounted for in the design and analysis?~~			
	~~3.5. During the study period, is the intervention administered (or exposure occurred) as intended?~~			
4. Quantitative descriptive	4.1. Is the sampling strategy relevant to address the research question?	x		
	4.2. Is the sample representative of the target population?			x
	4.3. Are the measurements appropriate?	x		
	4.4. Is the risk of nonresponse bias low?			x
	4.5. Is the statistical analysis appropriate to answer the research question?	x		
5. Mixed methods	5.1. Is there an adequate rationale for using a mixed methods design to address the research question?	x		
	5.2. Are the different components of the study effectively integrated to answer the research question?	X		
	5.3. Are the outputs of the integration of qualitative and quantitative components adequately interpreted?	X		
	5.4. Are divergences and inconsistencies between quantitative and qualitative results adequately addressed?	X		
	5.5. Do the different components of the study adhere to the quality criteria of each tradition of the methods involved?	x		
Total		15	0	2

Overview of WoE A Scores

Author(s)	WoE A
Ahtola & Kiiski-Mäki (2014)	Low (1)
Berger et al. (2014)	Low (1)
Boesley & Crane (2018)	Medium (2)
Hamre et al. (2018)	Medium (2)
Hartmann (2016)	Low (1)
Kearney et al. (2017)	Low (1)
Kjaer & Dannesboe (2019)	Medium (2)
Newman et al. (2018a)	High (3)
Norwich et al. (2018)	Medium (2)
O'Farrell & Kinsella (2018)	High (3)
Rose et al. (2018)	Medium (2)
Szulevicz & Tanggaard (2014)	Medium (2)
Thornberg (2014)	High (3)

Weight of Evidence B: Relevance of Methodology to the Review Question

Rationale

Research into collaboration between SENCOs, SLT, and EPs is at an exploratory stage. Due to the paucity of research in the area, the current review includes which examines collaboration or consultation which involves at least one of the three groups listed above. At least one of the three groups had to be represented in order for a study to be included in the current review. The exploratory nature of research in the area has led to considerable variability in the methodologies utilised in various studies. It may be argued that the exploratory stage of research necessitates examination of consultation and collaboration in terms of overall patterns but also in terms of individuals' experiences. For this reason, high-quality mixed-methods studies merited a 'High' WoE B rating. High-quality qualitative studies, including case studies, led to a 'Medium' weighting if they had at least 12 participants or clearly indicated that data saturation was reached, and/or if they provided a clear explanation and rationale for sampling and data analysis decisions (Mertens, 2014). High-quality quantitative studies led to a 'Medium' weighting. Quantitative studies examining consultation or collaboration in school contexts tend to involve survey designs; high-quality survey designs should have a response rate above 70% (Mertens, 2014). 'Medium' weightings were also applied to mixed-methods studies which were of good but not excellent quality. Qualitative or quantitative studies which were not of acceptable quality within the field merited a 'Low' rating, as did mixed-methods studies which were considerably sub-par in terms of quality.

High

1. Mixed methods where quantitative and qualitative elements are synthesised appropriately
2. Quantitative element must have:
    a. High response rate (at least 70%)
    b. At least one of the three groups represented (SENCO, SLT team member, EP)
3. Qualitative element must have:
    a. At least 12 participants or clearly indicate that data saturation was reached

   b. Clear explanation and rationale for sampling and data analysis decisions
   c. At least one of the three groups represented (SENCO, SLT team member, EP)

Medium

1. Mixed methods where one of the 'high' criteria above is not met

OR

2. Quantitative methods only; the study must have:
   a. High response rate (at least 70%)
   b. At least one of the three groups represented (SENCO, SLT team member, EP)

OR

3. Qualitative methods only; the study must have:
   a. At least 12 participants or clearly indicate that data saturation was reached
   b. Clear explanation and rationale for sampling and data analysis decisions
   c. At least one of the three groups represented (SENCO, SLT team member, EP)

Low

1. Mixed methods study where more than one of the 'high' criteria is not met

OR

2. Quantitative study which does not meet one or more of the 'medium' criteria

OR

3. Qualitative study which does not meet one or more of the 'medium' criteria

Overview of WoE B Scores

Author(s)	WoE B
Ahtola & Kiiski-Mäki (2014)	Low (1)
Berger et al. (2014)	Medium (2)
Boesley & Crane (2018)	Medium (2)
Hamre et al. (2018)	Low (1)
Hartmann (2016)	Medium (2)
Kearney et al. (2017)	Low (1)
Kjaer & Dannesboe (2019)	Medium (2)
Newman et al. (2018a)	Medium (2)
Norwich et al. (2018)	Medium (2)
O'Farrell & Kinsella (2018)	Low (1)
Rose et al. (2018)	Medium (2)
Szulevicz & Tanggaard (2014)	Low (1)
Thornberg (2014)	Medium (2)

Weight of Evidence C: Relevance of the Evidence to the Review Question

Rationale

Ideally the review would include research which explicitly examines barriers and facilitators to consultation and/or collaboration between SENCOs, SLT, and EPs in post-primary schools. Studies which fulfilled these criteria merited a 'High' WoE C rating. Due to the extreme scarcity of research in this area, relevant evidence also included research examining consultation and/or collaboration between at least one of the aforementioned groups and another profession or discipline, for example collaboration between EPs and psychiatrists. In order to examine consultation and/or collaboration in research, it is necessary to develop an operational definition which is empirically and conceptually meaningful. Developing and rationalising such a definition contributed to a 'High' WoE C weighting. It is also difficult to envisage research into collaboration and/or consultation between professions without contextualising this in terms of special or inclusive education. An appropriate contextualisation was therefore necessary to merit a 'High' WoE C weighting.

High

1. The study examines collaboration or consultation between SENCOs, SLT, and EPs.
2. Mainstream post-primary school context (or international equivalent)
3. The study provides a clear operational definition of collaboration and/or consultation, as appropriate to the research question.
4. The study positions collaboration or consultation within special or inclusive education.

Medium

1. The study examines collaboration or consultation where 1-2 of the partners are SENCOs, SLT, or EPs.
2. The study involves a mainstream primary school context or combination of primary and post-primary (or international equivalent)
3. The study meets one of 'high' criteria 3 and 4

Low

1. The study examines collaboration or consultation where one of the partners is a SENCO, SLT, or EP
2. The study does not involve a mainstream school context

3. The study does not provide a clear operational definition of collaboration or consultation.
4. The study does not position collaboration or consultation within special or inclusive education.

Overview of WoE C Scores

Author(s)	WoE C
Ahtola & Kiiski-Mäki (2014)	Low (1)
Berger et al. (2014)	Low (1)
Boesley & Crane (2018)	Medium (2)
Hamre et al. (2018)	Medium (2)
Hartmann (2016)	Low (1)
Kearney et al. (2017)	Low (1)
Kjaer & Dannesboe (2019)	Medium (2)
Newman et al. (2018a)	Medium (2)
Norwich et al. (2018)	Low (1)
O'Farrell & Kinsella (2018)	Medium (2)
Rose et al. (2018)	Low (1)
Szulevicz & Tanggaard (2014)	Medium (2)
Thornberg (2014)	Medium (2)

Weight of Evidence D: Overall Weighting

WoE D represents the overall weighting to be given to each study. WoE D was determined by calculating the mean of each study's rating for WoE A, B and C. Studies with a mean of 1-1.5 were assigned a 'Low' overall weighting, studies with a mean of 1.51 to 2.5 were assigned a 'Medium' overall weighting, and studies with a mean of 2.51-3 were assigned a 'High' overall weighting.

Author(s)	WoE D
Ahtola & Kiiski-Mäki (2014)	Low (1)
Berger et al. (2014)	Low (1.33)
Boesley & Crane (2018)	Medium (2)
Hamre et al. (2018)	Medium (1.67)
Hartmann (2016)	Low (1.33)
Kearney et al. (2017)	Low (1)
Kjaer & Dannesboe (2019)	Medium (2)
Newman et al. (2018a)	Medium (2.33)
Norwich et al. (2018)	Medium (1.67)
O'Farrell & Kinsella (2018)	Medium (2)
Rose et al. (2018)	Medium (1.67)
Szulevicz & Tanggaard (2014)	Medium (1.67)
Thornberg (2014)	Medium (2.33)

Appendix G: Research Timeline and Appraisal of Quality

Date	*Progression*
December 2020	Ethical clearance from MIC
February 2021	Ethical clearance from NEPS
March-April 2021	Pilot surveys for Phase 1
April-May 2021	Distribution of Phase 1 surveys
May 2012	Phase 1 data analysis
May 2021	Pilot interviews for Phase 2
June 2021	Phase 2 interviews
July 2021 – January 2022	Data analysis and write-up
February 2022	Second-order member checking

Mixed-Methods Appraisal Tool

The MMAT was used as a reflective tool during the research design process to ensure that the quantitative and qualitative elements of the study were cohesive and of an appropriate quality (Hong et al., 2018).

Category of study designs	**Methodological quality criteria**	**Responses**		
		Yes	No	Unclear
Screening questions (for all types)	S1. Are there clear research questions?	x		
	S2. Do the collected data allow to address the research questions?	x		
Further appraisal may not be feasible or appropriate when the answer is 'No' or 'Can't tell' to one or both screening questions.				
1. Qualitative	1.1. Is the qualitative approach appropriate to answer the research question?	x		
	1.2. Are the qualitative data collection methods adequate to address the research question?	x		
	1.3. Are the findings adequately derived from the data?	x		
	1.4. Is the interpretation of results sufficiently substantiated by data?	x		
	1.5. Is there coherence between qualitative data sources, collection, analysis and interpretation?	x		
~~2. Quantitative randomized controlled trials~~	~~2.1. Is randomization appropriately performed?~~			
	~~2.2. Are the groups comparable at baseline?~~			
	~~2.3. Are there complete outcome data?~~			
	~~2.4. Are outcome assessors blinded to the intervention provided?~~			
	~~2.5 Did the participants adhere to the assigned intervention?~~			
~~3. Quantitative nonrandomized~~	~~3.1. Are the participants representative of the target population?~~			

	~~3.2. Are measurements appropriate regarding both the outcome and intervention (or exposure)?~~			
	~~3.3. Are there complete outcome data?~~			
	~~3.4. Are the confounders accounted for in the design and analysis?~~			
	~~3.5. During the study period, is the intervention administered (or exposure occurred) as intended?~~			
4. Quantitative descriptive	4.1. Is the sampling strategy relevant to address the research question?	x		
	4.2. Is the sample representative of the target population? *Probability sampling was used to enhance the representativeness of the sample. Links to the surveys were sent to all NEPS psychologists and to all schools using the database of school contact details which is publicly available on the DoE website. As is common with survey research, it is possible that self-selection bias was at play; perhaps participants interested in collaboration and/or special and inclusive education might be more likely to respond. It was not possible to collect data on the characteristics of non-responders. However, survey responses indicated considerable variability in participants' experiences, which is consistent with previous research in the area, making it likely that the sample is generally representative of the population. There was also a variation in the sample in terms of demographic characteristics including years' experience, school type/patronage, urban/rural location, which is arguably reflective of the population. Future research on a larger scale is necessary to provide greater confidence about the representativeness of the sample.*	x* (see note)		
	4.3. Are the measurements appropriate?	x		
	4.4. Is the risk of nonresponse bias low? *The response rate was possibly compromised by the timing of the dissemination of the survey. The survey was distributed at a time when post-primary schools were in the process of re-opening following extended Covid-19 related school closures, meaning that the workload for post-primary schools and NEPS psychologists was particularly heavy at that time. It was not possible to delay the survey dissemination due to the time constraints of the DECPsy programme.*			x* (see note)

	The piloting process was intended to mitigate against the risk of nonresponse bias by ensuring that the questions were relevant for SENCOs, SLT and NEPS, that the layout was user-friendly, and that the survey could be completed within a short time frame (approximately 15 minutes). While it was difficult to quantify the risk o nonresponse bias, the measures outlined were intended to minimise it insofar as possible.			
	4.5. Is the statistical analysis appropriate to answer the research question?	x		
5. Mixed methods	5.1. Is there an adequate rationale for using a mixed methods design to address the research question?	x		
	5.2. Are the different components of the study effectively integrated to answer the research question?	x		
	5.3. Are the outputs of the integration of qualitative and quantitative components adequately interpreted?	x		
	5.4. Are divergences and inconsistencies between quantitative and qualitative results adequately addressed?	x		
	5.5. Do the different components of the study adhere to the quality criteria of each tradition of the methods involved?	x		
Total		16	0	1

Quality Checklist for Survey Research

The following checklist was developed by the researcher based on Mertens (2014) and was used as a reflective tool in addition to the MMAT to ensure that the survey component of the research was of sufficient quality. The same rating checklist was used to evaluate the methodological quality of survey research included in the literature review.

	Yes	**No**	**Unclear**
Survey Design			
1. Does the survey have specific goals?	x		
2. Did the researcher(s) collect samples that well represent the population to be studied?	x		
3. Did the researcher(s) take care to match question wording to the concepts being measured and the population being studied?	x		
4. Did the researcher(s) pilot questionnaires and procedures to identify problems prior to the survey?	x		
5. Did the researcher(s) disclose all methods of the survey to permit evaluation and replication?	x		
6. Does the research state whether the survey design is simple descriptive, cross-sectional or longitudinal? Does the research state how this design feature influenced the interpretation of the results?	x		
7. Does the wording of the questions minimise bias by avoiding leading language?	x		
8. Was self-report bias addressed in this study? *Self-report bias was mitigated for as far as possible, by ensuring participant anonymity, allowing people to skip questions, and stating questions in a neutral rather than leading manner.*	x		
9. Were any other response pattern biases addressed such as question order effects, response order effects, acquiescence, no-opinion filter effects, or status quo alternative effects? *Acquiescence bias and social desirability bias were addressed by phrasing the questions in a neutral manner. No opinion bias was addressed by producing three adaptations of the survey to make the questions more focused for SLT, SENCOs, and NEPS, and by piloting the survey to ensure that the questions were important and relevant for each group.*	x		

10.Do the researcher(s) distinguish between the different types of questions which they have included in the questionnaire e.g. knowledge, attitudes, behavioural or demographic questions? *Section headings were used to distinguish between different types of questions.*	x		
Participants and Sampling			
11.Did the researcher(s) carefully develop and fulfil pledges of confidentiality given to respondents?	x		
12.Did the researcher(s) select a method of data collection appropriate to the purpose of the survey, the nature of the data to be collected, cost factors and the size and characteristics of the sample?	x		
13.Did the researcher(s) adequately address response rate considerations e.g. maximising response rates within limits of ethical treatment of human subjects?	x		
14.Was the response rate provided?	x		
15.Was a follow-up done with non-respondents? *The scope of the research did not permit follow-up with non-respondents.*		x	
16.Did the researcher(s) explain and justify their sampling strategy?	x		
Data Analysis			
17.Did the researcher(s) use statistical analytic and reporting techniques appropriate to the data collected?	x		
18.Is the theoretical lens clearly stated and appropriate?	x		
TOTAL	17	1	

Quality Markers for IPA Research

The following reflective prompts formed part of a package of resources provided by Dr. Elena Gil-Rodriguez in her advanced IPA analysis workshop (Gil-Rodriguez, 2021). The prompts are not intended to be used as a checklist but rather are to be used a part of the researcher's iterative reflexive practice during the research process. The following sample reflections are taken from my research notebook; these brief excerpts are therefore iterative and informal rather than written according to formal academic conventions. The purpose of the reflections was to identify and bracket my personal assumptions, beliefs, and experiences in an ongoing manner throughout the research process. Reflections on the four pillars of quality are included; this was a key part of ensuring the rigour and validity of the work.

How is my work phenomenological?

My work aims to explore how people make sense of important life experiences, with a focus on exploring experience in its own terms. In terms of a hierarchy of experience, the comprehensive unit of analysis is participants' experience of collaboration. Collaboration between NEPS, SLT, and SENCOs is likely to be heterogenous due to the absence of the SENCO role from policy and the absence of theoretical underpinnings for the SENCO role and for collaboration between SENCOs, SLT, and NEPS. More variation in practice is expected than in cases where roles are clear. I am aiming to find out what it is like to be a person who is navigating this policy gap in practice. It is valuable to look at individual, granular experiences because generalisability would be exceptionally difficult to achieve, given the time/scope available and the variability in practice.

How is my work hermeneutic?

Hermeneutics refers to the theory of interpretation. The double hermeneutic means making sense of the way in which participants are making sense of their experiences – the assumption is that humans are sense-making beings. Going around the hermeneutic circle means that I need to be aware of and bracket my own assumptions and preconceptions. Access to participants' experiences is second order. In light of my own personal experiences and family circumstances, I have long-held

ideas and beliefs about SEN provision in schools. Bracketing gave me a way of making these explicit in my own reflective practice without implying that it was incorrect to hold strong personal beliefs and without these beliefs being seen as a limitation to the study. In IPA it is seen as inevitable and accepted that the researcher is a real person who cannot entirely separate themselves from the research process. I am aiming to ensure that my work is hermeneutic by being understanding, which means balancing empathy with a questioning approach.

How is my work idiographic?

Ensuring that my work is idiographic means being committed to the detailed examination of each particular case. I reflected on this throughout my data analysis – I immersed myself in each transcript individually. This involved repeated re-watching of the interviews during transcription, detailed note taking, and the identification of appropriate personal experiential themes for each participant. This idiographic process occurred before looking across groups and then across the whole sample. This process was time-consuming and laborious, but the depth of analysis generated by the detailed idiographic analysis contributed to the quality of the final analysis.

Four Pillars of Quality

Sensitivity to Context

a) How did the literature review clarify understanding of what is already known?

IPA research can stay close to the data/material generated by participants, or it can dialogue with what is already known in research and theory. I chose the latter; DST was the main theoretical framework which I used. The rationale for selecting DST to frame the literature review and research questions was that it is flexible enough to fit in with the assumptions of IPA – DST can be used at the intra-individual, inter-personal, or systems levels. I had to look at a variety of theories and many different branches of research to try to come close to an understanding of what is already known about collaboration between SENCOs, SLT, and NEPS. The complexity of theory, policy, and research around this collaborative relationship required a sensitive approach; this was why I opted to include a thematic and systematic element in my review paper, in order to capture a sense of the theoretical,

systemic, and practice-based tangles surrounding collaboration between SENCOs, SLT, and NEPS.

b) What was the rationale for the research question based on the literature review? Was it novel? Did it address a gap?

There was very little research conducted in this area in Ireland, and no studies were identified which explored collaboration specifically between SENCOs, SLT, and NEPS across the CoS. Addressing this gap was a novel approach. International research such as that coming from the UK suggested what barriers and facilitators to collaboration might be, but it was not possible to make direct generalisations from international contexts to the Irish context. This was because the SENCO role varies considerably across contexts – in Ireland it is emergent rather than formalised. However, because international research does suggest potential barriers and facilitators, my research question needed to go beyond simply asking what the barriers and facilitators in the Irish context are. This was why I opted for the experiential route via IPA – what is it like to experience these barriers and facilitators in a confusing and changing practice and policy context?

c) Recruitment and ethics: consider the impact of the setting, whether the interview facilitated participants to express themselves.

Ethical decisions were recorded in the methods section and in the critical review. Member checking meant that participants could express themselves freely in the interview, as they knew they would have the opportunity to review the quotes I wanted to use in the thesis afterwards. I included time for rapport building at the beginning and end, although this was not recorded. The online interviews meant that participants could select their own setting where they would feel comfortable. Most participants completed the interviews at home, where there was no possibility of being overheard by colleagues. When engaging in purposive sampling, I did not select my NEPS placement supervisors or the school which inspired the research to participate in the interviews which were used for the final analysis. This was due to

the impossibility of bracketing and not wishing to compromise the supervisor-supervisee relationship.

d) How did I privilege participants' voice and show sensitivity to the socio-cultural context in the analysis and written narrative account?

The themes were firmly rooted in the experiences which participants described. The pen pictures enabled readers to understand participants' contexts, for instance by describing the schools, roles, qualifications etc. Quotes were selected which illustrated both convergent and divergent experiences, and these were presented in a non-evaluative manner. DST was useful here. The use of DST in the written narrative account was based on my interpretation of the way in which participants made sense of their own experiences. Although I had used DST in the literature review and to inform research questions, I was conscious that participants' experiences may have drawn me in a different theoretical direction in the written narrative account. I identified DST as a useful lens for the written narrative account because many participants spoke about their schools and their work using the image of schools as living organisms. This mirrored the origins of DST in the field of biology, where it is used to examine complex interactions from the intracellular level to inter-organism and systemic levels.

Commitment and Rigour

a) In-depth knowledge of process for conducting IPA including extra training, ability to explain ontology and epistemology, rationale for IPA.

A key source for learning about IPA was 'Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method, and Research' (Smith et al., 2009, 2022). The second edition was published while I was conducting my analysis, which was useful in ensuring that I was using the most up-to-date iteration of IPA. I read high-quality IPA studies, joined an online IPA forum, and attended online training on advanced IPA analysis run by Dr Elena Gil-Rodriguez. The ontology and epistemology of my study were outlined in detail in the critical review, as well as in the empirical paper.

b) Participants and sampling: describe the procedures in detail, sample parameters, how tightly or otherwise the sample is defined.

I had initially intended to interview four participants from each group but reduced this to three as I learned more about IPA and the depth of analysis required. I was concerned that the depth of analysis would be compromised with four from each group. I defined the sample in the ethics form as follows: post-primary SENCOs and SLT with NEPS access, NEPS psychologists with post-primary schools on their caseloads, and no overlap between participants in order to preserve relationships.

c) Data collection including interviewing procedure and quality of data gathered.

The pilot was crucial in helping me to get better at eliciting appropriate data. The interview schedule did not change but my interviewing approach did – I became more skilled at following up and exploring important experiences, feelings, and examples of practice. I was satisfied that the nine interviews yielded data of sufficient quality for IPA. Conducting the interviews online enhanced my reflective practice as I could re-watch the interviews and reflect on my own interviewing technique, including verbal and non-verbal cues, and on participants' responses. This was particularly useful during the pilot phase, as I sought to refine my interviewing technique before conducting the interviews which were used in the final analysis. While the decision to conduct interviews online was largely due to Covid-19 restrictions, this decision had positive outcomes in terms of enhancing my reflective practice and interviewing technique.

d) Analysis – how can I show that I have engaged in the depth of analysis required?

The data analysis process followed that laid out by Smith et al. (2022) and was informed by insights gathered from the online forum and additional training facilitated by Dr Elena Gil-Rodriguez. The analysis process was comprehensively described between the empirical paper and critical review, and further examples of the analysis process are provided in appendices.

Coherence and Transparency

a) Overall coherence of the research narrative in its entirety: description of methods which is sufficiently clear to allow for replication, clear narrative from literature review through to final analysis and discussion.

This was a point of ongoing reflection throughout the research process, from initial planning stages to the final editing stages. I was particularly cognisant of maintaining coherence in light of the complex design involved; that is, combining thematic and systematic elements in the literature review, and using IPA as part of a mixed-methods, multi-perspectival design. While this approach was innovative, I needed to carefully consider each element to ensure that the project as a whole was cohesive and coherent. This was why I used the MMAT, survey checklist, and this resource package to comprehensively reflect on the quality of the study throughout the process.

b) Coherence of analysis – can the reader see how the final analytic account was produced, including connections between themes and quotes? Will the analytic account elicit engagement and interest for readers?

The inclusion of tables showing the representation of participants across themes and samples of analytic noting and personal experiential themes enables readers to trace through the process from initial noting to final selection of quotes. I used conference presentations to get a sense of reader engagement and interest. For example, I presented my results at the Educational Studies Association of Ireland conference in April 2022 and submitted an accompanying paper (presenting Phase 2 results), for which I received an Early Career Researcher Award of High Commendation.

c) Transparency – can I show my reflexive process? Can I show how interpretations are grounded in data via my commentary?

In the final write-up, I aimed to include interpretations which were closely rooted in data as well as deeper interpretations which made links between quotes or deeper conceptual links. The annotated sample of Peadar's transcript is intended to demonstrate the way in which I began with narrative notes staying close to the text, followed by linguistic notes and conceptual notes moving to deeper levels of

interpretative complexity. The inclusion in the appendices of the MMAT, quality checklist for survey research, and excerpts from my reflections on quality markers for IPA research is intended to demonstrate the reflexive process which was iterative and ongoing throughout the research process.

d) Transparency in presenting data – have I shown convergence and divergence? Do I have enough participants and data per theme? What was my justification for themes?

Convergent and divergent experiences were presented in a non-evaluative manner, for instance, participants had varying opinions and experiences of cognitive assessments. Where divergence existed, I aimed to highlight the ways in which participants had achieved positive change. For instance, some participants described the challenges of working in silos while others described open, dynamic ways of working. In this instance, I highlighted the process of transitioning from working in silos towards viewing schools as living organisms. I did not use a prevalence table when justifying my selection of themes. Instead, I focused on what participants had said was important to them, and on what I interpreted as important based on participants' experiences. Prevalence tables involve counting the frequency with which themes appear in participants' accounts; I considered that this somewhat quantitative approach would be inconsistent with my overall phenomenological and idiographic approach. This decision was based on reading of high-quality IPA studies, methodological literature, and my reflections following online IPA training. I included a table in Appendix L which indicates the representation of participants across themes, although it was not possible to include quotes from each participant for each theme in the final written account due to word count constraints.

Impact and Importance

The literature review enabled me to carefully consider links between my study and previous research and theory. This prompted me to reflect on the potential impact and importance of my work from the beginning of the research process. I was focused on identifying gaps in extant research to ensure that the research I was planning could make a valuable contribution. The critical review and impact statement provided scope to outline the impact and importance of the study in terms of theory development, practice, policy, and life and society more generally. I used

this section to highlight where my results sit in relation to extant research and theory and how my work could contribute to moving the field of research forward.

Appendix H: MIREC Ethical Clearance

Mary Immaculate College
Research Ethics Committee
MIREC-4: MIREC Chair Decision Form

APPLICATION NO. A20-055 FINAL

1. PROJECT TITLE

Barriers and facilitators to collaboration: Experiences of Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators, Senior Leadership Teams and Educational Psychologists in Irish post-primary schools.

2. APPLICANT

Name:	Maria Holland
Department / Centre / Other:	EPISE
Position:	Postgraduate Researcher

3. DECISION OF MIREC CHAIR

☐	Ethical clearance through MIREC is required.
☐	Ethical clearance through MIREC is not required and therefore the researcher need take no further action in this regard.
✓	Ethical clearance is required and granted. Referral to MIREC is not necessary.
☐	Ethical clearance is required but the full MIREC process is not. Ethical clearance is therefore granted if required for external funding applications and the researcher need take no further action in this regard.
☐	Insufficient information provided by applicant / Amendments required.

4. REASON(S) FOR DECISION

A20-055 – Maria Holland - Barriers and facilitators to collaboration: Experiences of Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators, Senior Leadership Teams and Educational Psychologists in Irish post-primary schools.

I have reviewed this application and I believe it satisfies MIREC requirements. It is therefore approved.

5. DECLARATION (MIREC CHAIR)

Name (Print):	Dr Marie Griffin
Signature:	
Date:	14th December 2020

Appendix I: Phase 1 Surveys and Informed Consent

Senior Leadership Team Survey

Note for participants: The term 'SENCO' which is used in this survey refers to the special educational needs co-ordinator in your school. This might be the lead Special Education Teacher, or another staff member who has responsibility for co-ordinating SEN provision in your school.

1.Does your school have access to a NEPS psychologist?

a. Yes, my school currently has access to a NEPS psychologist
b. My school previously had access to a NEPS psychologist
c. No, my school has never had access to a NEPS psychologist

Note: Participants who answer (c) will not complete the remaining questions and will instead be brought to the end of the survey.

Section 1: Demographics

1. Gender
    a. Male
    b. Female
    c. Prefer not to say
2. How many years' teaching experience do you have? _____
3. What is your current role in the senior leadership team?
    a. Principal
    b. Acting principal
    c. Deputy principal
    d. Acting deputy principal
    e. Other _____
4. How many years have you spent working in your in current role? _____
5. What is your school type? (Select all that apply)
    a. Community college/school
    b. Comprehensive school
    c. Vocational school
    d. Free voluntary secondary school
    e. Fee-paying voluntary secondary school
    f. Other _____
6. How would you describe the general socioeconomic background of your students?
    a. Upper socioeconomic background
    b. Middle socioeconomic background
    c. Lower socioeconomic background
7. How would you describe your school's catchment area?
    a. Urban (city/suburbs)
    b. Urban (town)

   c. Urban and rural mixed (e.g. town and surrounding countryside)
   d. Rural
8. Is your school single-sex or coeducational?
   a. Boys only
   b. Girls only
   c. Mixed boys and girls
9. Approximately how many students attend your school? _____
10. What type(s) of classes are in your school?
   a. Mainstream
   b. Mainstream with special class(es)
11. If applicable, how many special classes are in your school? _____
12. Does your school have DEIS status?
   a. Yes
   b. No

Section 2: Staff in SEN

1. Is there an SEN team in your school?
   a. Yes
   b. No
2. Is there a Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) in your school?
   a. Yes
   b. No
3. Do you undertake the functions of SENCO as part of your Senior Leadership role?
   a. Yes
   b. No
4. Which of the following best describes the position of the SENCO in your school?
   a. Subject teacher and SENCO
   b. Special Education Teacher
   c. Principal and SENCO
   d. Deputy principal and SENCO
   e. SENCO (Assistant Principal I)
   f. SENCO (Assistant Principal II)
   g. SENCO (not a post-holder)
   h. Other _____
5. In general, how much does your school use the Continuum of Support to organise SEN provision? (For example, organising specific support at different levels for all students in the school, some students and a few students)

   a. Always
   b. Most of the time
   c. Sometimes

d. Very seldom

e. Never

f. Don't know

Section 3: Working with NEPS

Note for participants: The Covid-19 pandemic may have changed the way you work with NEPS. Please answer the following questions based on your experiences prior to Covid-19.

1. Please rate the importance of the following NEPS roles as it applies to your school. (Extremely important, quite important, somewhat important, not particularly important, not at all important)
    a. Assisting with school development and planning for special educational needs provision
    b. Providing whole-school in-service training for staff
    c. Providing information and/or training about evidence-based interventions for use with individual students or small groups
    d. Recommending school-based assessments e.g. screening/intake tests, diagnostic tests.
    e. Supporting schools to process and analyse test results, in order to inform intervention and deployment of teaching resources
    f. Giving access to resources
    g. Engaging in consultation with SENCO
    h. Engaging in consultation with parents
    i. Engaging in consultation with Senior Leadership Team
    j. Engaging in direct work with students e.g. intervention, counselling
    k. Carrying out classroom observations
    l. Liaising with other external agencies on behalf of students e.g. disability services
    m. Helping school staff with IEPs/ SSPs
    n. Conducting psychoeducational assessments e.g. cognitive assessment
    o. Conducting research in the area of SEN provision
    p. Supporting school self-evaluation
    q. Providing support in the event of a critical incident

2. In your experience, how effective is the support you receive from NEPS in meeting the needs of students in your school?
    a. Extremely effective
    b. Effective
    c. Neutral
    d. Not particularly effective
    e. Not at all effective

3. Please select the location on the scale which best represents your experience of working with NEPS. *(Strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree)*

I have sufficient time to engage in consultation with NEPS.
The NEPS psychologist undertakes sufficient direct work with students e.g. interventions, counselling.
I am satisfied with the number of assessments carried out by the NEPS psychologist.
My school has sufficient budget/resources.
I have a good working relationship with the NEPS psychologist.
The NEPS psychologist is familiar with the post-primary context.
The NEPS psychologist knows what our school needs from them.
I often work with the NEPS psychologist.
The NEPS psychologist shares my school's goals for SEN provision. The NEPS psychologist brings a helpful perspective which helps me to approach different situations.
I trust the NEPS psychologist.
I can influence the consultation process – it is easy to make my voice heard.
Consultation with the NEPS psychologist is helpful in meeting students' needs across the Continuum of Support
Consultation is an efficient use of time and resources.
The NEPS psychologist conducts sufficient whole-school work e.g. staff training, evidence-based interventions at a whole school level.

4. Overall, how would you describe your experience of working with the NEPS psychologist? (Qualitative response)

5. Has the Covid-19 pandemic changed the way in which you work with your NEPS psychologist and if so, how? (Qualitative response)

Section 4: Your Role in SEN Provision

1. The following statements describe some roles which Senior Leadership staff might undertake in relation to SEN provision. Please rate the importance of the following roles as it applies to your work in your school. (Extremely important, quite important, somewhat important, not particularly important, not at all important)
    a. Organising early intervention and prevention
    b. Monitoring, recording and reviewing students' outcomes at group, class and whole-school level.
    c. Allocating resources and timetabling for students with SEN
    d. Identifying and keeping records of students who need support at Level 2 or 3 of the Continuum of Support

e. Overseeing a whole-school approach to assessment and screening to identify needs and to guide the allocation of appropriate supports
f. Ensuring effective engagement with feeder primary schools to support the transition of students with special educational needs
g. Facilitating the continuing professional development of all teachers in relation to the education of students with SEN
h. Using the school development planning process so that the models of organisation necessary for the inclusion of students with SEN are agreed and implemented.
i. Consulting and liaising with relevant external bodies and agencies such as NEPS
j. Ensuring that systems are in place for effective sharing of relevant information on students' needs with all subject teachers
k. Facilitating meetings between parents and various support services.
l. Leading the establishment of the SEN team.

Participants who indicated that they fulfil both the SENCO role and SLT role will complete the following questions.

1. Please rate your agreement with the following questions. *(Strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree)*

a. I can easily balance the SENCO component of my role with the SLT component.

b. I have sufficient time to effectively complete the SENCO component and SLT component of my role.

c. I think that combining the SENCO and SLT roles is a good way of completing both in an effective way.

2. How would you describe your experience of combining the SENCO role with an SLT role? (Qualitative response)

Section 5: Working with the SENCO
Note: If the SLT member is also the SENCO, the questionnaire design will allow them to skip Question 1.

1. How closely do you work with the SENCO?
    a. Very closely
    b. Somewhat closely
    c. Not particularly closely
    d. Not closely at all
2. The following statements describe some roles which the SENCO might undertake in relation to SEN provision. Please rate the importance of the following SENCO

roles as it applies to your school. (Extremely important, quite important, somewhat important, not particularly important, not at all important)

a. Identifying students whose needs require support at Level 2 or 3 of the Continuum of Support
b. Intake screening and collecting information from primary schools including student passport
c. Arranging standardised tests and/or diagnostic tests of literacy/numeracy
d. Developing Student Support Plans/Individual Education Plans etc.
e. Advocating on behalf of students
f. Applying for resources e.g. SET allocations, SNA allocations etc.
g. Applying for accommodations for students e.g. RACE/DARE/HEAR
h. Individual work with students e.g. planning, implementing and reviewing interventions
i. Co-ordinating SEN team
j. Liaising with Senior Leadership Team, subject teachers, guidance counsellors etc.
k. Liaising with parents
l. Collaborating with outside agencies e.g. NEPS
m. Directing the work of SNAs in the school
n. Developing policies and procedures
o. Putting whole-school initiatives and interventions in place
p. Arranging for cognitive assessments or other psychological assessments to be conducted
q. Identifying relevant CPD and providing CPD to staff
r. Provision mapping and allocating resources
s. Supporting students' transitions to and from post-primary school
t. Organising reasonable accommodations in school-based tests/exams
u. Liaising with other schools

3. Please select the location on the scale which best represents your experience of working with the SENCO in your school. *(Strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree)*
Note: If the SLT member was also the SENCO, they were able to skip this question.

The SENCO and I have shared goals and priorities regarding SEN provision
I have a positive working relationship with the SENCO
I have sufficient time to work with the SENCO
The SENCO and I both have useful skills which we can combine
I am involved with and interested in SEN provision.
Relevant CPD helps me to work effectively with the SENCO
The SENCO is closely aligned with mainstream staff
The SENCO is closely aligned with or part of the SLT

My school has effective systems and procedures for linking with SENCOs

4. Overall, how would you describe your experience of working with the SENCO? (Qualitative response)

SENCO Survey

Note for participants: The term 'SENCO' which is used in this survey refers to the special educational needs co-ordinator in your school. This might be the lead Special Education Teacher, or another staff member who has responsibility for co-ordinating SEN provision in your school.

1. Does your school have access to a NEPS psychologist?
    a. Yes, my school currently has access to a NEPS psychologist
    b. My school previously had access to a NEPS psychologist
    c. No, my school has never had access to a NEPS psychologist

Note: Participants who answer (c) will not complete the remaining questions and will instead be brought to the end of the survey.

Section 1: Demographics

1. Gender
    a. Male
    b. Female
    c. Prefer not to say
2. How many years teaching experience do you have? _____
3. How many years have you spent working as a SENCO? _____
4. What is your school type? (Select all that apply)
    a. Community college/school
    b. Comprehensive school
    c. Vocational school
    d. Free voluntary secondary school
    e. Fee-paying voluntary secondary school
    f. Other _____
5. How would you describe the general socioeconomic background of your students?
    a. Upper socioeconomic background
    b. Middle socioeconomic background
    c. Lower socioeconomic background
6. How would you describe your school's catchment area?
    a. Urban (city/suburbs)
    b. Urban (town)
    c. Urban and rural mixed (e.g. town and surrounding countryside)
    d. Rural
7. Is your school single-sex or coeducational?
    a. Boys only
    b. Girls only
    c. Mixed boys and girls
8. Approximately how many students attend your school? _____
9. What type(s) of classes are in your school?

   a. Mainstream
   b. Mainstream with special class(es)

10. If applicable, how many special classes are in your school? _____
11. Does your school have DEIS status?
   a. Yes
   b. No

Section 2: Staff in SEN

1. Is there an SEN team in your school?
   a. Yes
   b. No
2. Which of the following best describes your position as the SENCO in your school?
   a. Subject teacher and SENCO
   b. Special Education Teacher
   c. Principal and SENCO
   d. Deputy principal and SENCO
   e. SENCO (Assistant Principal I)
   f. SENCO (Assistant Principal II)
   g. SENCO (not a post-holder)
   h. Other _____
3. How many additional hours of support has the school been allocated? _____
4. Approximately how many hours are allocated to SEN coordination? _____
5. Are co-ordination duties shared with the SEN team?
   a. Yes
   b. No
6. In general, how much does your school use the Continuum of Support to organise SEN provision? (For example, organising specific support at different levels for all students in the school, some students and a few students)
   a. Always
   b. Most of the time
   c. Sometimes
   d. Very seldom
   e. Never
   f. Don’t know

Section 3: Working with NEPS

Note for participants: The Covid-19 pandemic may have changed the way you work with NEPS. Please answer the following questions based on your experiences prior to Covid-19.

1. Please rate the importance of the following NEPS roles. (Extremely important, quite important, somewhat important, not particularly important, not at all important)
    a. Assisting with school development and planning for special educational needs provision
    b. Providing whole-school in-service training for staff
    c. Providing information and/or training about evidence-based interventions for use with individual students or small groups
    d. Recommending school-based assessments e.g. screening/intake tests, diagnostic tests.
    e. Supporting schools to process and analyse test results, in order to inform intervention and deployment of teaching resources
    f. Giving access to resources
    g. Engaging in consultation with SENCO
    h. Engaging in consultation with parents
    i. Engaging in consultation with Senior Leadership Team
    j. Engaging in direct work with students e.g. intervention, counselling
    k. Carrying out classroom observations
    l. Liaising with other external agencies on behalf of students e.g. disability services
    m. Helping school staff with IEPs/ SSPs
    n. Conducting psychoeducational assessments e.g. cognitive assessment
    o. Conducting research in the area of SEN provision
    p. Supporting school self-evaluation
    q. Providing support in the event of a critical incident
2. How effective is the support you receive from NEPS in meeting the needs of students in your school?
    a. Extremely effective
    b. Effective
    c. Neutral
    d. Not particularly effective
    e. Not at all effective
3. Please select the location on the scale which best represents your experience of working with NEPS. *(Strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree)*

I have sufficient time to engage in consultation with NEPS
The NEPS psychologist undertakes sufficient direct work with students e.g. interventions, counselling
I am satisfied with the number of assessments carried out by the NEPS psychologist
My school has sufficient budget/resources
I have a good working relationship with the NEPS psychologist
The NEPS psychologist is familiar with the post-primary context

The NEPS psychologist knows what our school needs from them
I often work with the NEPS psychologist
The NEPS psychologist shares my school's goals for SEN provision. The NEPS psychologist brings a helpful perspective which helps me to approach different situations
I trust the NEPS psychologist
I can influence the consultation process – it is easy to make my voice heard
Consultation with the NEPS psychologist is helpful in meeting students' needs across the Continuum of Support
Consultation is an efficient use of time and resources
The NEPS psychologist conducts sufficient whole-school work e.g. staff training, evidence-based interventions at a whole school level.

4. Overall, how would you describe your experience of working with the NEPS psychologist?

5. Has the Covid-19 pandemic changed the way in which you work with your NEPS psychologist and if so, how?

Section 4: Your Role in SEN Provision

1. The following statements describe some roles which SENCOs might undertake in relation to SEN provision. Please rate the importance of the following SENCO roles as it applies to your work. (Extremely important, quite important, somewhat important, not particularly important, not at all important)

    a. Identifying students whose needs require support at Level 2 or 3 of the Continuum of Support
    b. Intake screening and collecting information from primary schools including student passport
    c. Arranging standardised tests and/or diagnostic tests of literacy/numeracy
    d. Developing Student Support Plans/Individual Education Plans etc.
    e. Advocating on behalf of students
    f. Applying for resources e.g. SET allocations, SNA allocations etc.
    g. Applying for accommodations for students e.g. RACE/DARE/HEAR
    h. Individual work with students e.g. planning, implementing and reviewing interventions
    i. Co-ordinating SEN team
    j. Liaising with Senior Leadership Team, subject teachers, guidance counsellors etc.
    k. Liaising with parents
    l. Collaborating with outside agencies e.g. NEPS
    m. Directing the work of SNAs in the school
    n. Developing policies and procedures

o. Putting whole-school initiatives and interventions in place
p. Arranging for cognitive assessments or other psychological assessments to be conducted
q. Identifying relevant CPD and providing CPD to staff
r. Provision mapping and allocating resources
s. Supporting students' transitions to and from post-primary school
t. Organising reasonable accommodations in school-based tests/exams
u. Liaising with other schools

Participants who indicated that they fulfil both the SENCO role and SLT role will complete the following questions.

1. Please rate your agreement with the following questions. *(Strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree)*

    a. I can easily balance the SENCO component of my role with the SLT component.

    b. I have sufficient time to effectively complete the SENCO component and SLT component of my role.

    c. I think that combining the SENCO and SLT roles is a good way of completing both in an effective way.

2. How would you describe your experience of combining the SENCO role with an SLT role? (Qualitative response)

Working with Senior Leadership Team

1. How closely do you work with the Senior Leadership Team?
    a. Very closely
    b. Somewhat closely
    c. Not particularly closely
    d. Not closely at all
2. The following statements describe some roles which the Senior Leadership Team might undertake in relation to SEN provision. How important do you think each role is? (extremely important, very important, fairly important, not particularly important, not at all important.)
    a. Organising early intervention and prevention
    b. Monitoring, recording and reviewing students' outcomes at group, class and whole-school level.
    c. Allocating resources and timetabling for students with SEN
    d. Identifying and keeping records of students who need support at Level 2 or 3 of the Continuum of Support
    e. Overseeing a whole-school approach to assessment and screening to identify needs and to guide the allocation of appropriate supports

f. Ensuring effective engagement with feeder primary schools to support the transition of students with special educational needs
g. Facilitating the continuing professional development of all teachers in relation to the education of students with SEN
h. Using the school development planning process so that the models of organisation necessary for the inclusion of students with SEN are agreed and implemented.
i. Consulting and liaising with relevant external bodies and agencies such as NEPS
j. Ensuring that systems are in place for effective sharing of relevant information on students' needs with all subject teachers
k. Facilitating meetings between parents and various support services.
l. Leading the establishment of the SEN team.

3. Please select the location on the scale which best represents your experience of working with the Senior Leadership Team in your school. *(Strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree)*

Senior Leadership and I have shared goals and priorities regarding SEN provision
I have a positive working relationship with Senior Leadership
I have sufficient time to work with Senior Leadership
Senior Leadership and I both have useful skills which we can combine
Senior Leadership is involved with and interested in SEN provision.
Relevant CPD helps me to work effectively with Senior Leadership
I work closely with mainstream staff
The SENCO is closely aligned with or part of the SLT
My school has effective systems and procedures for linking with SLT
I feel that my role as SENCO has status and is respected in the school
Senior Leadership respect and listen to my ideas for change

4. Overall, how would you describe your experience of working with the Senior Leadership Team? (Qualitative Response)

NEPS Survey

Note for participants: The term 'SENCO' which is used in this survey refers to the special educational needs co-ordinator in the post-primary schools on your caseload. This might be the lead Special Education Teacher, or another staff member who has responsibility for co-ordinating SEN provision in the school.

Section 1: Demographics

1. Gender
    a. Male
    b. Female
    c. Prefer not to say
2. How many years' experience do you have as a psychologist? _____
3. How many years have you spent working in NEPS? _____
4. Do you have a previous qualification as a teacher?
    a. Yes – primary
    b. Yes – post-primary
    c. No
5. If yes, how many years did you spend working as a teacher? ____
6. How would you describe the schools on your caseload? (select all that apply)
    a. Mostly urban
    b. Mixture of urban and rural
    c. Mostly rural
    d. Other _____
7. Approximately how many post-primary schools are on your caseload? _____
8. Approximately how many of the post-primary schools on your caseload have special classes? ___
9. Approximately how many of the schools on your caseload have DEIS status? _____

Section 2: SEN provision/organisation

1. How many of the post-primary schools on your caseload have an SEN team that you are aware of?
    a. All
    b. Most
    c. About half
    d. Some
    e. Very few

2. How many of the post-primary schools on your caseload have a SENCO that you are aware of?
    a. All
    b. Most
    c. About half
    d. Some
    e. Very few
3. In general, how much do the schools on your caseload use the Continuum of Support to organise SEN provision?
    a. Always
    b. Most of the time
    c. Sometimes
    d. Very seldom
    e. Never

Section 3: Working with Senior Leadership Team

Note for participants: The Covid-19 pandemic may have changed the way you work with Senior Leadership Teams. Please answer the following questions based on your experiences prior to Covid-19.

1. In general, how closely do you work with Senior Leadership Teams?
    a. Very closely
    b. Somewhat closely
    c. Not particularly closely
    d. Not closely at all
2. The following statements describe some roles which the Senior Leadership Team might undertake in relation to SEN provision. How important do you think each role is? (extremely important, very important, fairly important, not particularly important, not at all important.)
    a. Organising early intervention and prevention
    b. Monitoring, recording and reviewing students' outcomes at group, class and whole-school level.
    c. Allocating resources and timetabling for students with SEN
    d. Identifying and keeping records of students who need support at Level 2 or 3 of the Continuum of Support
    e. Overseeing a whole-school approach to assessment and screening to identify needs and to guide the allocation of appropriate supports
    f. Ensuring effective engagement with feeder primary schools to support the transition of students with special educational needs
    g. Facilitating the continuing professional development of all teachers in relation to the education of students with SEN

   h. Using the school development planning process so that the models of organisation necessary for the inclusion of students with SEN are agreed and implemented.
   i. Consulting and liaising with relevant external bodies and agencies such as NEPS
   j. Ensuring that systems are in place for effective sharing of relevant information on students' needs with all subject teachers
   k. Facilitating meetings between parents and various support services.
   l. Leading the establishment of the SEN team.

3. Please select the location on the scale which best represents your experience of working with the Senior Leadership Teams in your schools. *(Strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree)*

Senior Leadership Teams and I have shared goals and priorities regarding SEN provision
I have a positive working relationship with Senior Leadership Teams
I have sufficient time to work with Senior Leadership Teams
Senior Leadership and I both have useful skills which we can combine
Senior Leadership Teams are involved with and interested in SEN provision across the Continuum of Support
Relevant CPD helps me to work effectively with Senior Leadership Teams in post-primary schools
In general, Senior Leadership Teams work closely with mainstream staff
In general, schools have effective systems and procedures to help me to link with Senior Leadership Teams
I feel that my role as a NEPS psychologist has status and is respected in the school
Senior Leadership Teams respect and listen to my ideas for change

4. Overall, how would you describe your experience of working with Senior Leadership Teams? (Qualitative response)

5. Has the Covid-19 pandemic changed the way in which you work with Senior Leadership Teams and if so, how? (Qualitative response)

Section 4: Working with the SENCO

Note for participants: The Covid-19 pandemic may have changed the way you work with SENCOs. Please answer the following questions based on your experiences prior to Covid-19.

1. How closely do you work with the SENCO?
   a. Very closely
   b. Somewhat closely
   c. Not particularly closely

d. Not closely at all

2. The following statements describe some roles which the SENCO might undertake in relation to SEN provision. How important do you think each role is? (extremely important, very important, fairly important, not particularly important, not at all important.)
    a. Identifying students whose needs require support at Level 2 or 3 of the Continuum of Support
    b. Intake screening and collecting information from primary schools including student passport
    c. Arranging standardised tests and/or diagnostic tests of literacy/numeracy
    d. Developing Student Support Plans/Individual Education Plans etc.
    e. Advocating on behalf of students
    f. Applying for resources e.g. SET allocations, SNA allocations etc.
    g. Applying for accommodations for students e.g. RACE/DARE/HEAR
    h. Individual work with students e.g. planning, implementing and reviewing interventions
    i. Co-ordinating SEN team
    j. Liaising with Senior Leadership Team, subject teachers, guidance counsellors etc.
    k. Liaising with parents
    l. Collaborating with outside agencies e.g. NEPS
    m. Directing the work of SNAs in the school
    n. Developing policies and procedures
    o. Putting whole-school initiatives and interventions in place
    p. Arranging for cognitive assessments or other psychological assessments to be conducted
    q. Identifying relevant CPD and providing CPD to staff
    r. Provision mapping and allocating resources
    s. Supporting students' transitions to and from post-primary school
    t. Organising reasonable accommodations in school-based tests/exams
    u. Liaising with other schools

3. Please select the location on the scale which best represents your experience of working with the SENCOs in your schools. *(Strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree)*

The SENCO and I have shared goals and priorities regarding SEN provision
I have a positive working relationship with the SENCO
I have sufficient time to work with SENCOs
The SENCO and I both have useful skills which we can combine
SENCOs are involved with and interested in SEN provision across the Continuum of Support.
Relevant CPD helps me to work effectively with SENCOs in post-primary schools
In general, SENCOs are closely aligned with mainstream staff

In general, SENCOs are closely aligned with or part of the senior leadership team
The schools I work with have effective systems and procedures for linking with SENCOs
The schools I work with have effective systems and procedures to help me to link with SENCOs

4. Overall, how would you describe your experience of working with SENCOs? (Qualitative response)
5. Has the Covid-19 pandemic changed the way in which you work with SENCOs and if so, how? (Qualitative response)

Section 5: Your Role

1. The following statements describe some roles which NEPS might undertake in relation to SEN provision. Please rate the importance of the following NEPS roles in your experience. (Extremely important, quite important, somewhat important, not particularly important, not at all important)

    a. Assisting with school development and planning for special educational needs provision
    b. Providing whole-school in-service training for staff
    c. Providing information and/or training about evidence-based interventions for use with individual students or small groups
    d. Recommending school-based assessments e.g. screening/intake tests, diagnostic tests.
    e. Supporting schools to process and analyse test results, in order to inform intervention and deployment of teaching resources
    f. Giving access to resources
    g. Engaging in consultation with SENCO
    h. Engaging in consultation with parents
    i. Engaging in consultation with Senior Leadership Team
    j. Engaging in direct work with students e.g. intervention, counselling
    k. Carrying out classroom observations
    l. Liaising with other external agencies on behalf of students e.g. disability services
    m. Helping school staff with IEPs/ SSPs
    n. Conducting psychoeducational assessments e.g. cognitive assessment
    o. Conducting research in the area of SEN provision
    p. Supporting school self-evaluation
    q. Providing support in the event of a critical incident

Phase 1 Pilot Feedback Questions

1. How long did it take you to complete the survey up to this point?
    a. Less than 10 minutes
    b. 10-15 minutes
    c. 15-20 minutes
    d. 20-25 minutes
    e. More than 25 minutes
2. How would you describe the length of time it took to complete this survey?
    a. Very short
    b. About right
    c. Too long
3. Did you understand what each question was asking of you?
    a. Yes, the questions were clear
    b. Many questions were clear, with some unclear
    c. Many questions were unclear, with some clear
    d. Most questions were unclear
4. If you answered b, c, or d in question 3, how do you think the clarity of the questions could be improved?
    _____
5. Were there any questions which you thought were not relevant?
    a. Yes
    b. No
6. If yes, please indicate the kinds of questions which you thought were not relevant. _____
7. Please give your opinion on the balance between open-ended questions and tick-box questions.
    a. Too many open-ended questions, would prefer more tick-box questions
    b. About right
    c. Too many tick-box questions, would prefer more open-ended questions
8. Can you think any further questions which should be included in the survey?
    _____

9. Do you think the survey captures useful information about collaboration between SENCOs, SLT and NEPS? *(rate from 1 (extremely useful information) to 5 (not useful information)*
10. Do you have any other feedback which you think could improve the survey?
    _____

Summary of Feedback on Pilot SLT Survey

Time: About right

Question Clarity: All questions clear

Question Relevance: No irrelevant questions

Additional Suggested Questions: No further questions

Question Type: About right balance between open-ended and tick box questions

Value/Importance of Information Gathered: Extremely useful information

Additional Comments: There is nothing that would improve the survey as such but maybe a question of the Government ramping up the NEPS service to support young people who have gone through a fairly intensely difficult period in their short lives.

Summary of Feedback on Pilot SENCO Survey

Time: Time about right

Question Clarity: All questions clear

Relevance of Questions: No irrelevant questions

Question Type: About right balance between open-ended and tick box questions

Additional Suggested Questions:

Is there a timetabled slot when the SEN team can meet? (included)

How collaborative is the approach in the compilation of an IEP? (Not included – not directly relevant to research questions. To be borne in mind as a follow-up prompt in Phase 2 interviews.)

How do you think the role of NEPS could improve in assisting your school to plan for SEN? (This is a more experiential question – to be addressed in Phase 2)

You could perhaps ask how many teachers in the SEN team are qualified in the area of SEN. (Included)

Summary of Feedback on Pilot NEPS Survey

Feedback from NEPS 1 and NEPS 3

Time: Completion time about right
Question Clarity: All questions clear, all NEPS roles covered
Question Type: Balance between open-ended and tick box was about right
Question Relevance: All questions were relevant

Additional suggestions:
Give an example for access to resources e.g. assistive technology (included)
Clarify that SLT is principals and deputy principals (included)
Mentioning student support teams (included)
Open-ended question regarding barriers and facilitators to collaboration (included)
Do they value the role of the SENCO? (explored in Phase 2)
For it to be more user-friendly, would it be possible to show the Likert scale consistently above the questions as it can get confusing scrolling back up and then down to where you were. (included)

Additional Comments:
Liked distinction between Covid-19 and pre-Covid experiences

Feedback from NEPS 2

The following feedback was provided by the second NEPS psychologist who took part in the pilot for Phase 1. Notes are included in parentheses indicating a rationale for including/not including the feedback in the survey. Because this feedback differed from that of the first NEPS psychologist who completed the pilot survey, feedback from a third NEPS psychologist was sought. Feedback from NEPS 1 and NEPS 3 was consistent with one another; both were summarised above.

- The section on roles of SENCOs is asking an EP to give weightings of importance to different SENCO roles. At times it may be important for them to liaise with parents, another time organising reasonable accommodations – I

don’t see how an EP could be rating the importance of one above the other. (The question does not involve ranking i.e. rating one above the other).

- The section on working experience with SENCOs – experiences can vary from school to school. Additionally, an EP would not have a knowledge of a number of sections, e.g. their alignment with mainstream staff. (Variations in EPs experiences from school to school are explored in Phase 2 – Phase 1 seeks to gather a general overview).

- Clarify the meaning of Senior Leadership Teams (included)

- Different schools have different structures, and an EP would generally not be familiar with these. We tend to have a point of contact at the school, sometimes referred to as a SENCO, and we may or may not have involvement with other staff, e.g. Principal, Deputy principal, depending on the circumstances. How schools structure themselves, e.g. an SEN Dept, who reports to whom in management etc. would not often to clear to us, or indeed of interest to us. (This is an interesting perspective – it is clear that some EPs working with NEPS prefer to work at Level 2 or 3 of the CoS without addressing systemic change. This experience may be explored in Phase 2 interviews. My research questions focus on experiences of collaboration across the CoS, including collaboration focused on supporting systemic change in schools. Therefore, the survey needed to explore NEPS psychologists’ awareness of school structures and I did not change the survey questions based on this feedback.)

Mary Immaculate College
Research Ethics Committee

Phase 1 Pilot Information Sheet

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Who is conducting the study? This research is being conducted by Maria Holland, a trainee Educational Psychologist in the Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology programme at Mary Immaculate College (Department of Educational Psychology, Inclusive and Special Education). The research is being supervised by Dr. Johanna Fitzgerald.

What is the study about? The study is exploring collaboration between Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators, Senior Leadership Teams and Educational Psychologists in Irish post-primary schools, at all three levels of the Continuum of Support. The study seeks to explore factors which enhance collaboration as well as any barriers or challenges, in the experiences of the three groups. **This Pilot for Phase 1 is being carried out in order to refine a questionnaire which will then be distributed to participants.** Following this, Phase 2 will involve interviews to investigate common themes identified in Phase 1.

Why is it important? Irish policy does not include a clear definition of the SENCO role, and research into collaboration between SENCOs, SLT and NEPS is scarce. It is important to gather the experiences that SENCOs, SLT and NEPS have of working collaboratively together. It is hoped that this research will contribute to policy and practice by giving an insight into each group's understandings of their own role and their expectations of each other.

Who can participate? Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators, Senior Leadership Team Members (Principals and Vice-Principals) in post-primary schools, and educational psychologists working with the National Educational Psychological Service

What will I have to do? A link to the questionnaire will be emailed to you, which will include informed consent. You will be asked to complete a short online questionnaire, which will be tailored to your role (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator, Senior Leadership Team member or Educational Psychologist). The final section of the questionnaire will ask you to give feedback about the questionnaire e.g. clarity of questions, ease of completion, areas for improvement, questions which should be included or omitted.

How long will it take? Completing the questionnaire and feedback should take no more than 20-25 minutes.

Can I withdraw from the study? Your participation is voluntary and you are under no obligation to participate. You can withdraw at any point before or during your participation in the study without providing any reason and without any consequences. It will not be possible to withdraw your data afterwards. This is because all data is anonymised and it is not possible to link anonymised data with individual participants.

How will my information be used? Your feedback will be used to improve the questionnaire before it is distributed. Any feedback which you provide will be anonymised. The researcher will have custody of data. The supervisor may need occasional access to the data. The study will adhere to all relevant requirements in terms of data protection, GDPR, anonymity and confidentiality. All data will be anonymised as soon as possible, and anonymised data may be retained indefinitely as required by the researcher.

Researcher Contact Details:Supervisor Contact Details:

Maria Holland	Dr. Johanna Fitzgerald
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	+353 61 204517

This research study has received Ethics approval from the Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee (MIREC). If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent authority, you may contact: Mary Collins, MIREC Administrator, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick

Telephone: 061-204980 E-mail: mirec@mic.ul.ie

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Research Ethics Committee

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1. I have read and understand the participant information sheet.

2. I understand what the project is about, and what the results will be used for.

3. I understand that I am agreeing to participate in the Pilot for Phase 1 of this project.

4. I am fully aware of all of the procedures involving myself, and of any risks and benefits associated with the study.

5. I know that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the project at any stage without giving any reason.

6. I am aware that my results will be kept confidential.

Note: This statement appeared at the beginning of the survey. Participants indicated their consent to participate using a yes/no tick box.

Mary Immaculate College
Research Ethics Committee

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Why is it important? Irish policy does not include a clear definition of the SENCO role, and research into collaboration between SENCOs, SLT and NEPS is scarce. It is important to gather the experiences that SENCOs, SLT and NEPS have of working collaboratively together. It is hoped that this research will contribute to policy and practice by giving an insight into each group's understandings of their own role and their expectations of each other.

Who participated? Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators, Senior Leadership Team Members (Principals and Vice-Principals) in post-primary schools, and educational psychologists working with the National Educational Psychological Service

What did I do? You read an information sheet and provided informed consent. You completed a short online questionnaire, which was tailored to your role (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator, Senior Leadership Team member or Educational Psychologist). A link to the questionnaire was emailed to you. You then gave feedback to the researcher about the questionnaire e.g. clarity of questions, ease of completion, areas for improvement, questions which should be included or omitted.

Can I withdraw from the study? Your participation was voluntary and you were under no obligation to participate in the study. It was possible to withdraw at any

point before or during your participation in the study. It will not be possible to withdraw your data afterwards. This is because all data is anonymised and it is not possible to link anonymised data with individual participants.

How will my information be used? Your feedback will be used to improve the questionnaire before it is distributed. Any feedback which you provide will be anonymised. The researcher will have custody of data. The supervisor may need occasional access to the data. The study will adhere to all relevant requirements in terms of data protection, GDPR, anonymity and confidentiality. All data will be anonymised as soon as possible, and anonymised data may be retained indefinitely as required by the researcher.

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Why is it important? Irish policy does not include a clear definition of the SENCO role, and research into collaboration between SENCOs, SLT and NEPS is scarce. It is important to gather the experiences that SENCOs, SLT and NEPS have of working collaboratively together. It is hoped that this research will contribute to policy and practice by giving an insight into each group's understandings of their own role and their expectations of each other.

Who can participate? Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators, Senior Leadership Team Members (Principals and Deputy Principals) in post-primary schools, and educational psychologists working with the National Educational Psychological Service

What will I have to do? You will be asked to complete a short questionnaire, which is tailored to your role (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator, Senior Leadership Team member or Educational Psychologist). The questionnaire asks about your experiences of collaboration between Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators, Senior Leadership Teams and NEPS.

How long will it take? Completing the questionnaire online should take no more than 10-15 minutes.

Can I withdraw from the study? Your participation is voluntary and you are under no obligation to participate. You can withdraw at any point before or during your participation in the study without providing any reason and without any

consequences. It will not be possible to withdraw your data afterwards. This is because all data is anonymised and it is not possible to link anonymised data with individual participants.

How will my information be used? You will not be asked to provide your name or any other identifying information. The researcher will have custody of data. The supervisor may need occasional access to the data. The study will adhere to all relevant requirements in terms of data protection, GDPR, anonymity and confidentiality. All data will be anonymised as soon as possible, and anonymised data may be retained indefinitely as required by the researcher.

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1. I have read and understand the participant information sheet.
2. I understand what the project is about, and what the results will be used for.
3. I understand that I am agreeing to participate in Phase 1 of this project.
4. I am fully aware of all of the procedures involving myself, and of any risks and benefits associated with the study.
5. I know that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the project at any stage without giving any reason.
6. I am aware that my results will be kept confidential.

Note: This statement appeared at the beginning of the survey. Participants indicated their consent to participate using a yes/no tick box.

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Why is it important? Irish policy does not include a clear definition of the SENCO role, and research into collaboration between SENCOs, SLT and NEPS is scarce. It is important to gather the experiences that SENCOs, SLT and NEPS have of working collaboratively together. It is hoped that this research will contribute to policy and practice by giving an insight into each group's understandings of their own role and their expectations of each other.

Who participated? Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators, Senior Leadership Team Members (Principals and Deputy Principals) in post-primary schools, and educational psychologists working with the National Educational Psychological Service

What did I do? You read an information sheet. You completed a short online questionnaire, which was tailored to your role (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator, Senior Leadership Team member or Educational Psychologist). A link to the questionnaire was emailed to you.

Can I withdraw from the study? Your participation was voluntary and you were under no obligation to participate in the study. It was possible to withdraw at any point before or during your participation in the study. It will not be possible to

withdraw your data afterwards. This is because all data is anonymised and it is not possible to link anonymised data with individual participants.

How will my information be used? The data from all of the questionnaires completed during Phase 1 will be used to identify themes to be explored in interviews with participants in Phase 2. The researcher will have custody of data. The supervisor may need occasional access to the data. The study will adhere to all relevant requirements in terms of data protection, GDPR, anonymity and confidentiality. All data will be anonymised as soon as possible, and anonymised data may be retained indefinitely as required by the researcher.

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Appendix J: Phase 2 Interview Schedule and Informed Consent

Note: The following questions and prompts were implemented in a flexible manner, consistent with IPA research (Smith et al., 2022)

NEPS Interview Schedule

- Can you give me a brief overview of the schools you work with – context, size, how long working with them
- Do you use the term special or inclusive education? What does special/inclusive education mean to you?
- Tell me about your role in relation to special/inclusive education in schools.
- NEPS psychologists fulfil many different roles e.g. assessment, consultation, training, critical incidents. Which NEPS roles have you found to be most important or useful in your schools? Are there any roles which you find less valuable?
- NEPS have adopted a consultative model of service where they work with schools to support students indirectly. Can you tell me about your experiences with consultation? What would you expect to happen during a consultative process? What is going well and what could be improved?
- We have seen lots of policy changes in the last few years, the change in the model of resource allocation is an example of that. Can you talk about how these policy changes have had an impact on practice in your schools?
- Tell me about how special/inclusive education is organised in your schools.
- Do your schools use the CoS and if so, what does that look like? Can you give some examples of the kinds of things that are happening at each level? Can you tell me what you do at each level?

- Looking at post-primary schools as a system, are you aware of how SENCOs fit in or work with mainstream teachers and SLT?
- What is the role of the SLT in your schools? Tell me about the way you work with the Senior Leadership (by that I mean principal and deputy/deputies. What is going well? What are the challenges? (Prompt for barriers and facilitators)
    - Assessment
    - Consultation
    - S&D
    - Direct work
    - Administration
    - Time
    - Systems work
    - Access to resources
- How many schools have SENCOs? What is their role? Tell me about how you work with SENCOs. What is going well? What are the challenges? (Prompt for barriers and facilitators)
    - Assessment
    - Consultation
    - S&D
    - Direct work – SENCOs rated this as really important
    - Administration
    - Time
    - Systems work
    - Access to resources
- Has the way you work with the SLT/SENCOs changed during Covid-19 and if so, how?
- In your experience, how does collaboration between SLT, SENCO and NEPS affect outcomes for students?

- We have talked a lot about special/inclusive education and collaboration between NEPS, SENCOs and SLT. If you had a wish for how practice in this area could be better, what would it be?

Additional Prompts:

- In the case of challenges: what would you prefer to see them doing? What do you think their role should be?
- Why does that work in school x but not y?

Reflections on Pilot NEPS Interview

This was the first pilot interview which I conducted. I was conscious of balancing the practicalities of the interview with the experiential data which I was attempting to elicit. To help with practicalities, I printed the interview schedule and wrote key words at the top including time, confidentiality, recording, time to ask questions before beginning the recording. This interview was useful in helping me to become more fluent in using the technology I had chosen. I used the record function on Microsoft Teams and the transcription function in Microsoft Word online.

On reflection, I considered that the data elicited from this interview would not have been fully compatible with IPA, were I to use it for analysis. My use of the interview schedule was too prescriptive, as I was reluctant to deviate from the interview schedule. I needed to ask the questions differently so as to elicit more experiential data. I decided that in subsequent interviews, I would not read the questions word for word; rather, I would ask questions in a more flexible way around the topic, following on from what participants had already said. This would enable me to ensure that I asked questions in a non-judgemental manner, for example NEPS psychologists could have disparate experiences and views of the NEPS consultative model and cognitive assessments. Similarly, I needed to focus more on the idea of standing as closely beside participants as possible; that is, I needed to be more present and ask more follow up questions based on experiences which seemed to be important to participants. On a practical level, asking for examples would be an effective way of encouraging participants to speak about experiences rather than speaking about their work in a more general way. This strategy would also help with asking about sensitive or potentially difficult topics.

The participant said that the themes were important and relevant to her experiences of working with SENCOs and SLT, and she did not have any suggestions to add to the interview schedule. I was also satisfied that it was possible to explore all of the topics included in the interview schedule within the time allocated (45-60 minutes).

SENCO Interview Schedule

- Do you use the term special or inclusive education in your school? What does special/inclusive education mean to you? Tell me about how special/inclusive education is organised.
- Tell me about your role in relation to special/inclusive education in the school.
- Tell me about the way you work with the Senior Leadership (by that I mean principal and deputy/deputies). What is going well? What are the challenges? (Prompt for barriers and facilitators)
- Do you use the CoS and if so, what does that look like? Can you give some examples of the kinds of things that are happening at each level?
- Tell me about how the NEPS psychologist works with you and the SLT. What is going well? What are the challenges? (Prompt for barriers and facilitators)
- NEPS psychologists fulfil many different roles e.g. assessment, consultation, training, critical incidents. Which NEPS roles have you found to be most important or useful in your school? Are there any roles which you find less valuable?
- NEPS have adopted a consultative model of service where they work with schools to support students indirectly. Can you tell me about your experiences with consultation? What would you expect to happen during a consultative process? What is going well and what could be improved?
- Has the way you work with the SLT/NEPS changed during Covid-19 and if so, how?
- In your experience, how does collaboration between SLT, SENCO and NEPS affect outcomes for students?

- We have seen lots of policy changes in the last few years, the change in the model of resource allocation is an example of that. Can you talk about how these policy changes have had an impact on practice in your school?
- We have talked a lot about special/inclusive education and collaboration between NEPS, SENCOs and SLT. If you had a wish for how practice in this area could be better, what would it be?

Additional Prompts:

- In the case of challenges: what would you prefer to see them doing? What do you think their role should be?

Reflections on Pilot SENCO Interview

The SENCO who participated in this pilot interview works in a co-educational, post-primary school, serving a town and surrounding rural areas, which was established approximately five years previously as a result of the amalgamation of three schools in the town. I had been familiar with this school before conducting the research and was aware that they were engaging in high-quality collaborative practice in the school and with their NEPS psychologist. The interview confirmed my decision not to include this school in the final analysis. It would be almost impossible for me to bracket my ideas/knowledge about the school.

This was the second pilot interview which I conducted, and I found the practicalities and the interviewing process far easier than the first pilot interview. Following the previous interview, I re-ordered the questions slightly to begin with broader contextual questions before moving on the more focused questions. Generally, I started by asking about the participant's experiences of her own role before moving on the asking about her experiences of working with SLT and NEPS. I also worked on being more flexible in following the participant's direction and following up on experiences which were important for that person. This flexibility was helped by my increasing familiarity with the order and content of the prompts I wanted to cover – I was not concerned that I would forget any questions. I started treating the interview schedule as a series of themes/topics rather than a set of pre-set questions. The phrasing of the question depended on the experiences which the participant had already described. I had printed out the interview schedule and then wrote the key words in the margins beside the questions as an aid.

The participant said that the themes were important and relevant to her experiences of working with NEPS and SLT, and she did not have any suggestions to add to the interview schedule. My reflections on this interview did not lead to changes in the content of the interview schedule but enabled me to continue to improve my ability to ask questions in an affirming and non-evaluative manner.

Senior Leadership Team Interview Schedule

- Do you use the term special or inclusive education in your school? What does special/inclusive education mean to you? Tell me about how special/inclusive education is organised.
- Tell me about your role in relation to special/inclusive education in the school.
- Is there a SENCO? Tell me about their role and your experiences of working with them.
- Tell me about the way you work with the SENCO. What is going well? What are the challenges? (Prompt for barriers and facilitators)
- Do you use the CoS and if so, what does that look like? Can you give some examples of the kinds of things that are happening at each level?
- Tell me about how the NEPS psychologist works with you and the SENCO. What is going well? What are the challenges? (Prompt for barriers and facilitators)
- NEPS psychologists fulfil many different roles e.g. assessment, consultation, training, critical incidents. Which NEPS roles have you found to be most important or useful in your school? Are there any roles which you find less valuable?
- NEPS have adopted a consultative model of service where they work with schools to support students indirectly. Can you tell me about your experiences with consultation? What would you expect to happen during a consultative process? What is going well and what could be improved?
- Has the way you work with the SENCO/NEPS changed during Covid-19 and if so, how?
- In your experience, how does collaboration between SLT, SENCO and NEPS affect outcomes for students?

- We have seen lots of policy changes in the last few years, the change in the model of resource allocation, RACE, DARE, L2L3, SNA allocation is an example of that. Can you talk about how these policy changes have had an impact on practice in your school?
- We have talked a lot about special/inclusive education and collaboration between NEPS, SENCOs and SLT. If you had a wish for how practice in this area could be better, what would it be?

Additional Prompts:

- In the case of challenges: what would you prefer to see them doing? What do you think their role should be?

Reflections on Pilot SLT Interview

The SLT member who completed the pilot interview is the principal of an all-girls school serving a town and surrounding rural area. This interview highlighted some implicit beliefs, which I will be able to bracket in a reflective manner now that I have become aware of them. The principal described her experience of attempting to drive change in relation to SEN provision becoming more inclusive in the school. She was finding this challenging due to a lack of buy-in from the SENCO and mainstream staff. I was surprised that the principal in this school was driving change, rather than the SENCO. I realised that I had held an implicit belief, based on anecdotal evidence and some qualitative responses from the Phase 1 survey, that SENCOs would be more likely to be driving dynamic change than principals. Following this interview, I no longer have an image of SLT as less interested in SEN provision than SENCOs, although it appears that some are, based on the surveys and my own experience. It is unlikely that I will be able to interview SLT members who do not view SEN provision as part of their role due to self-selection bias in purposive sampling. Similarly, it is unlikely that I will have the opportunity to interview SENCOs like the one described by this principal. While bracketing and reflecting on this belief did not prompt me to change the content of this interview schedule, I will be mindful of convergent experiences when conducting future interviews and will continue to ensure that I frame questions in as open and non-judgemental a manner as possible.

This interview also enabled me to enhance my interviewing technique. The principal used the phrase ‘lawnmower parents,’ and did not explain what this meant. I had not heard this phrase before and was initially hesitant about redirecting from what she had gone on to say and asking her to explain. It was worthwhile to ask for an explanation; she was using the phrase to describe her experience of parents who wished to remove all obstacles from their children’s path. This made me more confident in asking for clarification in future interviews to get a clear picture of participants’ experiences. I noticed that there were times where I could have asked further follow-up questions, but I did not want to keep the principal for longer than 45-60 minutes as her data was not being used in the final analysis.

The participant said that the themes explored in the interview were important and relevant to her experiences of working with SENCOs and NEPS.The principal spoke about her experiences of working with Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) and indicated that this should be allocated more time in the interview schedule. Because collaboration with SENOs was not part of my research questions, I decided to follow up if this topic emerges as being important in the experiences of participants whose data would be used in the final analysis but did not include a question about SENOs in the interview schedule.

Mary Immaculate College
Research Ethics Committee

Phase 2 Pilot Information Sheet

Study Title: Barriers and facilitators to collaboration: Experiences of Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators, Senior Leadership Teams and Educational Psychologists in Irish post-primary schools.

Who is conducting the study? This research is being conducted by Maria Holland, a trainee Educational Psychologist in the Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology programme at Mary Immaculate College (Department of Educational Psychology, Inclusive and Special Education). The research is being supervised by Dr. Johanna Fitzgerald.

What is the study about? The study is exploring collaboration between Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators, Senior Leadership Teams and Educational Psychologists in Irish post-primary schools, at all three levels of the Continuum of Support. The study seeks to explore factors which enhance collaboration as well as any barriers or challenges, in the experiences of the three groups. A questionnaire was distributed to participants in Phase 1 of the main study. **This Pilot for Phase 2 is being carried out in order to refine a semi-structured interview schedule for Phase 2.** Phase 2 will involve interviews to investigate themes identified in Phase 1.

Why is it important? Irish policy does not include a clear definition of the SENCO role, and research into collaboration between SENCOs, SLT and NEPS is scarce. It is important to gather the experiences that SENCOs, SLT and NEPS have of working collaboratively together. It is hoped that this research will contribute to policy and practice by giving an insight into each group's understandings of their own role and their expectations of each other.

Who can participate? Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators, Senior Leadership Team Members (Principals and Deputy Principals) in post-primary schools who have access to NEPS support, and educational psychologists working with the National Educational Psychological Service

What will I have to do? You will be asked to provide informed consent before the interview. You will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview about your experiences of collaboration between Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators, Senior Leadership Teams and NEPS, which will be tailored to your role. The interview will be conducted via Microsoft Teams. You will be asked for permission for the interview to be recorded via Microsoft Teams. After the interview, you will be asked to give feedback to the researcher about the interview e.g. clarity of questions, ease of completion, areas for improvement, questions which should be included or omitted.

How long will it take? Participating in the interview should take no more than 45-60 minutes. The feedback session will take approximately 15-20 minutes.

Can I withdraw from the study? Your participation is voluntary and you are under no obligation to participate. You can withdraw at any point before or during your participation in the study without providing any reason and without any consequences. If you wish to withdraw your data afterwards you can do so by contacting the researcher.

How will my information be used? Your feedback will be used to improve the interview schedule before it the main study. Any feedback which you provide will be anonymised. The researcher will have custody of data. The supervisor may need occasional access to the data. The study will adhere to relevant requirements in terms of data protection, GDPR, anonymity and confidentiality. All data will be anonymised as soon as possible, and anonymised data may be retained indefinitely as required by the researcher.

Researcher Contact Details:Supervisor Contact Details:

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Phase 2 Pilot Consent Form

Study Title: Barriers and facilitators to collaboration: Experiences of Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators, Senior Leadership Teams and Educational Psychologists in Irish post-primary schools.

1. I have read and understand the participant information sheet.

2. I understand what the project is about, and what the results will be used for.

3. I understand that I am agreeing to participate in the Pilot for Phase 2 of this project.

4. I am fully aware of all of the procedures involving myself, and of any risks and benefits associated with the study.

5. I know that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the project at any stage without giving any reason.

6. I am aware that my results will be kept confidential.

Participant Signature: _____

Date: _____

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Phase 2 Pilot Debriefing Sheet

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Thank you for participating in the study – your time and effort are greatly appreciated.

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Why is it important? Irish policy does not include a clear definition of the SENCO role, and research into collaboration between SENCOs, SLT and NEPS is scarce. It is important to gather the experiences that SENCOs, SLT and NEPS have of working collaboratively together. It is hoped that this research will contribute to policy and practice by giving an insight into each group's understandings of their own role and their expectations of each other.

Who participated? Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators, Senior Leadership Team Members (Principals and Deputy Principals) in post-primary schools who have access to NEPS support, and educational psychologists working with the National Educational Psychological Service

What did I do? You read an information sheet and provided informed consent. You were asked for permission for the interview to be recorded. You completed a semi-structured interview about your experiences of collaboration between Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators, Senior Leadership Teams and NEPS, which was tailored to your role. The interview was conducted via Microsoft Teams. You were then asked to give feedback to the researcher about the interview e.g. clarity of

questions, ease of completion, areas for improvement, questions which should be included or omitted.

Can I withdraw from the study? Your participation was voluntary and you were under no obligation to participate in the study. It was possible to withdraw at any point before or during your participation in the study. If you wish to withdraw your data afterwards you can do so by contacting the researcher.

How will my information be used? Your feedback will be used to improve the questionnaire before it is distributed. Any feedback which you provide will be anonymised. The researcher will have custody of data. The supervisor may need occasional access to the data. The study will adhere to all relevant requirements in terms of data protection, GDPR, anonymity and confidentiality. All data will be anonymised as soon as possible, and anonymised data may be retained indefinitely as required by the researcher.

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Why is it important? Irish policy does not include a clear definition of the SENCO role, and research into collaboration between SENCOs, SLT and NEPS is scarce. It is important to gather the experiences that SENCOs, SLT and NEPS have of working collaboratively together. It is hoped that this research will contribute to policy and practice by giving an insight into each group's understandings of their own role and their expectations of each other.

Who can participate? Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators, Senior Leadership Team Members (Principals and Deputy Principals) in post-primary schools who have access to NEPS support, and educational psychologists working with the National Educational Psychological Service

What will I have to do? You will be asked to provide informed consent before the interview. You will be asked to discuss your experiences of collaboration between Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator, Senior Leadership Team members and Educational Psychologists with the researcher. The interview will be conducted via Microsoft Teams. You will be asked for permission for the interview to be recorded via Microsoft Teams. The interview will be exploratory and non-judgemental; any information which you share in the interview will not be shared with other participants. Further information about confidentiality is provided below.

How long will it take? The interview will take no more than 45-60 minutes.

Can I withdraw from the study? Your participation is voluntary and you are under no obligation to participate. You can withdraw at any point before or during your

participation in the study without providing any reason and without any consequences. If you wish to withdraw your data afterwards you can do so by contacting the researcher.

How will my information be used? Your interview will be recorded via Microsoft Teams and transcribed. The transcription will be anonymised and pseudonyms will be used when writing the research report. No identifying information (name, workplace etc.) will be included in the transcription or final research report. The researcher will have custody of data. The supervisor may need occasional access to the data. The study will adhere to all relevant requirements in terms of data protection, GDPR, anonymity and confidentiality. All data will be anonymised as soon as possible, and anonymised data may be retained indefinitely as required by the researcher.

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Research Ethics Committee

Phase 2 Informed Consent Form

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1. I have read and understand the participant information sheet.

2. I understand what the project is about, and what the results will be used for.

3. I understand that I am agreeing to participate in the Phase 2 of this project.

4. I am fully aware of all of the procedures involving myself, and of any risks and benefits associated with the study.

5. I know that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the project at any stage without giving any reason.

6. I am aware that my results will be kept confidential.

Participant signature: _____

Date: _____

Mary Immaculate College
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Phase 2 Debriefing Sheet

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Why is it important? Irish policy does not include a clear definition of the SENCO role, and research into collaboration between SENCOs, SLT and NEPS is scarce. It is important to gather the experiences that SENCOs, SLT and NEPS have of working collaboratively together. It is hoped that this research will contribute to policy and practice by giving an insight into each group's understandings of their own role and their expectations of each other.

Who participated? Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators, Senior Leadership Team Members (Principals and Deputy Principals) in post-primary schools who have access to NEPS support, and educational psychologists working with the National Educational Psychological Service

What did I do? You read an information sheet and provided informed consent. You completed a semi-structured interview about your experiences of collaboration between Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators, Senior Leadership Teams and NEPS, which was tailored to your role. The interview was conducted via Microsoft Teams. You were asked for permission for the interview to be recorded via Microsoft Teams.

Can I withdraw from the study? Your participation was voluntary and you were under no obligation to participate in the study. It was possible to withdraw at any

point before or during your participation in the study. If you wish to withdraw your data afterwards you can do so by contacting the researcher.

How will my information be used? The researcher will have custody of data. The supervisor may need occasional access to the data. The study will adhere to all relevant requirements in terms of data protection, GDPR, anonymity and confidentiality. All data will be anonymised as soon as possible, and anonymised data may be retained indefinitely as required by the researcher.

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Appendix K: Phase 2 Data Analysis Process

Note: This process is based on Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2022)

Non-technical description	Technical description	Meta-description
Step 1: Get to know the data •Transcription •Repeated viewing of recorded interviews •Re-reading of transcript	Reflexive reading	Phase 1: Working towards experiential statements
Step 2: Detailed exploratory analysis, staying close to the account •Descriptive notes •Linguistic notes •Conceptual notes	Exploratory notes	
Step 3: Articulate the main claims I am making about the meaning of the person's experience on the basis of their account • Colour coding and initial naming of themes • Experiential statements to explain meanings of initial themes • Text in left-hand column, notes in middle column and initial themes/experiential statements in right-hand column	Experiential statements	
Step 4: Organise my work around the main claims and supplement it with 'at a glance' annotation • Summary page of themes for individual participant with brief notes to explain what the theme means • Reflections added to document or to hard-copy	Preliminary clustering of statements (candidates for themes) Supplementary annotation Reflexive threads	Phase 2: Working towards case-level summaries

notebook (e.g. conceptual notes, reflections on bracketing, links I made with research)		
Step 5 Consolidate case analysis in case-level summary • Consolidation point • Page of preliminary themes and explanation of the meaning of each theme was refined during this phase • Link back to original transcript using colour coding. Timestamps also used. • Reflections on language, metaphor, narrative etc. were included	Structured consolidation of case-level work mapping to Personal Experiential Themes	
Step 6: Repeat steps 1-5 for each case, allowing time and space to go back a step and add further reflections, interpretations. or notes	Repeat	Phase 3: Working towards cross-case themes
Step 7: Review case-level summaries and identify candidate themes which cut across the cases • I drew on preliminary experiential themes to begin with and reflected on their contribution to the emerging group experiential themes • Colour coding helped to keep track of the process • I printed and cut out the preliminary experiential themes from each participants' summary page and	Group experiential themes	

grouped and re-grouped them, with time for reflection between shuffles		
Step 7b: Review the emerging analytic structure in supervision • Reviewed across two supervision sessions in Autumn 2021 and Spring 2022 • Reflected between the sessions and themes were refined accordingly • Synthesised group experiential themes (SENCO, SLT, and NEPS) into overarching themes.	Discuss proposed structure and revise it accordingly	
Step 8: Finalise analytic structure • Finalised appropriate names for each theme and sub-theme, using direct quotes from participants as much as possible as names for themes • Returned to original documents to select quotes and accompanying notes for each theme and subtheme • I am using a case-in-theme structure i.e. I am using the themes to structure the write-up with quote from participants to illustrate the themes • Reflection with and presentation of themes to peers	Finalise sub-themes and structure	Phase 4: Working towards a linear account of the thematic structure

Step 8b: Review work for audit trail • Ensure that I have kept comprehensive notes (combination of research notebook, notes app and Microsoft Word)	Reflect on variations and commonalities across cases	
Step 9: Work with supervisor to decide how to present some or all of the structure in a linear, written report • Submission of journal article based on Phase 2 planned • Reflection on drafts of empirical paper in supervision	Reflect on the level of granularity which can be included, given the scope and limitations of the document	

Appendix L: IPA Sample for Peadar

Transcript	Linguistic notes Descriptive notes Conceptual notes	Colour-coded personal experiential statements
00:33:23 SLT1 Am then we were finding then that 00:33:26 SLT1 as a child would present, 00:33:28 SLT1 emerging need would present, the NEPS psychologist was being drawn in, right, and while he was very available to us and we were glad of that there was a problem with the system in this school 00:33:37 SLT1 that I wanted to address because 00:33:40 SLT1 for me it was about 00:33:41 SLT1 problem offloading rather than problem sharing or being solution focused so we get rid of this problem off by way of punitive measures through our code of behaviour or we send them off the NEPS psychologist to be fixed, 00:33:51 SLT1 or we kick them out of the school altogether. 00:33:53 SLT1 Right. 00:33:54 SLT1 So that for me was not good practice. It didn't speak to us fundamentally around our values system, our mission, our objectives as a school and I just didn't like it, you know? So then we said, right what can we do and, look it, another dimension to the NEPS psychologist support is around management, supporting management level of the school, the systems level of the school. 00:34:17 SLT1 And that's getting into 00:34:21 SLT1 the nucleus of, the nerve centre of the school and saying okay, how do we get in here and sort of 00:34:30 SLT1 shape and influence at a systems level the decision making, the influence of the school community. 00:34:38 SLT1	Another gap was that the NEPS psychologist was being drawn in as soon as a problem emerged. Is there theory around problem offloading vs problem sharing? Problems were seen as being within-child – punitive measures or NEPS psychologist to be fixed. The principal thought that this was not good practice. I just didn't like it, our values system – sense of personal and collective values here. There is clearly alignment between the principal's professional values and the values system in the school. Another dimension of the NEPS role is around supporting management and the systems level of the school.	Problem offloading v problem sharing Changes in underpinning philosophy over time Personal and professional values
As opposed to starting, coming in at a case level, just on the ground to respond. So reaction reacting to incidents that arise. Okay, so how can we be more proactive? So having the brilliant NEPS psychologist that I have 00:34:52 SLT1 We devised, and I asked him to think about that more, and we looked at a wee model around how we could address the challenges around stressors for staff 00:35:00 SLT1 but equally, look at meeting the needs of the kids. 00:35:03 SLT1 And that's where we 00:35:05 SLT1 over the course of the year closed the school for to run a workshop expansion. We got special permission to do this.	It is necessary to address the nucleus of the school to shape and influence it at a systemic level, as against responding at a case-by-case level on the ground. Nucleus, nerve centre – school as a multi-layered living thing When NEPS is working at the systems level, they are interacting with the nucleus of the school system. Could look at the school as a cell – can't separate it from other systems, lots of complex things going on within it. They looked at a model around addressing the challenges of stressors for staff and equally meeting the needs of children Equally – staff and students seen as equally important	Systemic work happens at the nucleus

Personal Experiential Themes

Personal Experiential Theme	Link to original transcript
The principal is a champion for values and evidence-based practice	**Peadar**Pink – Principal identity – accountable; Principal as judge; Principal as leader; driver of values; Principal as analytical and critical thinker; Principal oversight and demands; Principal as personally challenging role; Driving agenda but not personal agenda; Principal as champion and model of trust; guide; personal and professional values; control; Principal as teacher; Personal identification with the school **Peadar**Turquoise – Policy as a driver of practice; Language determined by department policy; Focus on need rather than diagnosis – driven by policy? SENCO role shaped by policy; System underpinned by CoS; Fulfilling responsibilities is demanding and requires sacrifice; Surface v deep structures in policy; Underpinning ideological agenda of policy must be sound; SENCO role fits within current policy; SEN co-ordinator v SENCO **Peadar**Red – The SENCO has a delegated responsibility from the principal; SENCO as co-ordinator and administrator; SENCO appointment is an assistant principal not SEN co-ordinator; SENCO at administrative level – responsibility without accountability? SENCO as mirror for values driven by principal; Increasing similarity between principal and SENCO role in terms of oversight; SENCO as organiser and supervisor; Increasing accountability for SENCO
The school is a living organism	**Peadar**Blue – lots of layers, connections between layers; Layers need to be aligned; gaps between

layers; Dots joining up; Different layers in dialogue; Responsibility is distributed across layers of the school; Resistance – hard to change all elements of system; Isolation in different parts of the system; Narratives wrapped around the school are also systems; Working tension between layers; Gaps impacting progress; Systemic work happens at the nucleus; School system is within larger education system; Education is also part of the system of the real world; Layers in the system – gap in ITE; Layers in the system – gap in baseline knowledge

PeadarGreen – Image of school as a built system/infrastructure with particular instruments within it which have been carefully constructed; Building images – channels, spaces; School as a living organisation; Core values as the foundation and Values are actively lived out by staff; Communication as part of infrastructure; SENCO role is burgeoning; School as a living, evolving thing; School as a living, evolving thing; Instruments being used to support individual need; NEPS as feeding the system; The individuals working in the school are also built (emotions); Strong underpinning system – nuts and bolts; Systems help to make space; NEPS must understand complex school systems; Education system as something that is built.

PeadarGrey – NEPS helps to feed the school system; Consultation as seeking expertise; Not using expertise to wag fingers; Types of evidence that are valued; Problem offloading v problem sharing; Expertise looks different across the CoS;

	Values consultation; NEPS as external system; collaboration as a frustrating process; Prescriptive approach is unhelpful
Infrastructure and space are built over time	**Peadar**Buttercup – School taking ownership; ownership of SEN space; Ownership of space **Peadar**Teal – Elements within the system changing and interacting over time; Infrastructure being built over time, responding to gaps; Building up over time; Systemic transformation over time; Transformation over time continues into future; Opening and lighting the space, recalibrating; Improvements over time – on the move; Moving up from decline; Systems interacting across time; Changes in underpinning philosophy over time; Crisis pares back the system; Change in systems requires other systems to respond; Covid has caused system-wide disruption; Education system on the move; Rebuilding v tinkering with models; Personal feelings about change over time

Appendix M: Summary of Themes

Personal Experiential Themes

Saoirse	Interpersonal relationships are a saviour
	Lucky to have time – time as a necessity and luxury
	Gaps v overlap in school structures
Síle	Interpersonal relationships - it's a big battle
	Competing agendas – the tail is wagging the dog
	Silos – everything lands on my desk
Sinéad	SENCO role is drawn in different directions
	NEPS time is a valuable resource
	Systems and relationships are built step by step
Peadar	The school is a living organism
	Infrastructure and space are built over time
	SLT champions values and evidence-based practice
Paula	Layers of learning support for all
	Respect is the nub of relationships
	Gaps between policy and what needs to be done
Patricia	Identify of teachers, SLT, SENCOs as SEN-minded or not
	Being able to evolve is important – can't have dodos
	You have to go far and beyond
Neasa	Being funnelled into the SEN space
	Wellbeing as a way in
	You feel very small in secondary schools
Nóra	NEPS as agents of (slow) change
	Walking the relationship tightrope
	Shifting roles – NEPS and SENCO
Nuala	Holding hands
	Psychology as a commodity
	Silos – the left arm doesn't know what the right arm is doing

Group Experiential Themes

SENCOs (Saoirse, Síle, Sinéad)	The weight of the SENCO role
	Interpersonal relationships hold things together
	I feel lucky not to be siloed
SLT (Peadar, Paula, Patricia)	The school is an evolving, multi-layered organism
	Overseeing change can be a battle
	SLT creates space for collaboration between layers
NEPS (Neasa, Nóra, Nuala)	I feel siloed at the top of the CoS
	Relationship-building underpins collaboration
	NEPS creates space for active engagement

Overarching Themes

Theme 1: Interpersonal connections	From battle to luck	Saoirse Síle	Patricia	Neasa
	Far and beyond	Síle Sinéad	Patricia	Neasa Nuala
	Holding hands	Saoirse Síle Sinéad	Paula	Neasa Nóra Nuala
Theme 2: Expertise in managing layers	SENCO as filter	Saoirse Sinéad	Peadar Paula	Neasa Nóra Nuala
	SLT as overseers of layers	Saoirse Sinéad	Peadar Paula Patricia	Neasa Nóra
	NEPS as hub	Saoirse Sinéad	Peadar Paula Patricia	Neasa Nóra Nuala
Theme 3: Working around silos	Silo v deliberately constructed organism	Síle Sinéad	Peadar Paula Patricia	Neasa Nóra Nuala
	Language shapes silos	Saoirse Síle Sinéad	Paula Patricia	Neasa Nuala
	The value of collaboration	Saoirse Síle Sinéad	Peadar	Neasa Nóra Nuala

Appendix N: Summary of Phase 2 Second Order Member Checking

Pseudonym	Date Approved by Participant	Changes Requested
Saoirse	11/2/2022	No changes
Síle	10/2/2022	One phrase removed Clarified that SENCO role is not part of AP I post
Sinéad	23/2/2022	Make pen picture less identifiable (approved by Sinéad 24/2/2022) SEN changed to AEN in school policy in 2017 (transcribed as 2007 in error)
Peadar	1/3/2022	No changes
Paula	10/2/2022	No changes
Patricia	10/3/2022	One word removed and substituted
Neasa	18/2/2022	No changes
Nóra	14/2/2022	No changes
Nuala	10/2/2022	No changes