Can SENCOs do their job in a bubble? The impact of Covid-19 on the ways in which we conceptualise provision for learners with special educational needs

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to critique the practices of those coordinating provision for children and young people with special educational needs during the Coronavirus pandemic. Whilst many schools are focusing on the practical aspects of getting students and staff back to school, there is a danger that practicalities may obfuscate broader systemic problems. In terms of educating children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities, Covid-19 offers an opportunity to reflect on the difference between physical ‘bubbles’ designed to reduce transmission and the theoretical and professional ‘bubbles’ that have existed for many years. Whilst the former is urgent, it cannot be allowed to overwhelm the important; the role of the SENCO being one example. As education systems vary across geo-political contexts, a critique of practice in England is used as an exemplar for analysis.

Introduction

Whilst the impacts of the global pandemic on education and schooling are yet to be fully realised, it is important that we address immediate concerns, one of which is provision for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEN/D). Clearly, different national contexts are taking different approaches to how children and young people are educated in the current circumstances, from the creation of online schools in the global West to highly controlled classrooms in China via the ‘School’s Out, But Class’s On’ programme (Zhou & Li, 2020) and less formal schooling arrangements in many parts of the global South. From this, the impact of digital poverty on the quality of education is being reported across the world, alongside concerns about mental health and wellbeing (Asante, Quarshie & Andoh-Arthur, 2020; Bacher-Hicks et al., 2021).

A term that is being advocated for operating Covid-safe educational environments in England is that of being in a ‘bubble’. A bubble can be anything from a small group of students to whole year groups and, in many cases, a teacher will stay within a bubble to reduce the potential for transmission across schools and communities.

Given the necessary difference in responses to the pandemic, the purpose of this article is to elucidate aspects of the role of the person who coordinates special education...
provision in an educational setting. In many national contexts, this person is known as the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) and, although the remit of the role may differ across borders, complexities and confusions endure. For instance, an international review conducted almost 20 years ago (Emmanuellsen, 2001), highlighted concerns that continue to be articulated in many countries such as England, where the role was first adopted in 1994 (DFEE, 1994), and Ireland, where the role has been adopted much more recently (Fitzgerald & Radford, 2020).

The primary argument presented here is that many SENCOs in England have always worked in atheoretical and professional ‘bubbles’ rendering them procedural experts rather than pedagogical leads. Put simply, the role of the SENCO cannot simply be about procedures and paperwork, no matter how important these may be; to follow that route is to accept that meeting the needs of all learners, including those with SEN/D, is predominantly a paper exercise. Rather, the SENCO must lead pedagogical practice if they are to make a real impact on the ways in which their peers understand and enact teaching and learning and, by extrapolation, positively impact the life-world of the learners that they seek to support.

In order to develop this argument, the article begins with an analysis of national and international policies that specify the obligations of schools and colleges in ways that directly impact the role of the SENCO in England. Although the SENCO role in England precedes the international framing outlined in this section, the international landscape is an important factor in any analysis of the development of such a role over a 20-year span.

From this, policy-led framing of what is meant by ‘special educational needs’ is examined in order to critique the types of role adopted by SENCOs and the degree to which they are able to lead pedagogical practice. The necessity to focus on one national context stems from the variety of educational provision now being developed; however, the issues raised in this article are pertinent to anyone holding this, or a similar, role.

The national and international policy context

In 2015, the United Nations General Assembly published the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN, 2015) which is based around 17 Sustainable Goals. Importantly, these goals were deemed to be ‘of the people, by the people and for the people’ (UN, 2015, p. 12) The preamble to the document notes that:

People who are vulnerable must be empowered. Those whose needs are reflected in the Agenda include all children, youth and persons with disabilities (of whom more than 80 per cent live in poverty) (UN, 2015, p. 7).

Of particular note, Sustainable Development Goal 4 – Education – calls for the international community to work within the key pillars of access, equity and inclusion in order to ‘ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all’ (UN, 2015, p. 21). From this, the European Commission published guidelines that highlighted the need to strengthen inclusive educational practices (European Commission, 2017).

More than 10 years prior to these initiatives, the UK, ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) which is the main international treaty specific to persons with disabilities. Although not directly enforceable
by law (see Britlief v Birmingham City Council, 2019), the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), to whom the UK government are supposed to report every four years, refer to the UNCRPD when advocating for the right to inclusive education. Legal requirements to meet the needs of children and young people with SEN/D in England, Wales and Scotland are covered by the Equality Act (HMSO, 2010). In England and Wales, the Equality Act applies to all maintained and independent schools, including Academies, and maintained and non-maintained special schools. In Scotland, it applies to schools managed by education authorities, independent schools and schools receiving grants under section 73(c) or (d) of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980.

Specifically, ‘The [Equality] Act makes it unlawful for the responsible body of a school to discriminate against, harass or victimise a pupil or potential pupil:

- in relation to admissions,
- in the way it provides education for pupils,
- in the way it provides pupils access to any benefit, facility or service, or
- by excluding a pupil or subjecting them to any other detriment.

The “responsible body” is the governing body or the local authority for maintained schools in England and Wales, the education authority in the case of maintained schools in Scotland, and the proprietor in the case of independent schools, Academies or non-maintained special schools’ (HMSO, 2010, p. 7).

Four years after the publication of the Equality Act, the Children and Families Act (HMSO, 2014) gave rise to the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice 0–25 years (DfE/DoH, 2015). This was the third such Code of Practice with a strong focus on the role of the SENCO, which is mentioned 71 times. This Code of Practice made two provisions worthy of note: firstly, it was specified that the SENCO must be a qualified teacher and, secondly, that they must complete the National Award for SEN Coordination, within three years of appointment (DfE/DoH, sections 6.85 and 6.86). The National Award must ‘be a postgraduate course accredited by a recognised higher education provider’ (DfE/DoH, 2015, p. 108). This means that the SENCO is the only person in a school who MUST be a qualified teacher and have a postgraduate qualification within three years of their appointment. Finally, section 6.87 of the 2015 Code of Practice states that ‘the SENCO has an important role to play with the headteacher and governing body, in determining the strategic development of SEN policy and provision in the school’ (DfE/DoH, 2015, p.108). Nonetheless, following a Freedom of Information request to the DfE, Dobson (2019, p. 455) found that less than 39% of SENCOs in England held a senior leadership role.

In 2019, the House of Commons Education Select Committee published a report on the experiences of children with special educational needs and disabilities since the 2014 Children and Families Act. In a damning review, the Select Committee summarised that: ‘Let down by failures of implementation, the 2014 reforms have resulted in confusion and at times unlawful practice, bureaucratic nightmares, buck-passing and a lack of accountability, strained resources and adversarial experiences, and ultimately dashed the hopes of many’ (House of Commons Education Committee, 2019, p. 3). Once more, reference was made to the role of the SENCOs over 70 times and alarming practices were reported, including ‘a lack of knowledge about SEND law and local authority procedures which are,
in some cases, abused or taken advantage of’ (House of Commons Education Committee, 2019, p. 20). The committee also testified that ‘we were told that headteachers were putting pressure on SENCOs to make decisions about who to apply for a plan for, because funding for EHCPs (Education, Health and Care Plans) is not sufficient’ (House of Commons Education Committee, 2019, p. 49). In oral evidence, that preceded the report, question 794 raised concerns about ‘a lack of accountability; postcode lottery of provision and a treacle of bureaucracy that the parents have to wade through’ (House of Commons, 2018, HC 968). Given these comments, it is somewhat surprising that many academics have had little to say about the report since its publication.

In 2020, GCSE (General Certificate of Education) and ‘A’ Level examinations (Advanced Level, on which further study rely) did not take place when schools and colleges were in ‘lockdown’ due to the pandemic. One response to this was the publication, by the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ, 2020), of guidelines for SENCOs and assessors around the administration of assessments for the academic year 2020/21. Whilst undoubtedly welcome, the guidance focusses on process rather than the quality of education. As the JCQ is a membership organisation, comprising the eight largest providers of qualifications in the UK, the shift in focus on children falling behind when preparing for formal assessments renders the SENCO as policy actor, with little say over the practices that evolve.

**Conceptualising special educational needs: the theoretical bubble**

Without wanting to oversimplify how SENCOs might conceptualise special educational needs and disability, it could be argued that achieving a postgraduate award in Special Educational Needs Coordination *should* lead to in-depth engagement with the field of disability studies. Although individuals identified as having a special educational need do not necessarily have a disability, the treatment of those with a label of SEN/D can be understood by engaging with disability studies scholarship due to the social, political and cultural aspects of SEN/D (see Barton, 2017, for an overview). Furthermore, it is fair to say that *all* teachers should understand the difference between medical models of disability, that place difference within-person (Atkins, 2016), and social models of disability that recognise structural barriers to inclusion (Barnes, 2017; Oliver, 2017).

A concept central to disability studies is that of ‘othering’. Whilst othering has a long sociological and philosophical history, all educational practitioners will recognise the power structures that lead to judgements of superiority and inferiority between individuals and groups. Yet, although systems that ‘other’ individuals with labels, for example, are easily recognisable, the debate is more nuanced than that. For example, we cannot understand othering without recognising, in the first place, the impact of perceptions of ‘normal’ with which individuals must contend (Anastasiou & Kauffman, 2011). In addition, consideration of what is often termed the dilemma of difference (Norwich, 2008; Terzi, 2014) and grappling with arguments for separate education (see Kauffman & Hallaham, 2005), which, on the surface, can be uncomfortable, forces us to consider what is meant by othering, whether it is about space, place or philosophical position.

The SENCO that unknowingly contributes to such forms of othering can only see this reality when their engagement with theoretical perspectives outweighs their engagement with policy documents. Once this a/theoretical boundary has been crossed, the
SENCO must accept that any consideration of identity, citizenship and belonging raises culturally and politically bounded questions (Peterson & Tudball, 2016).

A middle-ground, so to speak, between those fully conversant with relevant scholarship and those more comfortable with policy-led definitions can be found in the literature that ‘foregrounds micro- and mundane moments in order to make sense of powerful discourses, practices and relations’ (Thomas & Sakellariou, 2018, p. 4). There are numerous international accounts of the lived experiences of those with a label of SEN/D (see Björne, 2020; Deacon et al., 2020; Niind & Strnadova, 2020) that offer accessible explanations beyond those given by the State. Simply put, critiques of practices that shape our identities can enable SENCOs to understand the complex social processes that shape their perceptions of the world.

Another field of study with which SENCOs should engage is that of Inclusive Pedagogy, which is defined, by Florian, as a means to question the ‘intractable problem of individuation’ (Florian, 2017, p. 132). This is an important body of work as the term, inclusive pedagogy, does not, in itself, challenge inequality; in fact, the familiarity of such words might hamper thinking. The point to be taken from Florian’s work is that inclusive pedagogy ‘attends to individual differences between pupils but avoids the marginalisation that can occur when pedagogical responses are designed only with individuals in mind’ (Florian & Beaton, 2018).

In terms of grounding educational practice in critical scholarship, it is of some concern that the number of handbooks and manuals aimed at SENCOs heavily outweighs the number of articles that seek to deconstruct the role. Coupled with the aforementioned Codes of Practice and policy directives, it is unsurprising that SENCOs regularly describe special educational needs in terms of labels and diagnoses (Hallett & Hallett, 2017) rather than individuals oppressed by exclusionary environments (Glazzard, 2016). That labels lead to funding is without question, and critiques of the ‘SEN industry’ have been put forward by Tomlinson (2012, 2017), but a quest for funding, or amended examination arrangements, cannot become the primary driver of provision for individuals categorised as having a special educational need or disability. Perhaps inevitably, empirical studies conducted with SENCOs (such as Curran, 2019; Fitzgerald & Radford, 2020; Hallett & Hallett, 2017) demonstrate tensions around what they believe that they should be doing, rather than what is expected of them in a given environment.

With regard to labels, the latest Code of Practice (DfE/DoH, 2015) presents four categories of need: communication and interaction; cognition and learning; social, emotional and mental health [initially Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties in 1994 and then Behavioural, Emotional and Social Development in 2001]; and, sensory and/or physical need. The example of social, emotional and mental health difficulties offers an illustration of procedural blinkers that block pedagogic reflection to the extent that ‘if there is no alternative discourse, if a particular idea is simply seen as “common sense” then there is a risk that it stops people from thinking at all’ (Biesta, 2016, p. 123).

In the 1994 Code of Practice, the section on Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties mentions the impact of the school environment on behaviour; in this version of the Code of Practice, the focus was on assessment and, although the length of the section does not necessarily indicate depth of thinking, the discussion extended to almost 1000 words including a section on special educational provision. In 2001, a new Code of Practice was published, and the category was renamed ‘Behavioural, Emotional and Social Development’.
Development’. In an albeit shorter section (162 words), continued attention was given to ‘flexible teaching arrangements’ and ‘positive interaction with peers and adults’ (Section 7.60). In this sense, the focus remained on assessment and relationships. In contrast, the category was renamed in the 2015 Code of Practice to ‘Social, Emotional and Mental Health Difficulties’, and in a 141 word section the focus shifted from assessment and relationships to pathologising students, with the introduction of the term ‘disorder’, which was used five times.

It is within this policy context that, in research conducted prior to Covid-19, SENCOs reported frustration around the marginalisation of learners, often stemming from medicalised conceptualisations of special education needs, resulting in teaching staff resisting responsibility for the education of all children (e.g. Carroll et al., 2011; Sakellariadis, 2017), potentially placing the SENCO in an atheoretical bubble. As argued by Skrtic, this phenomenon can be understood culturally by thinking of the standard programs as a paradigm of practice that persists because anomalies are distorted to preserve its validity (Skrtic, 1991, p. 169). If we apply this line of reasoning to contemporary practice in England, it is possible to view marginalisation as one of the paradigms of practice that shapes the educational experiences of staff and students. Where this is the case, anomalies either enable teachers to question the paradigms of practice or distort them to maintain the validity of beliefs and assumptions that might serve to exclude. Such concerns, when complicated with increased bureaucracy around the sensitive subject of formal assessment (Glazzard, 2014), invite some consideration of those who choose to become SENCOs and the roles that they adopt when in post.

The roles adopted by special educational needs coordinators: the professional bubble

In 2005, Kearns published a seminal article on the roles adopted by SENCOs. The five metaphors that he developed were SENCO as: arbiter; rescuer; auditor; collaborator; and, expert. Consideration of this typology has led to debates around the demarcation of roles with some SENCOs reporting that they experienced ‘intense pressure … in terms of “fixing” issues within classes where children with SEND were concerned, as well as expectations from parents to address all difficulties that their children were experiencing with regards to their education’ (Smith & Broomhead, 2019, p. 66). Such comments position the SENCO as potential expert without the means to arbitrate, or seemingly manage, these expectations. In this case, whether parents assumed that the role of the SENCO was to rescue the child is unknown, but the mainstream colleagues certainly appeared to marginalise both the student with special educational needs and the SENCO. Here, the underlying paradigm of practice demonstrated a focus on curriculum delivery over emancipatory forms of learning, and on the difference between those learners that met expected norms, and those who did not.

The complex power relations reported in much of the empirical work around the role of the SENCO indicate the need to understand the motivations of ‘those who are already in the profession who wish to make an “ecological transition” into another more complex school role’ (Dobson & Douglas, 2020, p. 312). For some, the motivation to become a SENCO will stem from the intrinsic desire to be an arbiter, rescuer or expert. For others, the need to audit practice and collaborate across, and beyond, a setting will be the primary
motivation. However, as useful as these metaphors are, the reality is more complex than can be expressed by these terms and, although Kearns never described them as mutually exclusive, some authors have subsequently argued that the roles are nested (Hallett & Hallett, 2017) and others have reconfigured the model based on the experiences of SENCOs in a range of national and educational contexts (Fitzgerald & Radford, 2020; Struyvea et al., 2018).

It is important that SENCOs understand the professional bubbles in which they find themselves. Whether created through self-preservation in uncertain political times or a desire to maintain a sense of expertise (Smith & Broomhead, 2019), the coordination of provision for children with special educational needs can expand, or diminish, the opportunity to be recognised as a pedagogical lead. When expressing frustration, and even despair, about the plethora of demands put upon them by school systems and policy directives, many SENCOs, in the aforementioned studies, also expressed concerns about a movement away from assisting individual children. This is a self-limiting perspective; if SENCOs view their role as one in which they predominantly work with individual children, it is unlikely that they will be viewed as pedagogical experts across the whole community. Alternatively, if the aim is to become a pedagogical lead for the educational provision for all children, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, viewing the role of the SENCO as a means to leadership (as identified by Dobson & Douglas, 2020) might be the more proactive route.

In essence, the typology developed by Kearns (2005), and the subsequent model created by Fitzgerald and Radford (2020), do not seek to disrupt practice, rather, the respective aims of these studies were to make the roles adopted by SENCOs transparent. Whilst an important endeavour, examining and contesting practices in educational settings does not appear to be moving the debate forward. What we need is for SENCOs to think beyond, rather than think differently. When contemplating the ‘beautiful risk of education’ Biesta (2016) argued for ‘careful judgement about the point where complexity reduction turns to unjustifiable and uneducational suppression and where suppression turns to oppression’ (p. 2). Undoubtedly the role of the SENCO is complex and has been described as such across decades and geographies, but the resulting confusion and frustration seems, in England at least, to be leading to a system that increasingly pathologises students who fail to make progress or fit the mould of 21st Century assessment-led schooling.

To return to the work of Dobson and Douglas (2020), it is easy to be cynical about the reasons behind the desire to be promoted to Senior Leadership Teams in schools, as though the more moral stance is to stay in the classroom. However, to take this position is to disavow the motivation behind those who believe that the system cannot be changed from the bottom. Working at the chalk-face does not avoid the trap of the SENCO reaffirming, rather than challenging, the pathologisation of students by focusing on labels and paperwork and on the individuals defined by them. Whilst this would be welcome, and even lauded, in some settings, this behaviour merely perpetuates unjustifiable educational suppression.

In order to disrupt othering and re-describe difference in environments hostile to change, courage must be harnessed to effect change for the benefit of the whole community. Girelli, Bevilacqua & Acquari argue that the leadership potential of the SENCO ‘can only be achieved by going beyond a mere juxtaposition of its functions’
(Girelli et al., 2019, p. 89). That is, whilst the SENCO does have bureaucratic responsibilities, not least to children with special educational needs or disabilities, the sum of these responsibilities does not create a professional who has the potential to lead inclusive pedagogies that stand, if necessary, outside the demands of their institutional environment. Whilst one could view the presupposition in the 2015 Code of Practice that SENCOs should become part of the Senior Leadership Team as a progressive and creative move, the findings of a study conducted by Struyvea et al. (2018) illustrated that ‘SENCOs received the legitimacy to act as teacher leaders … when school principals were willing to release power’ (p. 701).

Arguably, the role of the SENCO, whether officially empowered or not, is to acquire practical wisdom which Cowan argues requires ‘inclusiveness, foresight and decisiveness’ (Cowan, 2017, p. 6). Whilst these characteristics are central to the role of the SENCO, practical wisdom is rarely discussed in the literature around the SENCO as a leader. And yet, as argued by Skrtic, in order to recognise the anomalies in practice, and, as a result, unleash innovation, SENCOs need to be brave enough to ‘expose the silences, inconsistencies, contradictions and incompleteness relative to their grounding assumptions’ (Skrtic, 1991, p. 151); that is, to be a catalyst for thoughtful action. The term catalyst is controversial, here, given that many SENCOs argue that action is predicated on permitting circumstances, such as the degree to which leaders are willing to concede power. However, in order to address anomalies in practice, SENCOs must expose silences so that exclusionary practices, and the underlying assumptions in which they are grounded, are contested where they result in suppression of thought.

Whilst not exhaustive, the literature cited above indicates that there are conditions internal to the SENCO, and conditions external to the SENCO, which can be broadly characterised in three ways: those that stem from the beliefs of individual SENCOs; those imposed by educational environments; and, those dictated at the policy level. These constructs are obviously intertwined and a simple way to begin to untangle them, in order to better understand the challenges facing the SENCO, is by considering social capital, the connections within and between the unavoidable social networks created in schools.

MacBeath (2010) and Szreter (2000) clarify the differences between three forms of social capital: bonding social capital; linking social capital; and, bridging social capital. Bonding social capital relates to a minimal number of ‘dense homogenous networks’ (Murray et al., 2020) such as the Senior Leadership Team who decide policy and direct staff accordingly. Such approaches can lead to hierarchical structures that focus on ‘operational and strategic functions’ (Norwich, 2017, p. 117) over inclusive pedagogical action. For example, teachers may meet to discuss curriculum and teaching assistants may meet to discuss individual children. Where bonding social capital reigns, the SENCO may attempt to bridge each group but may struggle to have a genuine impact.

Linking social capital operates vertically between hierarchical structures, such as Senior Leadership Teams; curriculum leaders; teachers; teaching assistants; parents; and, learners. Clearly, if promoted to a leadership role, the SENCO is well placed to enable linking social capital as an alternative to the silos created by bonding social capital, yet the Select Committee Report (House of Commons Education Committee, 2019) did not offer evidence of such practices. In addition, even though linking social capital may seem to afford lines of communication between different staff groups, it can become a façade that does little to create space for action. The role of the SENCO is not always comfortable but the
imperative to know how to ‘suspend preconception and judgement; to know what they see rather than seeing what they already know’ (MacBeath, 2009, p. 74) is central to the practical wisdom required to act in a morally just manner.

Bridging social capital occurs when social links are less entrenched and ‘outward looking connecting people with others beyond their immediate reference group, opening up new ways of seeing, relating and learning’ (Swaffield & MacBeath, 2009, p. 45). Such approaches enable leadership for learning where learners, parents and educators each have a voice that informs ‘the moral purpose of the school and the extent to which accountability for learning is shared and valued’ (Hallett & Hallett, 2017, p. 50). This form of social capital enables a vision of learning as participation within a distributed model of leadership.

Distributed leadership involves more than one designated leader where cultures evolve that are democratic and collaborative. This is not to say that the headteacher or leadership team of a school do not have specific responsibilities, the point is that educational settings need to rest on democratic and just principles if the staff employed by them are to embrace socially just practices. Interestingly, when conducting research with 92 SENCOs across the province of Trento, Italy, Girelli et al. (2019) found that ‘in the geo-political areas where it was possible to establish and consolidate networks between SENCOs, distributed leadership seems to be timidly looming as a widespread influence’ (p. 103). Therefore, even though the 2015 Code of Practice advocates that the SENCO should become a member of the Senior Leadership Team, the degree to which this makes a difference in practice depends upon the philosophy and courage of the SENCO alongside the cultural expectations of the educational settings.

**Conclusion**

The Coronavirus pandemic has, understandably, raised questions about how and where we educate children and young people, including those with SEN/D. At the time of writing this article, schools in England have been deemed to be relatively stable environments, vaccines are on the horizon and systems for formal examination arrangements are in place. However, the policy rhetoric around educational provision for disabled children has shifted dramatically. In July 2018, the Secretary of State for education stated that:

> We know there has been a steady movement of children with special educational needs out of mainstream schools and into specialist provision, alternative provision and home education. At the same time, rates of exclusion have begun to rise after a period of having calmed down. And I hear too many stories about off-rolling, I want to be clear right now: this is not okay. SEND pupils are not someone else’s problem. Every school is a school for pupils with SEND; and every teacher is a teacher of SEND pupils. (ALLFIE, 2018)

Almost exactly two years later, a plan to build 35 new special schools was announced by a new Secretary of State for Education who commented that:

> We need to be more ambitious for these children, which is why we are delivering on this Government’s commitment to deliver more school places for children with complex special educational needs. This will give these young people the opportunity they deserve for tailored support in a school that responds to their individual needs, making them confident learners and engaged students. (Gov.UK, 2020)
This ideological shift is a stark reminder that ‘the institutional practice of special education (and the very notion of student disability) is an artefact of the functionalist quest for rationality, order and certainty in the field of education, a quest that is both intensified and legitimised by the institutional practice of educational administration (Skrtic, 1991, p. 153). Under these circumstances, ‘thinking outside territorialising lines is vital work to be undertaken’ Van de Putte, et al. (2018, p. 898) for teachers to see themselves as teachers of all children, not just those that fit a particular profile. Therefore, unless SENCOs break free from the aetheoretical bubble in which many are trapped, harmful ideological shifts, shaped by policy turbulence, can become insurmountable.

Whilst this article is written from the perspective of the English policy context, the international literature does not contradict the concerns raised here; nor are these problems new. Given that frustration around ‘wicked problems’ in the field of special education have been articulated for a number of years (Armstrong, 2017; Swenson & Lakin, 2014), those charged with coordinating provision for children and young people with SEN/D need to rethink practice. Perhaps the Coronavirus pandemic will create space and opportunities for those with the courage to think beyond, rather than think differently.

Disclosure statement

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Notes on contributor

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