In-school factors associated with the SENCO role that influence the rate of referral to the RTLB service.

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Declaration

I certify that the thesis entitled “In-school factors associated with the SENCO role influencing the rate of referral to the RTLB service” and submitted as part of the degree of Master of Educational Psychology is the result of my own work, except where otherwise acknowledged, and that this research paper (or part of the same) has not been submitted for any other degree to any other university or institution..

Signed _____

Dated_____

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Abstract

This research investigates what responsibilities and supports allocated to the Special Education Needs Coordinator (SENCO) are associated with lower referral rates to the Resource Teacher: Learning and Behaviour (RTLB) service. A SENCO that is referring at a lower rate will allocate less time to collaboration and liaison with RTLB and therefore will have more time to allocate to other tasks that can be supporting students with special education needs (SWSEN). This research compares the results from a survey of the responsibilities and supports for SENCO within 20 primary schools to the rate of referral to RTLB. The SENCO indicated what they considered influenced whether a student was referred to RTLB. Rates of referral less than the mean for the 20 schools were associated with experienced SENCO and SENCO that were part of a team referral process. The literature supports SENCO having a leadership role but this research shows that the SENCO who are part of a school management team do not always have influence or control of key special education decisions. The responsibility that was most frequently given a high priority by SENCO was liaison with external agencies. Experienced SENCO more frequently indicated that the most important factor influencing whether a referral was made to RTLB was the effect of the student on the classroom, which is an observation supported by literature on referral rates of boys to special education services. This research indicates that schools could decrease the amount of SENCO release time used for collaboration with RTLB by appointing an experienced SENCO and providing a team to support the SENCO in the referral process.

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Glossary

ERO	Education Review Office
FTTE	Full Time Teacher Equivalent
GEP	Group Education Plan
ILST	Institution-Level Support Team
IAT	Intervention Assistance Team
IEP	Individual Education Plan
IWS	Intensive Wraparound Service
IYT	Incredible Years: Teacher
LSC	Learning Support Coordinator
MLD	Moderate Learning Difficulties
MoE	Ministry of Education
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
ORS	On-going Resourcing Scheme
PB4L	Positive Behaviour for Learning
RTLB	Resource Teacher: Learning and Behaviour
SAER	Students Educational Risk team
SEG	Special Education Grant
SENCO	Special Education Needs Coordinator
SWSEN	Student with special education needs

Introduction

The New Zealand Special Education Needs Coordinator (SENCO) is a teacher who co-ordinates the support within a primary or secondary school for students with special education needs (SWSEN). The coordination of the support for SWSEN may involve liaison with parents and itinerant special education teachers, professional development for teaching staff, management of teacher aides, and collaborative processes to develop plans to support SWSEN. There is no job description, set of guidelines, training or staffing allocation provided for the SENCO role by the Ministry of Education. The responsibilities of the SENCO and the support for the role can therefore vary between schools. Therefore, it would be beneficial to know what variations in responsibilities and supports could assist the SENCO to make the most effective use of their time to support SWSEN.

Collaboration with external agencies is an effective but time consuming process that often involves the SENCO. It would be useful to know what responsibilities and supports for the SENCO result in schools having a lower referral rate to external agencies to support SWSEN. By reducing the SENCO time allocated to collaborative processes to the minimum required to support SWSEN the SENCO will be able to allocate more time to other special education responsibilities. Schools can make referrals to external agencies such as the Resource Teacher: Learning and Behaviour (RTLB) service to get extra support for SWSEN. The RTLB are itinerant teachers with postgraduate training in special education. The RTLB plan an intervention for a student through a collaborative process that involves the student, the student's family, and selected school staff. This research examined variation between schools of the rate at which students are referred to RTLB. This research investigated which responsibilities and supports allocated for the SENCO are associated with a lower rate of referral to the RTLB service.

A high referral rate to RTLB and other external agencies may be viewed as a method for a school to increase access to external resources. The negative consequences of a high referral rate need to be considered by the management of the school. Accessing external agencies requires more collaborative meetings that consume SENCO release time. A high number of referrals to external agencies will also increase the complexity of the liaison and coordination functions of the SENCO.

Coordinating diaries of multiple external agencies increases the possibility of delays to planning processes as the SENCO attempts to get all the agencies, parents and class teacher into one room at one time for a meeting.

Schools with a high proportion of SWSEN should have a proportionally higher referral rate. Research using a large sample of schools would reduce the influence of individual schools with a high proportion of SWSEN. The MoE identify that low decile schools have a high proportion of students with delays in literacy and numeracy (Ministry of Education, 2012) and therefore the sample would also have to be from schools over a range of deciles.

Another consideration is that a low referral rate to RTLB may be the result of a school having unsatisfactory systems for the identification of SWSEN. The Education Review Office (ERO) identified that 5% of schools had little knowledge of SWSEN within their school (Education Review Office, 2008). A large sample of schools would reduce the influence of the small proportion of schools that have unsatisfactory systems for identifying SWSEN.

The literature review describes the role of New Zealand special educators with an emphasis on SENCO and RTLB and the context of their work. As there is no prescribed role for a SENCO within New Zealand, the literature review includes an outline of key themes from international examples about the role of school based special educators. The advantages and disadvantages of collaboration are discussed. Another focus was to gain an understanding of where responsibilities are prioritized by New Zealand SENCO. This understanding was investigated by using a section of a survey for collecting data on the responsibilities allocated a high priority by SENCO in the UK (Cole, 2005). In order to examine the full range of responsibilities associated with the SENCO role the use of teacher aides in classes is discussed. As this research was analysing the rate of referral of SWSEN to an external agency, the three paradigms associated with the identification of SWSEN and the influences on the identification process are described. Further, components of the nation-wide PB4L programme are described as they may influence the number of students that are referred to RTLB.

Literature Review

Inclusion

The Ministry of Education (MoE) intends to have all New Zealand schools inclusive by 2014 (Ministry of Education, 2011b). The Ministry of Education has planned actions to help move schools towards that goal, such as use of a web based resource to help schools to question and develop their inclusive practices. It has also developed the Intensive Wraparound Service (IWS) to work with students who may have previously been referred to a special school. Finding agreement on what inclusion may be within a school has been acknowledged as difficult (Terzi, 2010). The Ministry of Education currently describes inclusive education as "the full participation and achievement of all learners" (Ministry of Education, 2012b, p1). New Zealand's move to inclusion in education started with the 1989 amendment of the Education Act so that every New Zealand child had the right to access mainstream education (Neilson, 2005). In the 1996 budget, central government built on that change with the introduction of the Special Education 2000 policy, which aimed to develop a world class inclusive education system where enhanced resourcing would achieve better outcomes for children with special needs (Ministry of Education, 2013c, 2013d). By 2010 only half the schools reviewed by the Education Review Office (ERO) could be described as inclusive (Education Review Office, 2010) and New Zealand had followed the international trend of an increasing number of children being enrolled in special schools (Higgins, MacArthur, & Morton, 2008). The international trend towards increased special education school enrolments has been attributed to the increased knowledge of special education professionals, raised awareness of special education needs and improved diagnostic tools (Richardson & Powell, 2011).

Stronger inclusive practice is found where there is more centralised control of education but Richardson and Powell (2011) highlight that the degree of decentralization of general education may not apply to the same extent within the special education system. Special education within New Zealand has a high degree of devolution. For example, in 2012 $504 million were allocated for special education in New Zealand, with $40.169 million allocated for between 7,650 and 8,050 children and young people eligible for the On-going Resourcing Scheme

(ORS) (Ministry of Education, 2011b). There is at least 0.1 Full Time Teacher Equivalent (FTTE) staffing allocated to a school for specialist teacher time for each child eligible for ORS. This provides approximately 800 specialist teachers to schools to support these children, but there is no requirement for these teachers to have any specialist training and no formal link to Ministry of Education staff oversight other than through the Individual Education Plan (IEP) process.

Service models

Successful inclusion requires the provision of appropriate supports (Giangreco, 2011) which requires a system for allocation. Three different allocation models have been described which include (Mitchell, 2010) demand driven where funding is provided for an individual student identified as meeting established criteria; supply driven, where funding is allocated according to a criteria such as census data and capped to a pre-determined percentage of the population; and an output model which is a theoretical model where schools are funded according to tasks achieved. The demand model tends to work against inclusion. This model tends to drive an increasing demand for psychometric assessments to access funding with a subsequent increase in the rate of identification of students with needs (Finlay, Mejia, & Ricketts, 2009). There is little evidence that this approach leads to differentiation of the curriculum to help the child to be more included (Brown & Moore, 2011). The supply model increased administrative costs and did not lower expenditure or the demand for special education enrolments (Mitchell, 2010).

New Zealand offers two of the service provision options described by Mitchell (2010) depending on the needs of the students and the individual school special education policy. The service provision options are a mix of funding and specialists who may work one on one with a student or provide specialist knowledge. These service provision options include:

1. Demand driven such as the provision of support to students supported through ORS or Supplementary Learning Support. A child with high or very high needs who meets the criteria for ORS may be supported by one or more of the 817 MoE special education staff such as speech language therapists, psychologists, and occupational therapists (Ministry of Education, 2010b, 2011b). For children to access ORS the completed four page application is

assessed by three experienced special education staff at the MoE National Office. Until the end of 2012 students who met criteria were able to access the Supplementary Learning Support service, but the limited placements available with the service at times resulted in students going on to a waiting list. This service provided access to a teacher for one on one support for approximately half a day a week for a child whose high needs did not meet the criteria for ORS (Ministry of Education, 2010c).

2. Supply driven such as the number of RTLB allocated to clusters and the allocation of Special Education Grant (SEG) to schools based on the decile rating of schools. Children described as having moderate needs may access the itinerant Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour (RTLB) service. Access is by referral to a local cluster of RTLB employed by a school. The RTLB can access Learning Support Funding to support interventions for student on RTLB registers. Special Education Grant is provided directly to schools so they can develop their own initiatives to meet the needs of their children with moderate needs (Ministry of Education, 1998). Allocation of this funding within the school is based on the schools own special needs policy. SEG is allocated to schools according to their decile rating. At the early stages of the introduction of Special Education 2000 policy the allocation per student on the school roll for decile 10 schools was $25 per student and increasing to $53 for decile 1 schools (Davies, 2000).

Special Education 2000 policy has been described as a funding policy rather than one about professional practice (Coleman, 2011). Aspects of the funding are in a form that would tend to drive the system towards the less inclusive medical model rather than a more inclusive ecological model of intervention. For example, within this inclusive policy still resides the anomaly of special schools albeit at a lower level than in other countries such as the UK (Brown & Moore, 2011; McMenamin, 2011).

New Zealand special education teachers

New Zealand special education has a mix of centralised and local resource allocation models with itinerant specialists working in schools, but lacking a national policy for development of trained and centrally funded special education teachers based in each school. Often the only school based teacher of children with special education needs who has specialist training for their role is the Reading Recovery teacher. This service was provided in 64.1% of eligible schools (Tunmer, Chapman, Greaney, Prochnow, & Arrow, 2013) and is used with children with a reading ability in the lowest 20% for their school (Ministry of Education, 2013b). This service is not provided through special education funding, but schools may use their SEG to increase the service (Ministry of Education, 1998, p2).

The importance of the SENCO has been reported on by ERO and clearly indicated through the appointment of SENCO by schools. Wylie proposed the establishment of a SENCO position in each school with the need for "hands on" staff as well as the itinerant services to support students with special needs (Wylie, 2000). New Zealand schools have moved towards the establishment of SENCO positions despite the lack of recognition of the position. A survey of 254 schools in New Zealand found 80% had a designated SENCO (Education Review Office, 2012). The SENCO position has also been recognized as being important in the development of inclusive practice. The Education Review Office describes the SENCO as being "pivotal for ensuring that students with high needs have the learning programmes and support they need to achieve at school" (Education Review Office, 2010, p.13). Through a later review ERO found schools that had not achieved a sufficient level of inclusion needed to review the effectiveness of their SENCO role, and that an "effective SENCO would, in many cases, raise these schools into the mostly inclusive category" (Education Review Office, 2013, p.1).

The decision as to whether to appoint a SENCO in New Zealand is at the discretion of the school (Mitchell, Morton, & Hornby, 2010). The lack of official recognition of New Zealand SENCO is in contrast to SENCO in the UK where the position is recognized within legislation. The New Zealand SENCO role is not stated in the new IEP guidelines or information about the government's new vision for special education "Success for all – every school every child" (Ministry of

Education, 2010c, 2011a, 2011b). The role only achieves a brief mention in advice to Boards of Trustees (Ministry of Education, 2012) where there is official recognition of school responsibilities for coordination, collaboration and identification of children with special needs, but there is no requirement for training of specialist staff to achieve those tasks. This is evidence of the continued devolution of special education in New Zealand.

There are few descriptions of the role of the New Zealand SENCO. Russell (2013) describes the attributes of a New Zealand SENCO as including being an empathetic experienced teacher with very good knowledge of assessment techniques and interventions, management skills, a clear and effective communicator, and with confidence in providing professional development for staff. Mentis et al. (2005) specifically mentions a guiding role of the coordinator for other teachers about inclusive practice. In the latter Mentis et al. (2005) also describes a wider role, one that takes inclusion out into the community. Russell lists possible roles of the SENCO with teacher aides including involvement in recruitment, appraisal, mentoring, administration, and training. These aspects of the coordinator's role are contingent on how much authority has been passed to the SENCO and their place in school leadership. Russell described SENCO involvement in management as being part of planning, review and policy development. This is supported by Mentis et al. (2005) portraying how policy development influences the essential collaboration processes for inclusion which in turn changes practice. ERO were quite explicit in their description of the SENCO role as being one of leadership, stating that "… the most important roles requiring an experienced and able leader is that of the SENCO" (Education Review Office, 2010, p.13). These descriptions fit with earlier suggestions of Wylie (2000) about the role of a SENCO, which included providing professional development to teachers, managing resources and having knowledge of other agency support that may be available.

The New Zealand SENCO role is often held by teachers with considerable teaching experience; some have leadership functions and may be part of school management teams. Of the participants in the study by Collinson (2011) 95% had more than 10 years teaching experience and three were the Head of Learning Support in secondary schools. Storer (2002) reported on the roles, responsibilities, experience, training and school support for 160 SENCO across a range of New

Zealand schools, including secondary and area schools (Storer, 2002). A senior management position was held by 46% of the SENCO that responded but 16% of the total respondents were also the Principal. There was a leadership responsibility amongst the SENCO with 81% reporting their involvement in the supervision and timetabling of teacher aides and 61% were also appraising teacher aides. Budgeting and prioritizing the Special Education Grant was another responsibility reported by 79% of SENCO. If the Principals responding in the survey were not considered, over half the SENCO were reporting some management responsibility. The SENCO were experienced teachers with 86% having 10 or more years within the profession and 62% with experience of more than five years in special education.

There is no training requirement for SENCO. Storer (2002) described only 35% of SENCO who responded to her survey had undertaken training in special education. Collinson (2011) however described a professional development programme for SENCO coordinated by RTLB in a rural community and supported by funding from the Ministry of Education.

There is variation in the provision of release time to New Zealand SENCO. A quarter of the SENCO that responded to Storer (2002) had no time allocation for their role and a further 38% had between one and four hours. Only 29% of SENCO surveyed by Collinson (2011) had release time prior to an intervention funded by the Ministry of Education, but the proportion with release time increased to 100% post intervention. The variation in the provision of release time may indicate differences in the ability of schools to fund the position. Small schools may lack the funding or flexibility in staffing allocation to make it possible to fund release time. There may be a systemic problem providing the release time that is not related to funding. The intervention studied by Collinson (2011) provided 4 days of release time per term for each SENCO, but SENCO found that the level of release time was too disruptive to their classroom teaching programme and the provision of release time was eventually decreased.

SENCO work closely with resource teachers such as RTLB (Education Review Office, 2008) and RTLB have commented that they can work more effectively in a school when there is a SENCO appointed (Collinson, 2011). Schools and teachers are supported by RTLB to meet the needs of Year 1 to 10

students with moderate learning and behaviour needs. The RTLB service was established in 1999 and is allocated approximately $73 million annually with 799 individual RTLB. (Education Review Office, 2009). The RTLB have been trained to work in an ecological, collaborative problem solving model (Hill & Brown, 2011; Thomson et al., 2003). The RTLB Toolkit for professional practice refers to students who meet "criteria for receiving service" (Ministry of Education, 2011c, p.35), but neither the current toolkit for RTLB professional practice or management, nor the Ministry of Education webpage about the service specify criteria for accessing the service. The previous toolkit described RTLB supporting students with moderate needs for whom the school required additional resources (Ministry of Education, 2007). Each cluster was required to have a procedure to close long term cases so the service had the capacity to accept further referrals (Ministry of Education, 2007), and the service was considered a short term support of usually less than a year for a student. Initially students with moderate special education needs were described as 4 to 6% of the school population (Prochnow, Kearney, & Caroll-Lind, 2000). The guidance from RTLB Toolkits about identifying children who should be referred to the service has been more specific about who was not eligible for the service, rather than who should be referred.

The Education Review Office (2008) reported that only 60% of primary schools were referring to the RTLB service. Nationally the RTLB service had poor management structures that resulted in less than half the clusters adhering to policy. Only 62% of RTLB clusters surveyed by ERO had good relationships within the cluster and with schools (Education Review Office, 2009). Teachers were looking for a "hands on" function that conflicted with the RTLB itinerant model (Massey University College of Education, 2001). ERO identified problems with equity of access to the service in half the clusters. SENCO complained about the need for re-referral of students. In a few clusters a lack of trust between school personal and RTLB was evident through earlier evaluations which showed the credibility of the service varied (Wylie, 2000). There was variation in the perception of the role between secondary and primary sectors. Further, individual teacher descriptions of the service ranged from "lifeline" to "utter farce" (Massey University College of Education, 2001). Evidence of the impact of the service on student achievement ranged from substantial evidence in 20% of clusters to 37.5% that could show little

or no evidence (Education Review Office, 2004). In 2012 the Ministry of Education put in place a new management structure for the RTLB service as part of the Ministry of Education 2011 Special Education Business plan to address some of the deficiencies in the service identified by ERO. One of the success indicators of the transformation will be that feedback from schools will show that RTLB are "a key contributor to the educational achievement and retention of students with additional learning and behaviour needs" (Ministry of Education, 2011b, p.13).

To summarize, New Zealand schools access a complex special education system where the provision of trained special education teachers is by itinerant services. The majority of schools now have SENCO who are experienced teachers with a key role in supporting SWSEN and inclusion. There is no prescribed team structure, training or documentation recommending responsibilities and procedures for the SENCO role. The importance of a leadership role for the SENCO has been suggested by ERO and recognized in the few descriptions of the New Zealand SENCO role. The provision of release time for special educators shows considerable variation in New Zealand. The RTLB service is one of the itinerant trained special education services that schools can make a referral to access support for SWSEN, but the RTLB required a new management structure to improve compliance with policy and provision of service. Poor management structures have contributed to a loss of school confidence in RTLB services.

International examples of special education teachers based within schools

In an inclusive setting the general classroom teacher trying to meet the needs of SWSEN will often require extra support and this can be provided in a number of different ways. Mitchell has described the range of support offered across 23 European countries (Mitchell, 2010). The supports included outside agencies, in-school specialist staff, and assistance from teachers based in specialist schools. The majority of countries used at least two of these options. Specialist teacher roles within schools varied from remedial work with individuals to coordination of services and improving classroom practice.

Where special educators are based in schools the literature describes the use of teams that include the special educator to meet the needs of SWSEN. Western Australian schools use a coordination role to improve school practice as

demonstrated by the Learning Support Coordinators (LSC). Learning Support Teams are established within a school by the LSC with a focus on teachers and raising the ability of teachers to meet the needs of students with diverse learning needs (Department of Education and Training, 2008). Within Western Australian schools there may be other teams that are focused on meeting the needs of SWSEN, such as the Students Educational Risk team (SAER). The focus of a SAER team is the identification of SWSEN and the coordination of the support for these students (Department of Education and Training, 2008). The SAER team may include school administrators, year group coordinator and other specialist staff such as the LSC. Mitchell (2010) describes South African practices that use a team approach to coordinate services across the whole school with a dedicated coordinator and the support of the senior leadership team. The South African Institution-level Support Team (ILST) work with teachers to plan support for the 10% of learners who require additional support within the classroom (Department of Education, 2008). The ILST has a broad membership with the suggested team members to include specialist educators, school management, educators, non-educator staff of the school and senior learner representatives to offer peer support (Department of Education, 2008). Burns (1999) study of 25 elementary schools in the United States reported Intervention Assistance Teams (IAT) using special education personnel had a significantly lower rate of referral for special education assessments and a high rate of retention of SWSEN within their school. The referral rates reported by Burns were expressed as the chance of being referred which allowed for the differences in school rolls. The use of collaborative teams to support SWSEN have been described as having the following advantages: builds trust, uses the range of expertise within the school, there are opportunities for developing teaching and learning, coordination of support, sharing the role of developing and implementing plans, and the shared responsibility increases accountability (Department of Education and Training, 2008).

A leadership role for special educators is described within the literature. The study by York-Barr et al. (2005) of special educators that had been identified by administrators and parents as highly effective, found that these special educators were coordinators of many adults and resources across a complex environment. Their dominant role was not working with a small group of students in a resource

room. That function may have been a component of their work, but predominantly the special educator's role required skills in instruction and assessment, interpersonal communication skills, management and leadership (York-Barr et al., 2005). The LSC role in Western Australia has a leadership role and school administrators are required to provide sufficient time for collaboration with staff and parents. All state schools in Western Australia are entitled to between 0.1 and 0.3 of a full time teacher for this role, depending on size and need (Department of Education and Training, 2008).The LSC is described as supporting their teaching colleagues with a professional development focus, increasing inclusive practice, using collaboration and working with parents. The role of the SENCO in the UK is a role officially described as having liaison, management, and oversight functions since at least 2001 with the introduction of the Special Education Needs Code of Practice (Department for Education and Science, 2001b), and the code is described as explicitly linking leadership to the SENCO (Layton, 2005). Pearson (2008) indicated that 68.4% of the UK primary SENCO responding to her survey were part of the senior management team. The UK legislation around the SENCO role however still allows schools to decide the function of the SENCO, with the school governance left with responsibility for meeting the needs of children with special education needs. The legislation is very explicit about what the functions of the SENCO may be, including the "selecting, supervising and training of learning support assistants" (Department for Children Schools and Families, 2008, p3), which shows an intent that this role should have a management function. The UK SENCO role however is not uniform across schools with respect to their management functions, qualifications, and commitment to the role (Pearson, 2008).

The school leadership and culture were identified as important influences on the special educator's ability to fulfil their role (Cole, 2005; Cowne, 2005; York-Barr et al., 2005). The survey by Layton (2005) of UK primary and secondary SENCO identified that SENCO cited the biggest barrier to promoting inclusion in their schools was not being part of senior leadership. Layton describes school leadership that did "not invest appropriately in their SENCO" (Layton, 2005, p.59) with evidence of this being schools where SENCO have limited control over policies and budgets. Where there was support for the SENCO role by management SENCO had "more time, more support, more space and more status" (Cole, 2005, p.299). The

provision of time to SENCO to fulfil their role varied from Cowne's (2005) survey of 179 London SENCO with 95% having release time, Cole's (2005) survey indicating 67% with release time, and a survey by Crowther et al. (2001) in the north-east of England where only 35% had release time.

Requiring special educators in schools to be trained and with centrally prescribed responsibilities and systems is described within the literature for the UK and Western Australia. Schools in the UK have been required to appoint a SENCO since 1994 (Pearson, 2008). The provision of the Special Education Needs Code of Practice for SENCO in the UK has resulted in concerns from SENCO about increased bureaucracy (Crowther, Dyson, & Millward, 2001) and the potential for parental litigation regarding school compliance (Cole, 2005). Since 2008 UK SENCO have had five key legal responsibilities, with a further eight responsibilities listed specifically about children on their register (Department for Children Schools and Families, 2008). Since 2009 SENCO in the UK must complete the National Award for Special Education Needs Co-ordination, which is a masters level qualification (Department for Children Schools and Families, 2009; Department of Education, 2013). The Learning Support Coordinators in Western Australia are supported through a training programme that can be face to face or online plus a source book that outlines their role and how the LSC role fits within historical, international and national policy development.

In summary literature about international examples of special education teachers based in schools indicate the following themes:

a. Special educators work within a team structure with a dedicated coordinator.

b. Special educators have a leadership role.

c. There is provision of special education training with centrally prescribed roles and responsibilities.

d. School leadership support for the role is important.

Collaboration

Collaborative teamwork has been highlighted as a key component of practice for those working within an ecological approach to achieve an inclusive system (Annan, 2005; Ministry of Education, 2003, 2011c; Thomson et al., 2003). Collaborative processes have been found to improve the accuracy of special education referrals, and participants in collaborative processes achieve more positive outcomes than professionals working alone (Mitchell, 2008). An example of collaborative consultation within special education is the Individual Education Plan (IEP) process where the family / whānau and professionals work together to develop agreed goals and plans to support the whole child (Mentis, Quinn, & Ryba, 2005).

The building block of an inclusive education system is an inclusive classroom. The ability of collaboration to change classroom practice is the reason Mitchell (2010) discussed its necessity if inclusion was to be achieved. Collaboration was therefore a major component of the new IEP guidelines developed to support all New Zealand schools moving towards inclusion (Ministry of Education, 2011a; Mitchell, 2010). An effective IEP develops goals and actions that can and will be incorporated back into the planning for the classroom (Clark, 2000; Frankl, 2005).

Not every SWSEN needs an IEP so that their needs are met. School and classroom strategies will meet the needs of many SWSEN (Ministry of Education, 2011a). The Group Education Plan (GEP) is an example of a process that recognizes that individual SWSEN can have their needs met through planning that is not individualized. The use of GEPs has been suggested in the SENCO Toolkit from the UK and can be used where a group of students within a school have similar targets that enable the use of similar interventions (Department for Education and Science, 2001; Frankl, 2005). Frankl (2005) questioned the effectiveness of the collaborative process when there are too many IEPs. Frankl (2005) described a school with too many IEPs as having an increased workload for the SENCO and will lead to the development of complex systems so the IEP review processes could be maintained. Frankl (2005) advocates the use of GEPs when appropriate to try and reduce the number of IEPs.

Collaboration is a process that is bringing people together that need to reach a common understanding of what needs to be achieved and that process can be

difficult and time consuming. Fraser makes the interesting observation that collaboration is not a partnership, as that description may indicate choice in the relationship which is often not the case when parents and professionals have to come together to support a child (Fraser, 2005). The process also has to be managed so one individual is not dominant (Giangreco, 2011). Such teamwork is not always achieved and can be challenging for the professionals involved (Mitchell et al., 2010). These statements about factors that need to be considered in the collaborative process indicate that managing the relationships within such a process can be difficult. Families may also require extra support so they can effectively participate in the process. The Ministry of Education (2011a) suggest the school may need to consider that families may need assistance with transport or childcare to participate in an IEP. Organizing child care and transport would increase the complexity of the liaison process.

The need for time to carry out the collaborative process is an important consideration. Finding the time so everyone in the team can meet during the school day can be difficult (Wylie, 2000) and that is why special educators in the United States indicated that time to collaborate was one of their greatest resource needs (York-Barr, Sommerness, Duke, & Ghere, 2005). A recommendation from the Ministry of Education (2011a) is that regular meetings or home visits may be methods for helping maintain effective relationships to support collaborative processes, but these activities will require an allocation of time by the professionals involved.

In summary collaboration is an important component of an inclusive ecological practice as it can change what happens within the classroom. The collaborative process can be challenging to coordinate and can be demanding on time, therefore too many IEPs may not be effective. The SENCO can support SWSEN through processes that assist many students at once.

Cole's study of UK SENCO

Cole's (2005) UK study was based on a self-selected survey of 59 SENCO using questionnaires focused predominantly on their perceptions, and these were followed by open interviews of 12 individuals. The questionnaire looked at 10 main areas, with one being key responsibilities from the 2001 Code of Practice. With the

latter area the SENCO were asked to indicate the level of priority as low, moderate or high for each of the following key responsibilities:

a. Day to day operation of the special education needs policy.
b. Liaising with and advising fellow teachers.
c. Managing teachers and support assistants of SWSEN.
d. Co-ordinating provision for pupils with special education needs.
e. Overseeing the records of pupils with special education needs.
f. Liaising with parents of pupils with special education needs.
g. Contributing to the in-service training of staff.
h. Liaising with external agencies.

(Cole, 2005)

The highest priorities were given to liaising with parents, coordinating provision for pupils, and liaising with external agencies. Cole commented on the fear of many SENCO about the potential for litigation by parents if something was missed, indicating why liaison with parents was such a high priority. This is within a context where there is legislation about the responsibility of schools for meeting the needs of SWSEN. Adding to the complexity of the role is Cole's description of UK polices that use competitive models based on performance indicators and parental choice, which run counter to inclusion especially for children with an emotional behavioural disorder.

Cole suggested the SENCO needs the support to allow them to question school values and to advocate for those deeper changes that are needed for inclusion. Cole describes this as a SENCO within senior management with responsibility for inclusion, and involved in the financial decision making of the school.

The use of teacher aides in special education

Teacher aides are frequently used within schools to support SWSEN. At the start of Special Education 2000 an investigation of inclusive practice by Prochnow et al. (2000) indicated that teacher aides were a support frequently requested and utilized by teachers to support SWSEN. The importance of teacher aides to special education programmes in schools can be demonstrated by the funding allocated to

provide teacher aide support in schools. For example there was an allocation in 2009 / 2010 of $64 million for teacher aides to support students eligible for ORS (Office of the Auditor General, 2009) and the number of teacher aides provided to schools through MoE programmes was increased by 25% through allocating an extra $4.4 million over four years in the 2010 Budget (Ministry of Education, 2010a). Management of valuable resources such as teacher aides would therefore be a key leadership role within the special education programme of a school.

Special education management is a key role for the appropriate use of teacher aides. The demand for teacher aides may be supported by one study indicating that the presence of a teacher aide in a class increased pupil and teacher attention to work (Blatchford, Russell, Bassett, Brown, & Martin, 2004), but this UK study however also showed that teacher aides had an increasing role in the direct teaching of students. If the less qualified person in the room is involved in the teaching process then supervision of this assistant will be an important consideration. Teachers and their assistants however had difficulties in finding the time for planning together and the exchange of feedback. Blatchford et al. (2004) also noted the fragmented nature of teacher aide distribution impacted on their effectiveness and job satisfaction.

The frequent use of teacher aides and the guidance required for the appropriate use of teacher aides highlight the need for special education leadership within schools. The leadership role that a SENCO can have with respect to the use of teacher aides demonstrates just one of the responsibilities that a SENCO can undertake to support SWSEN within a school.

Identification of students with special education needs (SWSEN)

Most countries would have a mix of the three major paradigms associated with the identification of SWSEN as described by Mitchell: the psycho-medical, the socio-political, and the organisational paradigms (Mitchell, 2010). The psycho-medical paradigm identifies that a deficit exists within the child, using diagnostic tools such as cognitive assessments. The requirement for cognitive assessments to access a special class placement in New Zealand was removed in 1986 (Dunn & Sotiri, 2005), but is part of the present requirement for accessing special assessment conditions in the National Certificate of Educational Achievement due to learning difficulties (New Zealand Qualifications Authority, 2013). The socio-political

paradigm asserts that there are structures within the education system that reflect inequalities within the wider society. This may result in differential treatment of students that reinforce the inequalities. The organisational paradigm identifies that the educational environment is not meeting the student's needs, and that it is this environment that needs to change. The relevance of this paradigm is highlighted by the assertion by Ellis and Tod that the identification of SWSEN in the UK can vary between schools and classes (Ellis & Tod, 2012).

Internationally the identification of SWSEN appears complex due to variations between countries and the ongoing development of systems within countries. The number of categories used for identifying SWSEN vary, from 17 in Belgium (Flemish), the 15 in the U.S., to 1 in England and Wales (Richardson & Powell, 2011). In the U.S. there are categories that have been described as being the result of advocacy and show little relationship to improved instruction (Mitchell, 2010). In Belgium the development of a matrix to determine more systematically which students were SWSEN took a wider view of the child than the previous medical focus model (Lebeer et al., 2010). This was an attempt to reduce the trend for referral of students to the eight different types of special schools in Belgium, where a child gains entry based on their category. One dilemma was how to cater for a child that meets the criteria for more than one category. This matrix resulted in more children being identified as SWSEN but provided a categorising of student according to education needs rather than medical deficiencies. Mitchell (2010) describes developments against the use of categories in countries such as Sweden. A reduction in the use of categories in Sweden has resulted in a reduction in the use of psychometric testing. The OECD has developed a three category system to improve inter-country comparison of data. The three categories are:

A. Children with disabilities.
B. Children with learning or behaviour difficulties.
C. Children with disadvantages.

(OECD, 2007; Richardson & Powell, 2011)

SENCO REFERRING TO RTLB

In the devolved New Zealand system the responsibility for identifying SWSEN is with the Board of Trustees of each school. The advice to Boards of Trustees from MoE as to which students should be on the school's special needs register indicate three categories:

A. Learners working at or above the curriculum level for their age.
   These children require specific adaptations or teaching within the classroom to enable them to access the curriculum. Examples will be children with hearing or eyesight loss.
B. Learners working at level one of the curriculum for most or all of their schooling. These children may be entitled to support through ORS. Previously students may have accessed support from a Supplementary Learning Support teacher. The latter service has been discontinued and is now provided by RTLB.
C. Learners struggling to work at the curriculum level for their age.
   These students need extra support which could include access to external special education resources and advice.

(Ministry of Education, 2012)

These categories are very broad and therefore opinions about which students should be recorded on the special needs register may vary between schools. The Board of Trustees annual plan for the school must identify what will be done to achieve better outcomes for the children identified, when it will be done, and who will coordinate the work. The initial step of identification is not reliable in New Zealand. Only 75% of New Zealand schools have been found to be able to reliably identify students at risk of underachieving (Education Review Office, 2008).

There is no defined proportion of SWSEN that a SENCO should be trying to identify within their school. A comparison of the proportion of SWSEN between countries is difficult due to these variations in systems for identifying SWSEN. The proportion of all students identified as SWSEN varies between countries, from Finland at 36.6%, the U.S. 13.5%, and the UK 2.9%. Teacher identification of students who required additional support during the early years of New Zealand's SE2000 policy indicated a proportion of 22% (Prochnow et al., 2000).

To summarize the international range of SWSEN categories and the developments associated with those categories indicate the complexity of identifying SWSEN. With the devolved New Zealand education system and the three broad categories of SWSEN provided by MoE the method used to identify SWSEN may vary between schools. The New Zealand SENCO therefore has a complex role identifying who should be considered a SWSEN within their school.

Influences on the identification of SWSEN

The identification of SWSEN can be influenced by the skill level of teaching staff. The ERO report on the support for children with high needs showed that not all school staff were effective at applying for resources from government and non-government agencies (Education Review Office, 2010). ERO indicated that this meant support for children was based on the quality of applications rather than the needs of the child. Ellis and Tod (2012) quoted findings from a 2010 review of special education needs in the UK that found areas of the country where there was an incentive to increase identification of SWSEN. The increased identification of SWSEN was linked to a school's funding but the review also indicated identification of SWSEN was increased to cover up for poor teaching. A study using vignettes to identify teacher characteristics that influence decisions to seek extra support for students found practicing teachers were more likely than pre-service teachers to seek support of outside agencies. (Green, Shriberg, & Farber, 2008). Green et al. (2008) considered that the lack of experience of pre-service teachers may mean they were not aware of what support the external agencies could offer. Green et al. (2008) considered that training about what support the external agencies could offer may be useful for beginning teachers.

The classroom teacher's perception of whether a referral to an external service will be worthwhile will influence referral patterns. Teachers with stricter standards for behaviour in the classroom referred students with low levels of aggression at a higher rate for special education services, compared to teachers with less strict standards (McIntyre, 1990). McIntyre (1990) found that the opposite occurred when considering the referrals of students with high levels of aggression. These students were referred at a lower rate by teachers with stricter classroom standards. McIntyre's assertion was that once a teacher perceived that the child's

behaviour was highly aggressive and may be categorized as emotionally disturbed then a referral was competing for a much smaller number of places within special education services. Once the teacher perceived that the child was emotionally disturbed they would have known the special education placement opportunities were reduced. The reduced opportunity of being successful with a referral was a disincentive. The less strict teacher would have perceived a smaller gap between the classroom standards of the teacher and the child's behaviour, and therefore didn't perceive they were making a referral that would be categorized as an emotionally disturbed child. The stricter teacher was more likely to reach the conclusion the child was emotionally disturbed and realized that a referral was unlikely to succeed.

The school environment in which the teacher works can influence whether a referral is made for extra support for a student. Uncertainty about whether or not to refer a child was more likely to be found with teachers suffering high levels of burn-out (Egyed & Short, 2006). One explanation considered by Egyed and Short (2006) was that the teacher suffering from burn-out may not have had the energy for the pre-referral process and implementation of an intervention. Egyed and Short (2006) did not find a relationship between years of service and extent of teacher burn-out, or between the teacher's education level and their sense of burn-out or self-efficacy. They thought that one possible explanation was that it is the environment in which the teacher is working that influences the extent of their burn-out or self-efficacy, and not their level of training.

National policies can influence the identification of SWSEN. Burton et al. (2009) and Mitchell et al. (2010) describe the tension between a policy push for academic performance targets to be reached and the inclusion needs of SWSEN (Burton, Bartlett, & Cuevas, 2009; Mitchell et al., 2010). The publishing of league tables has undermined any desire for schools to collaborate for the benefit of their local children. The month of birth of a child in the UK can have an impact on their results in national achievement tests (Crawford, Dearden, & Greaves, 2011) and this affects the identification of children as being SWSEN. The month of birth effect is where the number of children identified as being SWSEN is associated with the month in which the children are born. Squires et al. (2012) showed that UK children born in the summer are more likely to be identified as SWSEN. This effect is most pronounced amongst those deemed to have Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD)

(Squires, Humphrey, Barlow, & Wigelsworth, 2012). Squires et al. (2012) found the month of birth effect was less pronounced amongst children where their needs have been identified by a number of professionals working together and making reference to age related data. Schools in the UK however are being compared based on assessment data that relates to the child's year level. There will be children who have not been in the classroom as long as other children due to their birth date, and could be expected to perform at a lower level in assessments due to experiencing less teaching. The majority of SWSEN are MLD and have been identified by the class teacher. Identification of a child with MLD can entitle the school extra resources which may be an incentive.

The influence of the gender of the teacher on the decision making process was identified in a study using a series of vignettes to investigate teacher and student characteristics that may influence whether or not a teacher seeks extra support for a child (Green et al., 2008). Male teachers were found to be less likely to identify student behaviour as a problem and are less likely to seek assistance to help deal with that behaviour. This finding is also supported by early work by McIntyre that indicated male teachers were less likely to refer for special education services than female teachers (McIntyre, 1988).

Boys are over represented as SWSEN compared to girls in proportions of between 2 and 3:1 (Piechura-Couture, Heins, & Tichenor, 2011; Vardill, 1996; Vardill & Calvert, 2000). This can be viewed as an over representation of boys, or a lack of identification of the needs of girls. Vardill and Calvert (2000) indicated that the extent of the imbalance was greatest at primary school, compared to early childhood settings and high school. Piechura-Couture et al. (2011) took an ecological perspective of this issue and investigated the impact of single-gender classes on teacher, parent and student perceptions of academic performance and behaviour of boys. They reported a positive effect in all areas, especially for African American boys. Mitchell (2010) noted one study showing that the extent of gender imbalance in special education referrals differed between schools. This indicates that there is an ecological component to the gender imbalance. Mitchell (2010) listed other possible reasons for the gender imbalance such as biological factors because boys are more at risk from some genetic disorders, peer influences, differences in the learning strategies preferred by girls and boys, and the masculine behaviour of boys may be

more unacceptable. If a girl and a boy have similar learning difficulties the boy will be referred first as they demand more attention and more likely to cause difficulties in the future and therefore it is the disruptive child that is referred first (Vardill, 1996; Vardill & Calvert, 2000).

The variability in identifying SWSEN supports the description of special education needs as a "social construct and not an absolute condition" (Squires et al., 2012, p479). Which children are identified as SWSEN will depend on national policies, school systems, characteristics of the teacher, and the effect of the child on the class environment. Identification of SWSEN is often about access to resources. A SENCO who receives information from a class teacher that a child maybe SWSEN needs to consider that the needs of the child may not be the predominant influence on the identification of the child as possibly needing extra support. The SENCO therefore has a complex role identifying which children in the school need extra support.

Positive Behaviour for Learning (PB4L)

Instead of focusing on methods for identification of SWSEN who display disruptive behaviour, PB4L is a proactive approach. The Ministry of Education 2011 Special Education Business plan identifies that the PB4L programme is one component of their plan to help schools become more inclusive. PB4L is a nation-wide plan developed by the Ministry of Education to use multiple, evidence based interventions to promote pro-social behaviour amongst students. The plan developed from the 2009 Taumata Whanonga behaviour summit. Two key components of the plan are the Incredible Years: Teacher (IYT) programme and the PB4L: School Wide programme. PB4L is a preventative programme that will not eliminate disruptive behaviour in classrooms but it increases the ability of teachers and school systems to reduce anti-social behaviour amongst students.

The IYT programme offered in New Zealand to teachers of children aged 3 to 8 years is one of the courses developed by Carolyn Webster-Stratton to reduce aggression in children in the age range 0 to 12 years. This programme has been evaluated in at least 6 countries and has been shown to be effective with different ethnic groups (Webster-Stratton, 2010). On the IY Teacher programme the teachers attend a one day course each month for 6 months with a follow up session later in the

year (Ministry of Education, 2013a). The teachers also receive feedback from classroom observations.

The PB4L School Wide programme is a framework based on Applied Behaviour Analysis that enables a school to develop systems to promote pro-social skills. The programme uses a team approach to develop specific behaviour expectations for their school. The pro-social behaviours are taught and then encouraged through use of a reinforcement programme. Data collection procedures are used so that individual student and school wide evidence based interventions can be developed, targeted appropriately and monitored. The programme is based on Positive Behaviour Support which research has shown to be effective in reducing anti-social behaviour in U.S. schools, and anecdotal evidence from New Zealand schools shows a reduction in behaviours such as vandalism and tagging (Savage, Lewis, & Colless, 2011).

Purpose of this study

The purpose of this research was to identify what responsibilities and supports allocated for the Special Education Needs Coordinator (SENCO) were associated with a lower rate of referral to the Resource Teacher: Learning and Behaviour (RTLB) service. The New Zealand special education system is reliant on specialist itinerant services that need to collaborate with class teachers, parents and SENCO. By allocating responsibilities and supports for SENCO that enable a reduction in the referral rate to specialist itinerant services the SENCO will be able to allocate less time to collaboration processes and more time to other responsibilities to support SWSEN. For example the literature shows that the identification of SWSEN is a complex process and therefore SENCO would need time away from their classes to identify which students could be considered SWSEN. The frequent use of teacher aides to support SWSEN would indicate that leadership responsibilities directed to the allocation and guidance of teacher aide could also be an alternative use of SENCO time.

There is no ideal rate of referral to an external agency that a school should be aiming to achieve, yet extremes of referral rates may reflect an underlying procedural or structural difference. An example of an unusual referral rate reflecting an underlying procedural difference is the month of birth effect shown in the

identification of students with Moderate Learning Difficulty (MLD) in the UK. The month of birth effect for the identification of students with MLD reflects the use of inappropriate assessment tools, the lack of a team in the identification process for this SWSEN category, and the reinforcement of the process by extra resourcing being provided for students with MLD.

To achieve inclusion there must be a continual effort on the part of the school management team to instil appropriate beliefs within the staff that support an inclusive school culture. Cole (2005) and Layton (2005) suggest that SENCO should have a management role and ERO (2010) describe the role of SENCO in terms of leadership. From a management position SENCO may be more influential regarding policy, budgets, staff allocation and training, but does it change the rate at which the school engages with other services to support SWSEN? The first research question was therefore:

1. Is there a relationship between SENCO having a leadership role within schools and the rate of referral to the RTLB service?

The extent to which school management teams are supporting the role of SENCO needs to be considered. The need for SENCO to have adequate release time has been identified from U.S. studies (Yorke-Barr et al., 2005) and the UK Special Education Needs Code of Practice (Department for Education and Science, 2001b, p29). New Zealand studies have identified the variation in release time provided to SENCO (Collinson, 2011; Storer, 2002). School management teams that support SENCO will ensure the role has been allocated release time so SENCO can meet their responsibilities. Layton (2005) described SENCO having limited control over budgets and policies when the school provided inadequate support for the SENCO. The second research question was therefore:

2. Is there a relationship between support from school management teams for the role of SENCO within schools and the rate of referral to the RTLB service?

There are no prescribed processes for schools to identify and refer SWSEN to the RTLB service. The role of SENCO in these processes may therefore vary between schools. The use of teams makes referral processes more reliable and so the

presence of special needs committees or other team structures may influence the referral rate. The third research question was therefore:

3. Is there a relationship between a team being present to support the SENCO in the referral processes and the referral rate to the RTLB service?

The role of the SENCO within the collaborative IEP process is not prescribed and therefore schools could use class teachers or other staff members to lead the process. This research was based on the assumption that there was an association between the rate of referral to RTLB and the extent of SENCO involvement in collaborative processes, but that association had not been proven. The fourth research question was therefore:

4. Is there a relationship between the level of involvement of SENCO in collaborative processes within schools and the rate of referral to the RTLB service?

The gender of the class teacher, their teaching experience and their class discipline characteristics can influence referral patterns. Within the RTLB cluster used in this research all referrals from a school to the RTLB had to be approved by the SENCO. A SENCO may therefore have a moderating effect on referrals from the different teachers within a school, but is there a characteristic about SENCO that has an effect on referral rates to RTLB? There is no prescribed training for SENCO in New Zealand and Storer (2001) found that only 35% of SENCO had some form of training in special education. In the absence of consistent SENCO training this research investigated whether there was a difference in the referral rate if the SENCO had more experience within their special education role. The fifth research question was therefore:

5. Is there a relationship between a SENCO having experience of five or more years within their special education role and the rate of referral to the RTLB service?

The Ministry of Education 2011 Special Education Business plan identifies that the PB4L programme and the transformation of the RTLB service are components of their plan to help schools become more inclusive. The Ministry of Education has implemented the nation-wide PB4L programme to improve the ability

of schools to manage student behaviour. The intent is to reduce behaviour problems within schools and this may change the referral rate to RTLB. The confidence of the SENCO to make another referral to the RTLB has to be considered because of the relationship difficulties between the service and schools as identified by ERO (2008). A key indicator of the transformation of the RTLB relates to improved feedback from schools about the contribution of RTLB to student achievement. The transformation of the RTLB service may therefore change the rate of referral to RTLB. The sixth research question was therefore:

6. Is there a relationship between the implementation of three components of the Ministry of Education 2011 Special Education Business plan (IY Teacher, PB4L School, transformation of the RTLB service) and the rate of referral to the RTLB service?

The final research question investigated the priorities within schools for supporting SWSEN. The priorities focused upon are SENCO responsibilities, the allocation of trained staff to support SWSEN and other influences on referrals to agencies to support SWSEN. Cole (2005) included in her survey an opportunity for SENCO to indicate the priorities they set for their responsibilities. This section of the survey by Cole has been replicated in this research to get an indication from SENCO what they think are their high priority responsibilities. Within this research the SENCO were also provided an opportunity to indicate variables they believed may influence whether or not a student was referred to the RTLB service. The results that indicate the priorities of schools in relation to SENCO responsibilities, allocation of trained staff and referrals to agencies to support SWSEN was not compared to referral rates to RTLB, but informed the discussion about the results from the other research questions. The seventh research question was therefore:

7. What are the priorities within a school in relation to SENCO responsibilities, allocation of trained staff and referrals to agencies to support SWSEN?

Method

This research is a quantitative study of the relationship between variables associated with the school SENCO and the referral rate to the RTLB service. A quantitative study by Pearson (2008) used a mix of Chi-square analysis and comparisons of percentages to report on the leadership role, qualifications, retention and recruitment of English SENCO. Burns (1999) compared the rate at which children with special education needs were retained within 25 urban U.S. schools to measure the effectiveness of changes within Intervention Assistance Teams (IAT). Burns (1999) divided the 25 schools into two groups according to whether or not the IAT for each school included a special education professional and then used a t test to compare the mean retention rates of the two groups. The *t* test analysis could not be used for my research due to the low return rate of surveys, however, for each of the four research questions, the SENCO were divided into two groups and comparisons were made between the two groups based on the frequency of schools that were at or above the mean referral rate to RTLB. The criteria for forming the groups differed according to the research question. The mean referral rate to RTLB used to compare groups was calculated for the 20 schools that returned surveys.

SENCO survey

A postal survey was used to collect data from SENCO and for each of the nine sections the SENCO indicated the following:

1. How much experience they had in their SENCO roles and as teachers.
2. Whether the SENCO were part of school management teams.
3. The level of delegation of special education responsibilities to SENCO.
4. The number of trained teacher hours allocated to assist students with special education needs.
5. Whether the school was part of the PB4L School Wide or IY Teacher MoE initiatives.
6. The confidence of SENCO to make referrals to the RTLB service.
7. The prioritizing of responsibilities by SENCO.
8. What SENCO believed influenced whether or not a child was referred to the RTLB service.
9. Where SENCO were located within school referral processes.

SENCO REFERRING TO RTLB

Three sections of the SENCO survey for this research used a Likert Scale to provide an indication of the responsibilities and priorities of SENCO. The survey included the 'key responsibilities' section of the survey used by Cole (2005) and Agaliotis and Kalyva (2011) in their study of teacher perceptions of SENCO roles which included 'key responsibilities' questions about SENCO coordinating support for students, liaising with teachers and with parents. The relationship between each research question and the different parts of the SENCO survey are listed in Table 1.

Cole (2005) reported the distribution of SENCO on salary scales as an indication of their seniority within schools. To simplify the formation of groups for the data analysis the question from Cole's (2005) about salary scales was replaced with a closed question that asked SENCO if they were part of school management teams. A school management team was considered to include a Principal, the Deputy Principal and Assistant Principals. The SENCO were also asked to indicate how often they were included in the management functions of budget and teacher aide allocation as Layton (2005) had described variation in the involvement of SENCO from the UK in these decisions. The survey also included one question about the involvement of the SENCO in special needs policy decisions, and a question which required indication of the involvement of the SENCO in the referral processes.

Cole (2005) used Likert scales in her survey of SENCO but reported the data as percentages against the descriptors within the scales. Questions using Likert scales provide more information for comparison between participants in a survey than closed questions, but Likert scales make defining groups more challenging. Likert scales only provide a comparison between those responding within the survey and should be considered an ordinal measurement (Coolican, 2009). The median is the most appropriate measure of central tendency for ordinal data (Coolican, 2009). Where the SENCO survey has provided data using Likert scales the different sections of the scale were assigned a score to indicate a response. For research question four the SENCO were divided into two groups for comparison based on the median of the Likert scale scores.

The draft survey was piloted with two RTLB, a Principal and a SENCO. The SENCO was from a school not included in the survey.

Table 1:

The SENCO survey questions that provide data to answer the research question.

Research question	Related SENCO survey questions
Research question 1. Is there a relationship between SENCO having a leadership role within schools and the rate of referral to the RTLB service?	2
Research question 2. Is there a relationship between support from school management teams for the role of SENCO within schools and the rate of referral to the RTLB service?	3A 3D 3E 4F 9
Research question 3. Is there a relationship between a team being present to support the SENCO in the referral processes and the referral rate to the RTLB service?	9
Research question 4. Is there a relationship between the level of involvement of SENCO in collaborative processes within schools and the rate of referral to the RTLB service?	3B 3C 7B 7D 7F 7H
Research question 5. Is there a relationship between a SENCO having experience of five or more years within their special education role and the rate of referral to the RTLB service?	1B
Research question 6. Is there a relationship between the implementation of three components of the Ministry of Education 2011 Special Education Business plan and the rate of referral to the RTLB service?	5A 5B 6
Research question 7. What are the priorities within a school in relation to SENCO responsibilities, allocation of trained staff and referrals to agencies to support SWSEN?	4 7 8

RTLB referral data

The number of individual students from each school on RTLB registers was collated using the 2012 data for one RTLB cluster. The cluster used for this research was selected as the RTLB referral data were made available and is the largest of the 40 RTLB clusters. The number of individual student RTLB referrals per 100 students on each school roll was calculated using the following formula:

Referral rate = Number of students referred / (school roll/100)

The number of students at each school as at 1st July 2012 was accessed from the MoE website www.educationcounts.govt.nz.

The referral rate was used so the size of each school did not have to be considered in the interpretation of the data. Burns (1999) used referral rates to eliminate the effect of school size in a study of the effectiveness of Intervention Assistance Teams (IAT) on the special education referrals from 25 schools. Burns divided the school population by the number of referrals and expressed the results as the "chance of being retained or referred for special education testing (e.g. 1 in 150)" (Burns, 1999, p355).

There were 80 primary schools identified within the cluster that met the following criteria:

a. Roll size greater than or equal to 50 students as this was the minimum size expected to have a staff member allocated to a SENCO role within a school.
b. The school will be teaching through English medium.
c. The school would only teach students in the year groups 1 to 8. Intermediate schools could therefore be included but not Year 7 to 13 high schools as this eliminated variables associated with secondary school structures, such as year level deans.
d. The SENCO was not the Principal. One of the research questions focuses on management support of the SENCO role. It is not possible to determine the leadership support for the SENCO role when the school leader is the SENCO.

Procedures

Each Principal was contacted by email using a standard format to explain the purpose of the research, including a request for permission to send a survey to the SENCO within the school and the contact details of the SENCO (Appendix A). The contact details for each school were sourced from the website www.educationcounts.govt.nz. The Principals were contacted by email in the final days of a holiday period to try to increase the rate of reply. The final days of a holiday period were chosen as Principals are often in their office at this time completing administration duties before the return of students and staff. The timing of contact is an important consideration to improve the response rate for a survey (Mertens, 2010).

A survey was posted to individual SENCO after their Principal provided permission (Appendix B). The decision to mail out surveys is supported by Mertens (2010) reference to a 2008 meta-analysis that indicated that a postal survey to teachers will achieve a higher return rate than a web based survey. The surveys were posted after the second week of the term to avoid a busy period for teachers. Each survey was accompanied by a letter of explanation (Appendix C). A stamped self-addressed envelope was included so the survey could be returned to Massey University. The Ministry of Education number for the school was recorded at the top of each survey. The SENCO were specifically requested not to record their name or school name on the survey. Two weeks after posting the surveys all the SENCO that I had permission to survey were contacted by email to remind them that they still had time to return the completed survey. A follow up is one recommendation to increase the response rates from a survey (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009). Three weeks after posting the surveys to the SENCO all returned surveys were posted to the independent coder.

A spreadsheet was provided to the independent coder for recording survey results. The first column of the spreadsheet listed the Ministry of Education number of each of the 80 schools. The second column recorded the referral rate for each school. The independent coder was provided with instructions for coding the survey responses onto the spreadsheet (Appendix D). Once all the results of the surveys had been recorded on the spreadsheet the independent coder deleted the first column containing the Ministry of Education number for each school. The spreadsheet was

then sorted by referral rate and this procedure anonymized the survey data. The file was then emailed to the researcher. The coder had to store all the surveys and then destroy them after the research was completed.

Method for research question one

Research question one investigated the relationship between the leadership roles of the SENCO and the rate of referral to the RTLB. The SENCO indicated whether or not they were part of a school management team in survey question 2. The two groups formed were compared based on the frequency of the SENCO from each group at or above the mean referral rate for all schools who returned surveys, as shown in Table 2.

Method for research question two

Research question two referred to whether there was a relationship between school management team support for the SENCO position and the rate of referral to RTLB. The data for research question two was gathered from survey questions 3A, 3D, 3E, 4F and 9 in the SENCO survey.

Survey question 3A requested an indication of the frequency that the SENCO had influence on the special needs policy for the school. The Likert scale for question 3A provided possible responses of *always, usually, sometimes,* and *never or not applicable*. The schools were divided into two groups based on whether or not the SENCO *always* had influence on the special needs policy. One group therefore consisted of SENCO that *always* had influence on the special needs policy. The second group consisted of SENCO that *usually, sometimes,* or *never* had influence on the special needs policy or the SENCO indicated the question was *not applicable*. The two groups formed were compared based on the frequency of SENCO from each group at or above the mean referral rate for all schools who returned surveys.

Survey question 3D requested an indication of the frequency that the SENCO was involved in the decision making process about the use of the special needs budget for the school. The Likert scale provided possible responses of *always, usually, sometimes*, and *never or not applicable*. The schools were divided into two groups based on whether or not the SENCO *always* was involved in the decision making process about the special needs budget. One group therefore consisted of

SENCO that *always* was involved in the decision making process about the special needs budget. The second group consisted of SENCO that *usually, sometimes,* or *never* were involved in the decision making process about the special needs budget or the SENCO indicated the question was *not applicable*. The two groups formed were compared based on the frequency of SENCO from each group at or above the mean referral rate for all schools who returned surveys.

Survey question 3E requested an indication of the frequency that the SENCO had responsibility for the allocation of teacher aides for the school. The Likert scale provided possible responses of *always, usually, sometimes*, and *never or not applicable*. The schools were divided into two groups based on whether or not the SENCO *always* was responsible for the allocation of teacher aides. One group therefore consisted of SENCO that *always* was responsible for the allocation of teacher aides. The second group consisted of SENCO that *usually, sometimes,* or *never* were responsible for the allocation of teacher aides or the SENCO indicated the question was *not applicable*. The two groups formed were compared based on the frequency of the SENCO from each group at or above the mean referral rate for all schools who returned surveys.

Survey question 4F requested the number of hours per week teachers were released to carry out their SENCO roles. The schools were divided into two groups based on whether SENCO were provided with release time that was less than the average release time per week for the 20 schools that returned surveys.

Research question two used survey question 9 to divide the SENCO into two groups based on whether SENCO were involved in the referral process. Within question 9 SENCO could select from six options. If options a, b or c were selected from question 9 this indicated the SENCO was not involved in the referral process. A range of options were provided so the survey question could also provide data for research question four.

Table 2:

The relationship of the research questions 1 to 4 to the survey questions and the method for forming the schools into two groups for comparison.

Research question	SENCO survey questions	Method of defining groups for comparison
Research question 1: Is there a relationship between the SENCO having a leadership role within schools and the rate of referral to the RTLB service?	2	The SENCO is part of the management team.
Research question 2: Is there a relationship between support from school management teams for the role of the SENCO within schools and the rate of referral to the RTLB service?	3A	The SENCO *always* has influence on the special needs policy for the school.
	3D	The SENCO *always* is part of the decision making process about the use of the special needs budget for the school.
	3E	The SENCO *always* has responsibility for allocation of teacher aides.
	4F	The SENCO was provided less than the average release time of 3.6 hours per week.
	9	The SENCO is involved in the referral process.
Research question 3: Is there a relationship between the SENCO being part of teams for the referral processes and the referral rate to the RTLB service?	9	If option e or f are selected the SENCO was considered to be working within a team as part of the referral process.
Research question 4: Is there a relationship between the level of involvement of the SENCO in collaborative processes within schools and the rate of referral to the RTLB service?	3B 3C 7B 7D 7F 7H	a. For questions 3B and 3C the level of SENCO involvement in special education responsibilities was allocated a score from 0 to 3. b. For questions 7B, 7D, 7F and 7H the level of priority given by the SENCO to special education responsibilities was allocated a score from 0 to 3. c. The sum of part a and part b were calculated. d. The SENCO has a score below the median score.

Method for research question three

Research question three investigated whether there is a relationship between a team being present to support the SENCO in the referral processes and the referral rate to the RTLB service. If options e or f were selected from question nine this indicated the SENCO was working within a team as part of the referral process.

Method for research question four

Research question four investigated the relationship between the level of involvement of SENCO in collaborative processes with schools and the rate of referral to the RTLB service. The method used to compare the level of the involvement of SENCO in collaborative processes used a collaborative score for each SENCO. The collaborative score was indicated by the collaboration responsibilities of the SENCO and the collaborative priorities set by the SENCO. A comparison was made of the referral rates of schools with SENCO below the median collaboration score to the other schools that responded to the survey.

The collaboration responsibilities were indicated by survey questions 3B and 3C, which referred to the level of involvement by SENCO in the coordination and the leadership of the IEPs for schools. The collaboration priorities were indicated by survey questions 7B, 7D, 7F and 7H, which referred to the priority given by SENCO to liaising with teachers, parents and external agencies and the coordination of support for SWSEN. The collaboration responsibilities of SENCO were indicated using a Likert scale showing how often SENCO were involved in decision making. If SENCO indicated they were *always* involved this response was allocated a score of 3, *usually* a score of 2, *sometimes* a score of 1, and *never* or *not applicable* a score of 0.

The collaboration priorities set by SENCO were indicated using a Likert scale about the level of priority assigned to each task. A score was calculated for each question with an indication of a *high* priority allocated a score of 3, a *moderate* priority was scored 2, *low* priority scored 1, and a responsibility *not applicable* scored 0.

The total score for 3B, 3C, 7B, 7D, 7F, and 7H in the SENCO survey was calculated to indicate the collaboration score for each SENCO.

Method for research question five

Research question five investigated whether there was a relationship between a SENCO having experience of five or more years within their special education role and the rate of referral to the RTLB service. In question 1B SENCO indicated their years of experience in their role as a SENCO by selecting from the four options of *two years or less*, *between two and five years*, *five to 10 years*, or *more than 10 years*. The SENCO were divided into two groups with those SENCO selecting the final two options having experience of five or more years within the special education role. The two groups formed were compared based on the frequency of the SENCO from each group at or above the mean referral rate for all schools who returned surveys, as shown in Table 3.

Method for research question six

Research question six investigated whether there is a relationship between the implementation of three components of the Ministry of Education 2011 Special Education Business plan and the rate of referral to the RTLB service. The three components of the Ministry of Education 2011 Special Education Business plan were the transformation of the RTLB service, the implementation of PB4L School and the implementation of IY Teacher.

Questions 5A asked whether the school was taking part in the PB4L School programme. The two groups formed were compared based on the frequency of the SENCO from each group at or above the mean referral rate for all schools who returned surveys, as shown in Table 3.

Questions 5B asked whether the school was taking part in the IY Teacher programme. The two groups formed were compared based on the frequency of the SENCO from each group at or above the mean referral rate for all schools who returned surveys, as shown in Table 3.

Question six used a five part Likert scale to indicate the confidence of SENCO to refer to the RTLB service. Question six was analyzed by considering that a SENCO choosing 6A or 6B was providing a negative response and the other three possible responses were considered positive. By considering that the selection of 6A or 6B was a negative response the selections by SENCO could be divided into two

categories of positive and negative responses. The two groups formed were compared based on the frequency of the SENCO from each group at or above the mean referral rate for all schools who returned surveys, as shown in Table 3.

Method for research question seven

Research question seven investigated the priorities within a school in relation to SENCO responsibilities, allocation of trained staff and referrals to agencies to support SWSEN.

Survey question four required SENCO to record the approximate number of trained teacher hours allocated within their schools in 2012 to support SWSEN against the following categories:

a. Reading Recovery.
b. Supplementary Learning Support teacher.
c. Specialist teacher to support students funded through ORS.
d. Teachers of the deaf and visually impaired.
e. Additional trained teacher time allocated to work with groups and individuals requiring extra support.
f. SENCO release time.

The number of schools that were allocating trained teacher time to each of the categories listed above was calculated. The number of schools using each category of trained teacher was used to produce a ranking based on which category of trained teacher was used by the highest number of schools.

Survey question seven was a replication from the survey by Cole (2005). The SENCO indicated which of the eight SENCO responsibilities listed they considered a *low*, *medium* or *high* priority. For each SENCO responsibility the percentage of SENCO that indicated the responsibility was a high priority was calculated. The eight SENCO responsibilities listed were then ranked as shown in Table 4. The highest ranking responsibility had the greatest percentage of SENCO indicating the responsibility was a high priority. The data from Cole (2005) was analyzed in the same manner to enable a comparison to the priorities allocated by SENCO from the UK.

Table 3:

The relationship of the research questions 5 to 6 to the survey questions and the method for forming the schools into two groups for comparison.

Research question	SENCO survey questions	Method of defining groups for comparison
Research question 5: Is there a relationship between a SENCO having experience of five or more years within their special education role and the rate of referral to the RTLB service?	1B	The SENCO has experience of five or more years within their special education role.
Research question 6: Is there a relationship between the implementation of three components of the Ministry of Education 2011 Special Education Business plan and the rate of referral to the RTLB service?	5A	The school is taking part in PB4L School.
	5B	The school is taking part in IY Teacher.
	6	If option a or b were selected the response was considered negative to the SENCO having confidence in referring to the RTLB service.

Within question eight of the survey the SENCO indicated what they thought influenced whether or not a child was referred to the RTLB service. For each of the eight influences suggested within the survey the SENCO could indicate whether they thought the factor was of a *low*, *moderate* or *high* importance as to whether the child was referred to RTLB or they could indicate they *do not know*. The frequencies of experienced SENCO indicating a factor was of a high importance were compared to that of less experienced SENCO. SENCO with five or more years of experience within their role were considered experienced.

Ethics

This research was ethically a low risk research project involving human participants. The voluntary survey was confined to descriptions of the SENCO role, the special needs referral procedures for their school and their opinions about these processes. The survey would not be expected to cause embarrassment or harm.

Informed consent for school participation was achieved by emailing the Principal requesting permission to post the survey to the SENCO. The Principals' responses had to be by email. The survey was posted to the SENCO with a covering letter stating that participation was voluntary. If they did not wish to take part the survey could be discarded. The name or location of the cluster or schools was not reported in the study. The RTLB cluster manager provided written permission for the referral rate for each of the cluster primary schools to be used in this research. The referrals to the RTLB service were expressed as the rate of referral per 100 students, eliminating any reference to individual students. The MoE number for each school was removed from the survey data prior to being sent to the researcher. The researcher was therefore unable to report on results for individual schools, SENCO or students, and so no previously collected data of a personal nature was used. There was considered to be no conflict of interest for the researcher as the researcher's employer was not one of the schools surveyed and the researcher holds no supervisory position within surveyed schools.

Results

A response was received from 56% of the 80 Principals contacted by email for permission to provide a survey to the SENCO in their school. The survey was returned by 51% of the SENCO from the 39 schools that provided permission to take part.

The roll size of the 80 schools contacted ranged between 50 to 700 students with an average size of 231. The deciles of the 80 schools ranged from 1 to 10. No referrals were made by six schools, indicating 92.5% of the schools contacted had made referrals to the RTLB service. Referrals by each school to the RTLB service ranged from 0.0 to 12.5 referrals per 100 students. The average referral rate was 3.1 referrals per 100 students with a standard deviation of 2.5.

Only 20 schools returned surveys. These 20 schools had referral rates that ranged from 0.0 to 12.5 referrals per 100 students, and an average referral rate of 3.2 referrals per 100 students with a standard deviation of 2.9. The referral rate from the 20 schools that returned surveys were therefore similar to the 80 schools initially contacted. The size and decile of the 20 schools could not be reported due to procedures to maintain anonymity for the SENCO.

A frequency of less than five within 20% of Chi-square cells is usually unacceptable for a Chi-square analysis (Coolican, 2009). The low return rate of surveys for this research has therefore made it inappropriate to use Chi-square analysis. Cole (2005) used a mix method study of UK primary school SENCO focused on their perceptions of 10 areas of the SENCO role including priorities they assigned to key responsibilities. Cole's (2005) research used a survey returned by 59 SENCO from which data were reported as frequencies and percentages. The data analysis in this research reported frequencies to make comparisons between variables associated with SENCO. This research has used percentages and rankings to draw comparisons with Cole's (2005) reporting of UK SENCO prioritizing of key responsibilities.

Results for research question one

The first research question referred to whether there was a relationship between SENCO having a leadership role within schools and the rate of referral to the RTLB service. The results for research question one came from survey question 2.

There was a response to question 2 from only 14 SENCO. Eleven SENCO indicated they were part of a school management team. Six schools with a SENCO in the management team had a referral rate that was below the mean RTLB referral rate. There was no relationship between the SENCO being in school management teams and the rate of referral to the RTLB service.

All SENCO had experience of at least five years as teachers. Of the 11 SENCO who were part of a school management team, eight of the SENCO had experience of 10 or more years as teachers and the other three SENCO had experience of between five and 10 years as teachers. Five of the 11 SENCO who were part of a school management team had experience of five or more years as a SENCO. A SENCO who was part of a school management team were therefore an experienced teacher but may have experience of less than five years within their special education role.

Of the 11 SENCO that were part of a school management team

a. seven always had influence on the school special needs policy,
b. five were always part of the special needs budget decision making process,
c. four always had responsibility for allocation of teacher aides.

SENCO who were part of the school management team did not always have influence on key special needs decision making areas. SENCO who were part of school management teams were more often associated with always having influence on school special needs policy than they were associated with always being part of the budget decision making processes or the allocation of teacher aides.

To summarize no relationship was identified between the SENCO having a leadership role within a school and the rate of referral of students to the RTLB service. The SENCO who were part of a school management team did not always

have influence on the special needs policy, special needs budget decisions or the allocation of teacher aides. SENCO who were part of a school management team were more often associated with always having influence on the school special needs policy compared to always being involved in budget decision making processes or the allocation of teacher aides.

Results for research question two

The second research question referred to whether there was a relationship between the school management teams supporting SENCO roles within schools and the rate of referral to the RTLB service. The results for the second research question came from survey questions 3A, 3D, 3E, 4F and 9.

Seven of the 11 schools where the SENCO always had influence on the special needs policy referred to the RTLB at below the mean referral rate. The SENCO always having influence on the special needs policy was therefore not associated with a difference in the proportion of schools referring at less than the mean referral rate to RTLB.

Seven of the 11 schools where the SENCO always participated in the special needs budget decision making process referred to the RTLB at below the mean referral rate. The SENCO always participating in the special needs budget decision making process was therefore not associated with a difference in the proportion of schools referring at less than the mean referral rate to RTLB.

Eight schools where the SENCO always had influence on the allocation of teacher aides were evenly distributed about the mean referral rate to RTLB. There was no observable difference in the referral rate to RTLB where the SENCO always had responsibility for allocating teacher aides.

Nine of the 12 schools that did not always provide the SENCO with the opportunity to allocate teacher aides had a referral rate that was below the mean. Of the nine schools that did not always provide the SENCO with the opportunity to allocate teacher aides and had a referral rate that was below the mean, seven of these schools had their SENCO as part of a team referral process as identified within research question four. Not allowing the SENCO to always allocate teacher aides was associated with schools that included the SENCO within team referral processes.

In survey question 4F the SENCO indicated the hours of release time they had per week to fulfil their SENCO role. Release time was provided to 15 of the 20 SENCO. Five of the six schools that provided release time to their SENCO above the mean of 3.6 hours per week referred students to RTLB at less than the mean referral rate of 3.2 referrals per 100 students. Four of the six schools that provided release time to their SENCO above the mean had a SENCO with experience of five or more years within their role. The results for research question five showed that lower referral rates were associated with SENCO with experience of five or more years within their role. The lower referral rates of schools providing SENCO with release time above the mean may be a result of these schools having experienced SENCO and therefore a relationship may not exist between the provision of release time to SENCO at more than 3.6 hours per week and a rate of referral to RTLB at less than the mean.

In survey question 9 the SENCO indicated whether they were part of the referral process for the school. All SENCO were involved in the development of referrals to the RTLB by their school.

Nine of the 11 SENCO that always had influence on special needs policies had experience of five or more years within their role. Eight of the 11 SENCO who always participated in the special education budget decision making processes had experience of five or more years within their role. More experienced SENCO were therefore associated with always having influence on the special needs policy and always participating in the special education budget decision making processes. A comparison of the frequency of experienced SENCO that did and did not always have responsibility for teacher aide allocation showed a variation of two SENCO. More experienced SENCO did not appear to have an increased opportunity to always allocate teacher aides to classes compared to SENCO with experience of less than five years.

To summarize school management teams that supported SENCO by always allowing the SENCO influence on the special needs policy or participation in decision making about the special needs budget did not have any observable difference in rates of referral to the RTLB service. Experienced SENCO were associated with always having an influence on special needs policy and budget

decisions but not with always allocating teacher aides. Schools that did not always allow SENCO to allocate teacher aides were associated with lower rates of referral to RTLB. Not always allowing SENCO to allocated teacher aides was associated with schools that included the SENCO in a team referral process. It was not possible to determine if providing a higher number of hours of release time to SENCO or including SENCO in referral processes was associated with lower rates of referral to RTLB.

Results for research question three

The third research question investigated whether there is a relationship between a team being present to support the SENCO in the referral processes and the referral rate to the RTLB service. The response to research question three came from the results of survey question 9.

Eight of the 13 schools with the SENCO in a team referral process had a referral rate to the RTLB below the mean for the 20 schools that responded to the survey. Where a SENCO was part of a team referral process the school was associated with a referral rate to RTLB less than the mean.

Results for research question four

The fourth research question referred to whether there was a relationship between the level of involvement of the SENCO in collaborative processes within the school and the rate of referral to the RTLB service. The results for research question four came from a collaboration score developed from survey questions 3B, 3C, 7B, 7D, 7F and 7H. These questions used Likert scales. Likert scales are an ordinal measurement for which the median is the best measure of central tendency. The median collaboration score from the 20 SENCO was 16. Those SENCO with a collaboration score at or above the median will be referred to as having a high collaboration score. Those SENCO with a collaboration score below the median will be referred to as having a low collaboration score.

Seven of the 11 schools that had a SENCO with a high collaboration score had a referral rate to RTLB greater or equal to the mean. Two thirds of the schools with a SENCO that had a low collaboration scores referred to the RTLB at a rate less

than the mean. SENCO with a higher level of involvement in collaborative processes were associated with a higher rate of referral to the RTLB service.

Seven of the 12 SENCO with experience of five or more years within their special education role had a high collaboration score. There was no observable relationship between the years of experience of the SENCO within their role and the collaboration score.

In summary SENCO with a higher level of involvement in collaborative processes tended to have a higher rate of referral to the RTLB service and this difference in collaborative score was not related to the years of experience that the SENCO had within their role. This research has assumed that SENCO are involved in the collaborative process with RTLB, but the involvement of the SENCO in collaborative processes is not prescribed within the MoE publication on IEP processes (Ministry of Education, 2011a). The results of research question four show that there is an association between the rate of referral to RTLB and the involvement of SENCO in collaborative processes.

Results for research question five

The fifth research question referred to whether there was a relationship between a SENCO having experience of five or more years within their special education role and the rate of referral to the RTLB service. The results for research question one came from survey question 1B.

Comparison of referral rates from schools with SENCO with experience of five or more years in their role to those schools with less experienced SENCO showed that nine of the 12 schools with experienced SENCO had referral rates to RTLB that were below the mean. Of the eight SENCO with experience of less than five years within their special education role four were within schools that had referral rates to RTLB that were below the mean. Lower referral rates to the RTLB service were associated with schools that had a SENCO with experience of five or more years within their role.

Results for research question six

The sixth research question referred to whether there was a relationship between the implementation of three components of the Ministry of Education 2011 Special Education Business plan and the rate of referral to the RTLB service. The three components of the plan were the transformation of the RTLB service, the implementation of PB4L School and the implementation of IY Teacher.

Four schools that were involved in the PB4L School Wide programme returned a survey. With such a low return rate from participants in the PB4L School programme, a comparison of the referral rate of these four schools with those of the other 16 schools that did not participate in PB4L School was not possible.

There were 11 schools taking part in the IY Teacher programme and six were referring to RTLB at a rate that was less than the mean. The presence of the IY Teacher programme in schools was associated with no more than one school below the mean referral rate compared to the frequency of schools above the mean. The presence of the IY Teacher programme in schools did not make sufficient difference in the frequency of schools that were above and below the mean referral rate to find an association between IY teacher and the rate of referral to RTLB.

There were 19 SENCO that were very interested in referring to the RTLB service and one SENCO indicated that they may refer again to RTLB. It was not possible to separate the SENCO into two groups based on whether or not the SENCO were sufficiently confident in the RTLB service to make another referral. No relationship could therefore be determined between the confidence of the SENCO in the RTLB service and the rate of referral.

In summary no relationship could be identified between the three components of the Ministry of Education 2011 Special Education Business plan and the rate of referral to the RTLB service.

Results for research question seven

The seventh research question investigated the priorities within a school for SENCO responsibilities, allocation of trained staff and referrals to agencies to support SWSEN.

All 20 SENCO answered question 4 indicating how many hours of trained teacher time their school allocated each week to support students with special education needs. Of the 19 schools that provided trained teacher time to support students with special education needs 15 allocated release time to SENCO. More schools supported SWSEN through the allocation of release time to SENCO then used any other form of trained teacher time to support SWSEN.

All SENCO answered all sections of question seven indicating the level of priority they gave to eight different responsibilities within their role. The percentage of the 20 SENCO that indicated a responsibility was a high priority was ranked as shown in Table 4. The percentage of UK SENCO in the survey by Cole (2005) that indicated a responsibility was a high priority was ranked and included as a comparison. The two SENCO groups had the same or similar ranking for five of the eight responsibilities. New Zealand SENCO more frequently indicated a high priority for liaison with external agencies and UK SENCO more frequently indicated a high priority for liaising with parents.

For question eight of the survey the SENCO indicated what factors they thought had a high, moderate or low influence on whether a child was referred to RTLB. Of the 12 SENCO with five or more years of experience in their role 11 considered that the impact of the child on the classroom had a high level of influence on whether a child was referred as shown in Table 5. For the experienced SENCO their confidence in the RTLB service was the second most commonly selected item they thought had a high level of influence on whether a child was referred. The two highest ranking items that the eight SENCO with experience of less than five years thought had a high level of influence on whether a child was referred were the child's assessment results and the priority the SENCO assigned to working with external agencies.

Table 4:

The ranking of SENCO responsibilities according to which responsibility had the greatest percentage of SENCO considering the responsibility was a high priority. The rankings of responsibilities by SENCO from the UK are provided as a comparison.

The highest rank is 1 and the lowest rank is 8.

SENCO responsibility	Rank order for NZ SENCO	Rank order for UK SENCO (Cole, 2005)
Liaising with external agencies.	1	3
Co-ordinating support for students with special education needs	2	2
Overseeing the records of students with special education needs	3=	4
Liaising with and advising fellow teachers.	3=	6
Managing special education teachers and / or teacher aides.	5	5
Liaising with parents of students with special education needs	6	1
Day to day operation of the special education needs policy.	7	7
Contributing to the in-service training of teachers	8	8

Table 5:

The frequency of SENCO indicating a factor was of high importance as to whether a student is referred to RTLB. The 20 SENCO had a choice between the factors being of *high*, *medium* or *low* importance or *do not know* the factors importance.

Survey question	Factor that may influence whether a student was referred to the RTLB service.	SENCO with 5 or more years within the role (N=12)	SENCO with less than 5 years within the role (N=8)
8B	The impact of the child on the classroom.	11	4
8E	The confidence of the SENCO in the RTLB service.	9	4
8H	The assessment results of the child.	8	6
8F	The role of the SENCO within the referral process.	6	5
8G	The importance the SENCO assigns to working with external agencies.	4	6
8A	The availability of special education teacher time.	3	0
8C	The teaching and special education experience of the SENCO.	3	0
8D	The influence of the SENCO on the special needs policy and procedures.	3	0

Discussion

Discussion of research question one

The first research question referred to whether there was a relationship between SENCO having a leadership role within schools and the rate of referral to the RTLB service. No relationship was found between the SENCO having a leadership role within a school and the rate of referral to RTLB.

Cole (2005) and Layton (2005) recommended that the SENCO be within the management team so the SENCO could advocate for inclusion and have direct influence on policy and budgets. Pearson (2008) and Layton (2005) both reported that there was variation in the ability of SENCO in the UK to have control of budgets and influence policy. This research showed that New Zealand SENCO that were part of the school management team did not always have influence on the special needs policy, the decision making process about use of the special needs budget, or the allocation of teacher aides. This research indicates that SENCO being part of the school management team does not ensure that SENCO are always involved in key decision making processes related to special needs. The recommendation of Cole (2005) and Layton (2005) that SENCO be part of the school management team does not address the problem of SENCO not always having direct influence on special needs policy, staff allocation and budgets in the decentralized New Zealand special education environment.

New Zealand and UK SENCO have been identified as holding Principal, senior management positions and other coordination roles (Cole, 2005; Cowne, 2005; Storer, 2002). There were 11 of the 20 SENCO identified in this research that were part of a school management team, which is a higher proportion than the 46% identified by Storer (2002). Pearson's (2008) survey of UK SENCO found 68.4% of primary school SENCO were part of school management teams, which is a higher proportion of SENCO who are part of a school management team than occurs in New Zealand. Layton (2005) describes the UK Special Education Needs Code of Practice as specifically linking leadership to the SENCO role. An example of management functions included in the Code of Practice is the supervision, selection and training of teacher aides. The higher proportion of UK SENCO being part of a

school management team may be due to the requirements of the UK Special Education Needs Code of Practice.

In summary a detectable difference in the referral rate was not found for schools where the SENCO was within the management team. New Zealand SENCO show variation in the control of key special needs decision making processes as do SENCO in the UK. Being part of a New Zealand school management team did not ensure SENCO always had control of key special needs decision making processes. New Zealand SENCO are part of school management teams in a lower proportion of schools compared to the UK and this may be due to requirements of the UK Special Education Needs Code of Practice.

Discussion of research question two

The second research question referred to whether there was a relationship between the school management teams supporting SENCO roles within schools and the rate of referral to the RTLB service. Schools where the SENCO always had influence on the special needs policy and budget and the allocation of teacher aides did not have an observable difference in rates of referral to RTLB compared to the other schools. This lack of observable difference in rates of referral to RTLB compared to the other schools was despite SENCO who always had influence on the special needs policy and budget more often having experience of five or more years within their role. If SENCO try to reduce the referral rate to RTLB due to time constraints for collaboration then the ability to control policy and resources does not appear to be sufficient to achieve an observable reduction in referral rates.

Schools that did not always provide the SENCO with the responsibility for allocation of teacher aides were associated with lower referral rates to RTLB. Of the nine schools that did not always provided the SENCO with the responsibility for allocation of teacher aides seven of these schools included the SENCO in a team referral process. The effectiveness of teams to reduce the rate of referral for special education assessments (Burns, 1999), to improve the development of plans to support SWSEN (Finlay et al., 2009; Masse, Couture, Levesque, & Begin, 2013) and the effectiveness of a team approach in South Africa to coordinate services for SWSEN (Mitchell, 2010) indicate that the use of teams can be an effective structure for special education processes. The lower referral rate when the SENCO is included

in a team referral process may indicate that the structure in which the special education staff work is more important than the SENCO always having management functions to meet the needs of students within their school.

There were 15 of the 20 SENCO with allocated release time for their role, which is the same proportion of SENCO with release time as identified by Storer (2002). It was not possible to determine if the difference in referral rates between schools was due to the experience of the SENCO or the allocation of SENCO release time.

In summary, providing the SENCO the opportunity to always have influence on the special needs policy, the allocation of the special needs budget and the allocation of teacher aides had no relationship to the rate of referral to RTLB. It was not possible to determine whether the provision of release time for the SENCO had any relationship to referral rates. All SENCO were involved in the referral process to RTLB. No relationship was therefore identified between a school management team's support for the SENCO role and the rate of referral to RTLB, but there may be a lower referral rate to RTLB when the SENCO is part of a team for the referral process.

Discussion of research question three

The third research question investigated whether there was a relationship between a team being present to support the SENCO in the referral processes and the referral rate to the RTLB service. Schools where a team supported the SENCO in the referral process were associated with a referral rate to RTLB that was less than the mean. Team structures can assist with the sharing of tasks, help facilitate coordination of support and they can also draw on a range of expertise within the school. The Learning Support Teams in Western Australia include a range of education staff but the South African ILST may also draw into the team non-educators and senior students as peer support. Burns (1999) found that including educational psychologists within Intervention Assistance Teams reduced the referral rate for special education assessments and increased the retention rate of SWSEN within their school. In the UK Squires et al. (2012) found a month of birth effect amongst SWSEN is less pronounced amongst students identified by a group of professionals compared to those identified with Moderate Learning Difficulties

(MLD) by the class teacher. Burns (1999) and Squires et al. (2012) show that the expertise that a team structure can use to identify an appropriate pathway to support a student may change the patterns of special education referrals. The lower referral rate to RTLB associated with schools that include a SENCO within a team referral process is therefore consistent with the literature that indicates the benefits of a team structure within special education processes.

Discussion of research question four

The fourth research question referred to whether there was a relationship between the level of involvement of the SENCO in collaborative processes within the school and the rate of referral to the RTLB service. SENCO with greater involvement in collaborative processes tended to have a higher rate of referral to RTLB. The RTLB have been trained to work within an ecological collaborative problem solving model (Thomson et al., 2003). The greater involvement in collaborative processes being associated with a higher rate of referral to RTLB may indicate that SENCO may use collaborative processes predominantly only when developing plans for a student who is receiving RTLB support. The results for this research question support the view that if a SENCO is allocated supports and responsibilities that enable a reduction in the referral rate to RTLB then the SENCO could allocate less time to collaborative processes.

This research would indicate that SENCO do not reduce their involvement in collaborative processes as they gain experience, but the literature indicates that the challenges of the process may benefit from the skills of an experienced SENCO. The collaborative process has the potential for management difficulties that would benefit from having experienced personnel involved, such as preventing the domination of the process by one individual (Giangreco, 2011) or assisting in the development of a team approach amongst the professionals (Mitchell et al., 2010).

Discussion of research question five

The fifth research question investigated if there was a relationship between a SENCO having experience of five or more years within their special education role and the rate of referral to the RTLB service. This research showed that lower referral rates to the RTLB service were associated with schools that had SENCO with

experience of five or more years within their role. With the lack of recognised training for New Zealand SENCO and the broad access criteria for the RTLB service a SENCO may only gain an understanding of which students benefit from referral to RTLB by working with RTLB from the local cluster. Green et al. (2008) identified that a difference in referral rates to special education may occur between experienced and inexperienced teachers due to the difference in their knowledge of what an external agency can offer. Knowledge of which students could be considered SWSEN and benefit from support from an external agency may require professional development and experience within the role. Collinson (2011) for example reported increased identification of SWSEN by a SENCO as a result of a professional development programme for SENCO.

A successful referral to the itinerant RTLB service does not increase school staffing or funding over an extended period. The RTLB may provide Learning Support Funding for a limited time depending on the needs shown within a collaborative plan. The collaborative process increases the workload of SENCO and class teachers due to the time required for meetings, sharing of information and implementation of plans. The lower referral rate by experienced SENCO may therefore be due to the time required and difficulties associated with the collaborative process that is required to work with RTLB. A SENCO would benefit from making the minimal number of referrals to the RTLB service to meet the needs of SWSEN within their school.

Discussion of research question six

The sixth research question investigated whether there was a relationship between the implementation of three components of the MoE 2011 Special Education Business plan and the rate of referral to the RTLB service. The three components of the MoE 2011 Special Education Business plan were IY Teacher, PB4L School, and the transformation of the RTLB service.

The SENCO that returned survey indicated they were confident to make a referral to the RTLB service and so SENCO confidence in the service was not affecting referral rates. The SENCO who returned surveys may have only been those that had confidence in the RTLB service and therefore biased the results. A sample biased towards SENCO that had confidence in the RTLB is unlikely however as

92.5% of the 80 schools that were contacted for this survey had made referrals to the RTLB cluster. The cluster surveyed therefore has a higher proportion of schools engaging with the service compared to the 60% of primary schools nationwide referring to the service as reported by ERO (2008).

It was not possible to determine if the PB4L School programme had an influence on the referral rate to RTLB due to the low number of surveys being returned from schools involved in the programme. There was no observable relationship between the presence of the IY Teacher programme and a lower rate of referral to the RTLB service. The IY Teacher programme has been implemented to improve a school's ability to meet the needs of students with behaviour difficulties and therefore would be expected to lower the rate of referral to RTLB. As the three components of the MoE 2011 Special Education Business plan investigated for this research question were not associated with differences in the rate of referral to the RTLB service, then the interpretation of results for the other research questions can be made without having to consider the influence of these programmes on the results.

Discussion of research question seven

The seventh research question investigated the priorities within a school for SENCO responsibilities, allocation of trained staff and referrals to agencies to support SWSEN.

This research found that the allocation of release time for a SENCO was the most frequent use of trained teacher time to support SWSEN. This research and the work of Storer (2001) also identified that 75% of schools allocated release time for SENCO. The high proportion of schools that allocated release time to the SENCO role and in preference to other teacher time to support SWSEN shows that there is support within schools for the position of SENCO despite a lack of official recognition for the role.

Within Cole's (2005) survey of SENCO she provided a list of eight responsibilities that are listed within the UK SENCO 2001 Code of Practice. Cole required the SENCO to indicate for each of their responsibilities whether the responsibility was of low, medium or high priority. The responsibility that was given

a high priority most frequently by SENCO in the UK from Cole's (2005) survey was liaison with parents. New Zealand SENCO responding to the same list of eight responsibilities within this research most frequently indicated liaison with external agencies was a high priority. The difference between the responsibility given the highest priority in the UK compared to New Zealand may be due to the SENCO in the UK being concerned about the potential for parental litigation against the school when the special education needs of a child with a disability are not met. The provision of trained special education teachers within New Zealand is predominantly through itinerant services. A New Zealand SENCO trying to provide appropriate trained services to SWSEN within their school would therefore need to be liaising with external agencies, whereas SENCO in the UK have specialist training.

The 20 New Zealand SENCO indicated what they thought had a high, medium or low influence on whether a child was referred to the RTLB service. For the experienced SENCO with five or more years within the role the factor that they most frequently selected as having a high influence on whether a child was referred to the RTLB was the impact of the child on the classroom. This opinion of the experienced SENCO is consistent with the literature that indicate that one reason for boys being over represented in referrals to special education services is that the behaviour of boys attracts more attention and disruptive boys are more likely to cause difficulties in the future. The second most frequently selected factor by experienced SENCO as having a high influence on whether a child was referred was the confidence of the SENCO in the RTLB service. The Education Review Office found that only 62% of schools had a good relationship with the RTLB service (Education Review Office, 2009), and 37.5 % of RTLB clusters had little or no evidence of the impact of the service on student outcomes (Education Review Office, 2004). The survey data collected by ERO would indicate that nationally there were schools not referring to the RTLB service for reasons that may be linked to a reduced confidence in the service. The experienced SENCO indicating that having confidence in the RTLB as the second most frequently indicated reason for having a high influence on whether a child is referred may indicate the knowledge of these SENCO of the RTLB services historical reputation.

Limitations of the study and considerations for further research

The low number of surveys returned by SENCO has limited the method of analysis that was possible for this research and the reliability of the results. The return rate at each step requiring consent was comparable to other surveys reported in the SENCO literature but the extra step requiring permission from Principals to survey SENCO resulted in a cumulative reduction. With 92.5% of the 80 schools contacted making referrals to the RTLB cluster the low return rate would not be due to an unwillingness to engage with RTLB. One school that had not referred to RTLB still returned a survey. Further research across a greater number of schools and SENCO is required so that statistically significant results can be reported.

This research did not identify an ideal referral rate to RTLB. It may be possible to identify through the use of a range of measurements schools that are considered inclusive and that effectively meet the needs of SWSEN on the school roll. It may then be possible to use the referral rate of schools that are considered inclusive and effective with SWSEN to develop a guide to what may be appropriate referral rates. A guide to what are appropriate referral rates would be useful when determining the allocation of staffing for RTLB to clusters. A Principal may also find it useful to know if their school is referring to local services within what is considered an appropriate range of referral rate as a guide to whether the special education services within the school are operating in a similar manner to schools nationally.

Repeating this research with a greater number of schools may improve understanding of the relationship between the amount of release time provided to the SENCO and the rate of referral to RTLB. The explanation within this research for the lower referral rate from schools with experienced SENCO indicates that the experienced SENCO are optimizing their use of RTLB. With increased time the SENCO may be able to fulfil the “hands on” role identified by Wylie (2000) and therefore resolve more of the problems affecting SWSEN thus reducing the referral rate. Increased time to collaborate may allow the SENCO to be able to engage more effectively with RTLB. Alternatively the confidence of the SENCO in the RTLB service does effect whether referrals are made to RTLB and so more effective engagement with the service may increase the rate of referral. Understanding the

relationship between amount of release time and referrals to external agencies may assist schools develop an understanding of what may be an optimum release time for the SENCO role. Collinson (2011) did find that increasing the release time can interfere with the class programme operated by the SENCO and therefore resolving the problem of allocating SENCO release time is not just about the allocation of funding.

The inability to compare the referral rates against decile rating for the school surveys from SENCO has meant that the higher proportion of students from lower decile schools with learning and behaviour needs could not be considered. The 80 schools initially contacted however had deciles ranging from 1 to 10. The referral rates from the 20 schools that returned surveys showed a distribution of referral rates similar to the original 80 schools contacted, and therefore the sample of 20 schools could be considered representative of the 80 schools which covered the complete range of deciles. The research could not have investigated relationships of referral rates to decile rating as the school name and MoE number were not available due to the anonymizing process. The low number of surveys returned would have made any analysis that considered the affects of low decile ratings of schools difficult. Experienced SENCO are identifying that it is the impact of the student on the classroom that has the greatest influence on whether a student is referred to RTLB. The student who has a large impact on a high decile school classroom may have different range of needs to the student who is identified for referral from a low decile school. If the RTLB service is responding to referrals that reflect the impact of students on the classroom and there are no clear guidelines as to which students should be referred to the service then the RTLB may have difficulties meeting the needs of local schools while still meeting national priorities.

Conclusion

This research found that SENCO with a higher level of involvement in collaborative processes were associated with a higher rate of referral to RTLB. A reduction in the referral rate to RTLB would therefore be associated with a reduction in time allocated to collaboration.

There was support within schools for a SENCO position as indicated by the high proportion of schools with a designated SENCO with allocated time to be released from class to carry out their special education role. This research shows that the allocation of release time to SENCO is the most frequent use of trained teacher time to support SWSEN, which shows that schools value the role of the SENCO.

The responsibility most frequently given a high priority by the SENCO taking part in this research was liaison with external agencies. The high priority given to liaison with external agencies reflects the structure of the decentralised New Zealand special education system that does not fund and support a designated trained special education teacher within schools. Referral to an external agency is the only mechanism for accessing trained special education staff and this will usually result in participation in a collaborative planning process.

For experienced SENCO the effect of the student on the classroom was most influential on whether a referral was made to the RTLB service. The importance given to the effect of the student on the classroom to the decision about referral to RTLB was consistent with the literature about the disproportionate referral rate for boys to special education services. If the effect of the student on the classroom has a high influence on whether a referral is made to RTLB then referral patterns may be reflecting the needs of individual schools rather than national priorities.

This research identified that a lower rate of referral to RTLB was associated with experienced SENCO with five or more years within the SENCO role. There are no clear national guidelines as to which students are eligible to access the RTLB service and no formal recognition or training for the SENCO role, therefore at present only experience will provide the SENCO with the understanding of which SWSEN may be the most appropriate to refer to RTLB.

This research identified that approximately half of SENCO are part of school management teams. The literature supports SENCO having a leadership role within schools. The SENCO role can be complex as indicated by the range of factors that can influence the identification of SWSEN and the leadership responsibilities that schools need to fulfil with regard to the use of teacher aides. Being part of a school management team did not always provide the SENCO with control of key decision making processes associated with special education and was not associated with a lower referral rate to RTLB. Where the SENCO did always have control of key decisions about special education within the school this was not associated with lower referral rates to RTLB.

The school structure that was associated with a lower referral rate to RTLB was having the SENCO as part of a team referral process. The literature describes team structures being prescribed for special education decision making processes within other countries. Team structures that include special education trained personnel have also been described as having an impact on special education referral patterns. A team structure would also provide a process that other teaching staff could be included in and thereby assist in the development of experience in special education amongst more teachers. The school would then be able to appoint another SENCO as required from staff who already have some understanding of processes to support SWSEN.

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Appendix A: Email request to Principals

Subject: Permission to contact SENCO

To the Principal

I am completing a thesis for a Masters of Educational Psychology through Massey University. My thesis is investigating school policies and practices associated with the rate of referral to the RTLB service, with particular emphasis on the role of the SENCO. I hope the study will contribute to our understanding of the pivotal role of the SENCO . The importance of the SENCO role in helping children at risk was identified by ERO within reports from 2008 and 2010.

I will collect some of the data for the study using a postal questionnaire. The questionnaire asks about the SENCO years of experience, level of responsibility within the school, extent of their involvement in policy decisions and referral processes, and their confidence in re-referring to the RTLB service. The analysis will be based on 2012 data.

I will post the questionnaire to the SENCO's school address.The school number is already entered on the questionnaire. I do not want the school name or the SENCO name on the questionnaire. The collected data will be independently entered onto a spreadsheet. After data entry reference to school number will be removed from the spreadsheet before I can access the information. The questionnaires will be destroyed at completion of the thesis. This will ensure I cannot track questionnaire responses back to a school or SENCO. The SENCO doesn't need to complete the questionnaire if they do not want to do so.

I need your permission to post the questionnaire to your staff member who was the SENCO in 2012 and the name of that staff member so that I can post them the questionnaire.

If you have any questions you may contact me through this email address or phone me on (027) 275 1142. Alternatively you can contact my supervisor Dr Jane Prochnow at the Institute of Education, Massey University at j.e.prochnow@massey.ac.nz.

Yours sincerely

David Taylor

Appendix B: Questionnaire for SENCO

SENCO REFERRING TO RTLB

SENCO questionnaire School number: _____

Do not record your name or school name on this questionnaire. Please base your answers for the following questions on your work in 2012.

1. Please tick the appropriate boxes to answer the following questions.

Teaching and special needs coordinator experience.	2 years or less (1)	Between 2 and 5 years (2)	5 to 10 years (3)	More than 10 years (4)
A. How many years have you been a trained teacher?				
B. How many years have you been a SENCO?				

2. Are you part of the school's management team? (Circle one)

   a. Yes b. No

3. Please tick the appropriate boxes to answer the following questions.

Responsibility	**Not applicable** (0)	**Never** (0)	**Sometimes** (1)	**Usually** (2)	**Always** (3)
A. Do you have influence on the school's special needs policy?					
B. Do you coordinate the school's IEP meetings and who attends?					
C. Do you lead the school's IEP meetings?					
D. Are you part of the decision making process about use of the special needs budget?					
E. Do you have responsibility for allocation of teacher aides to classes?					

4. Please indicate the approximate hours per week that the following special education teachers have allocated to support children with special education needs within your school. These hours may not be in direct contact with children, but instead may have administrative or coordination components related to activities such as IEPs or training other staff. Only include trained teachers in these calculations.

Special Education teacher hours within the school	Approximate hours per week
A. Reading Recovery teacher.	
B. Supplementary Learning Support teacher.	
C. Teacher with time allocated to support students funded through ORRS.	
D. Teachers of the deaf or visually impaired students working within the school for a regular period each week.	
E. Additional teacher time allocated outside of class time for working with individuals or groups identified as requiring extra support, such as in reading or Maths.	
F. The hours per week release time that you have to fulfil your SENCO role.	

5. Please tick the appropriate boxes to answer the following questions.

School involvement in Ministry of Education initiatives	Yes	No
A. Is your school part of the PB4L School initiative?		
B. Have staff from your school taken part in the IY Teacher professional development programme?		

6. Based on your experience in 2012, how confident would you be to make another referral to the RTLB service in the future? (Circle one)
   A. Very unlikely to feel that I would want to refer again to the service
   B. Unlikely to feel that I would want to refer again to the service
   C. May refer again to the service
   D. Would be interested in referring again to the service.
   E. Would be very interested in referring again to the service.

SENCO REFERRING TO RTLB

7. Below are listed some possible responsibilities of a SENCO. Tick in the appropriate column for each responsibility to indicate its level of priority in your position as a SENCO. There should be only one tick per line.

Responsibility	Not applicable (1)	Low priority (2)	Moderate priority (3)	High priority (4)
A. Day to day operation of the special education needs policy.				
B. Liaising with and advising fellow teachers.				
C. Managing special education teachers and / or teacher aides.				
D. Co-ordinating support for students with special education needs				
E. Overseeing the records of students with special education needs				
F. Liaising with parents of students with special education needs				
G. Contributing to the in-service training of teachers				
H. Liaising with external agencies.				

8. Below are listed some factors that may influence whether a child is referred to the RTLB service. Tick in the appropriate column to indicate how important you think each of these factors are in whether or not a child will be referred to the service? There should be only one tick per line.

Possible influences whether referrals are made to the RTLB service	Do not know	Low	Moderate	High
A. The availability of special education teacher time working within and employed by the school. (This doesn't include itinerant teachers).				
B. The impact of the child on the classroom programme.				
C. The teaching and special education experience of the SENCO.				
D. The amount of influence by the SENCO on the school special needs policy and procedures.				
E. The SENCO confidence in the RTLB service.				
F. The role of the SENCO within the referral process.				
G. The SENCO view of the importance of working with external agencies.				
H. The child's assessment data.				

SENCO REFERRING TO RTLB

9. Please circle one number to indicate the flow chart that best represents the RTLB referral process for your school.

A. Principal or senior staff → Referred to RTLB

B. Class teacher → Referred to RTLB

C. Class teacher → Principal → Referred to RTLB

D. Class teacher → SENCO → Principal → Referred to RTLB

E. Class teacher → Principal → Referred to RTLB

Discussion between Principal and/or senior staff with the SENCO about the need for the referral.

Principal ↓↑ SENCO

F. Class teacher → Special Needs Committee. The committee may include the Principal. → Principal → Referred to RTLB

SENCO REFERRING TO RTLB

Appendix C: Letter accompanying questionnaire.

SENCO REFERRING TO RTLB

Dear SENCO

I am completing a thesis for my Masters of Educational Psychology through Massey University. The thesis is investigating school policies and practices associated with the rate of referral to the RTLB service, with particular emphasis on the role of the SENCO. I hope the study will contribute to our understanding of the pivotal role of the SENCO . The importance of the SENCO role in helping children at risk was identified by ERO within reports from 2008 and 2010.

Would you please complete the attached questionnaire and return it to my supervisor in the stamped self-addressed envelope enclosed. Responces to most questions only require you to tick the appropriate box that best reflects your view. The time required is only 5 to 10 minutes. There is no compulsion to complete the questionnaire.

The analysis will focus on 2012 data. You received the questionnaire as you have been identified as the school's SENCO last year. So your responses to questions need to be in terms of what was happening within your school in 2012.

Please do not record your name or school name on the questionnaire. To ensure that responces are anonymous, and thus confidential, the collected data will be independently entered onto a spreadsheet. After data entry the reference to school number will be removed from the spreadsheet before I can access the information. The questionnaires will be destroyed at the completion of the thesis. This will ensure I cannot track questionnaire responses back to a school or SENCO.

If you have any questions you may contact me through my email address dtaylor@foxton.school.nz or phone me on (027) 275 1142. Alternatively you can contact my supervisor Dr Jane Prochnow at the Institute of Education, Massey University at j.e.prochnow@massey.ac.nz.

This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics committees. The researcher(s) named above are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.

SENCO REFERRING TO RTLB

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher (s), please contact Professor John O'Neill, Director (Research Ethics), telephone 06 350 5249, email humanethics@massey.ac.nz.

Yours sincerely

David Taylor

Appendix D: Instructions to independent coder

SENCO REFERRING TO RTLB

Instructions to independent coder

1. An envelope containing all the returned questionnaires will be sent to you from Massey University. The questionnaires will all be in unopened envelopes.
2. The Excel spreadsheet has been set up with a column for each question. When you receive the spreadsheet save the file as thesisdata2013A
3. The school number (Column A) and referral rate per 100 students (Column B) have already been entered onto the spreadsheet. The spreadsheet has been sorted by the school number, so the lowest school number is at the top. The school numbers will not be sequential, as some schools will not have been sent a survey and some have not returned a survey.
4. Please sort the returned questionnaires according to school number prior to starting data entry.
5. The columns for some questions have been produced with a drop down facility so you have a list from which you select the answer to be recorded. The following table shows the possible responses for each question.

Question	**Response to be recorded**	**Does the column have a drop down?**	**Comments**
1A, 1B	1, 2, 3 or 4	Yes	
2A, 2B	Yes or No	Yes	
3A to 3E	Not applicable, Never, Sometimes, Usually, Always	Yes	NA = Not applicable
4A to 4F	A number	No	
5A, 5B	Yes or No	Yes	
6	A, B, C, D, E	Yes	
7A to 7H	NA, Low, Moderate, High	Yes	NA = Not applicable
8A to 8H	Do not know, Low, Moderate, High	Yes	
9	A, B, C, D, E, F	Yes	

6. Once all data has been entered save the file.

SENCO REFERRING TO RTLB

7. Now select the following:
    a. File
    b. Save as
    c. Save the file as thesisdata2013B

   This will ensure that if there are any difficulties with the next steps you have a back-up file.

8. Select column A. Right click on the mouse and delete column A.
9. Save the file.
10. Now sort the spreadsheet by the referral rate, which is now column A. This is done by the following steps:
    a. Click on the cell B2.
    b. Select “Data” in the toolbar.
    c. Select “Sort” in the toolbar.
    d. In the instructions box that now shows on the screen click on the small box beside “My data has headers” in the top right hand side. This will ensure there is a tick in this box.
    e. Click on the drop down button in the “Sort by” section. Select “rate of referral per 100 students”.
    f. Click on the drop down button in the “Sort on” section. Select “values”.
    g. Click on the drop down button in the “Order” section. Select “Smallest to largest”.
    h. Select OK.
    i. The data should now be sorted with the lowest value referral rate at the top.
11. Email me the file thesisdata2013B
12. Under no circumstances are you to send me the original questionnaires or the file thesisdata2013A.
13. After I have checked the file you have sent me I will contact you by email. At the completion of the thesis I will contact you by email again and request that you delete file thesisdata2013A and shred all the questionnaires.

Appendix E: Ethics approval

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHUROA

25 July 2013

David Taylor
118 Te Whanga Road
RD 12
LEVIN 5572

Dear David

Re: In-School Factors around the SENCO Role That Influence Referral Rates to the RTLB Service

Thank you for your Low Risk Notification which was received on 27 June 2013.

Your project has been recorded on the Low Risk Database which is reported in the Annual Report of the Massey University Human Ethics Committees.

The low risk notification for this project is valid for a maximum of three years.

Please notify me if situations subsequently occur which cause you to reconsider your initial ethical analysis that it is safe to proceed without approval by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees.

Please note that travel undertaken by students must be approved by the supervisor and the relevant Pro Vice-Chancellor and be in accordance with the Policy and Procedures for Course-Related Student Travel Overseas. In addition, the supervisor must advise the University's Insurance Officer.

A reminder to include the following statement on all public documents:

> *"This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named above are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.*
>
> *If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Professor John O'Neill, Director (Research Ethics), telephone 06 350 5249, e-mail humanethics@massey.ac.nz".*

Please note that if a sponsoring organisation, funding authority or a journal in which you wish to publish requires evidence of committee approval (with an approval number), you will have to provide a full application to one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. You should also note that such an approval can only be provided prior to the commencement of the research.

Yours sincerely

J. O'Neill

John G O'Neill (Professor)
Chair, Human Ethics Chairs' Committee and
Director (Research Ethics)

cc Prof James Chapman
Institute of Education
PN500

Dr Jane Prochnow
Institute of Education
PN500

Assoc Prof Sally Hansen, Director
Institute of Education
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