

**Teacher leadership in practice: Mapping the negotiation of the position of the special educational needs coordinator in schools.**

Charlotte Struyve (Corresponding author)

Affiliation: Educational Effectiveness and Evaluation Research Group, KU Leuven

[Charlotte.struyve@kuleuven.be](mailto:Charlotte.struyve@kuleuven.be)

Prof. dr. Karin Hannes

Affiliation: Centre for Sociological Research, KU Leuven

[Karin.hannes@kuleuven.be](mailto:Karin.hannes@kuleuven.be)

Chloé Meredith

Affiliation: Educational Effectiveness and Evaluation Research Group, KU Leuven

[Chloé.meredith@kuleuven.be](mailto:Chloé.meredith@kuleuven.be)

dr. Machteld Vandecandelaere

Affiliation: Educational Effectiveness and Evaluation Research Group, KU Leuven

[Machteld.vandecandelaere@kuleuven.be](mailto:Machteld.vandecandelaere@kuleuven.be)

Prof. dr. Sarah Gielen

Affiliation: Educational Effectiveness and Evaluation Research Group, KU Leuven

[Sarah.gielen@kuleuven.be](mailto:Sarah.gielen@kuleuven.be)

Prof. dr. Bieke De Fraine

Affiliation: Educational Effectiveness and Evaluation Research Group, KU Leuven

[Bieke.defraigne@kuleuven.be](mailto:Bieke.defraigne@kuleuven.be)

## **Abstract**

Special needs care has taken on a substantial evolution within education. Special educational needs coordinators (SENCOs) are no longer considered to provide individual guidance to students but to support and professionalize regular teachers in fulfilling special needs care in their classroom. In doing so, they act as teacher leaders. Many concerns are raised about how teacher leadership may interfere with the existing working relationships in schools. In this study, we use Positioning Theory as a theoretical approach to obtain an in-depth understanding of how the position of the SENCO and the responsibilities attached to this position are negotiated within the school. The findings illustrate that SENCOs receive the legitimacy to act as teacher leaders when their expertise was recognized, when teachers perceived their task as first-line helpers, and when school principals were willing to release power.

**Key words:** Teacher leadership, Special educational needs coordinator (SENCO), Positioning Theory, Case studies

## 1. Special needs care in motion

During the last two decades, more attention has been paid to pupils or students with special educational needs in mainstream education (see e.g., Agaliotis & Kalyva, 2011; Crowther, Dyson, & Millward, 2001; Davies, Garner, & Lee, 1998; Dyson & Gains, 1995). While first the question was *whether* additional support should be provided to students with special educational needs, the discussion developed towards the question *how* this support should be organized. Traditionally, special needs care was ascribed to a specific teacher in the school, the so-called special needs teacher. Later on, international educational research and policy indicated that the support of students with special educational needs should move away from the support by a single teacher towards a special needs care that is embedded in the school and that is the responsibility of every single member of the school team (see e.g., Beveridge, 1999; Jacobs, Struyf, & De Maeyer, 2013; Szwed, 2007). The reason behind this ‘whole-school approach’ is that teachers form the largest group of professionals who interact with students on a daily basis. This puts them in a prominent position to identify and assist students with disorders, and to support students’ personal and social development (Hui, 2002; Lam & Hui, 2010). Teachers are regarded as ‘first-line helpers’ because they collect useful information about their students (Rothi, Leavy, & Best, 2008).

Together with this evolution, the role of the special educational needs *coordinator* (SENCO) was introduced in most countries, including the Nordic countries, encompassing the coordination of the overall school response to special needs care (Crowther, Dyson, & Millward, 2001; Dean, 1996). Schools’ special educational needs teachers, who, next to teaching responsibilities, originally provided individual help to students with special educational needs themselves, have been encouraged to transform their responsibilities towards a coordination role that mainly focuses on professional guidance for and support of the regular teachers (Forlin, 2001; Jones, Jones, & Szwed, 2001; Lindqvist, 2013). The role of the SENCO has been about improving mainstream schools’ capacity to overcome barriers to learning by professionalizing teachers in special needs care and by creating a more collaborative approach between teachers in the fulfillment of their special needs responsibilities (Forlin, 2001; Pijl & Van Den Bos, 2001; Szwed, 2007; Vlachou, 2006). In that sense, SENCOs function as so-called ‘teacher leaders’ who “help translating principles of school improvement into the practices of individual classrooms” (Day & Harris, 2003, p. 973). Although teacher leadership has been extensively studied, an unambiguous definition of the concept is still lacking (Scribner & Bradley-Levine, 2010). Teacher leadership functions as an umbrella concept of a broad empirical reality, containing both formal and informal leadership roles for teachers, fulltime and part-time (in combination with teaching duties) appointments, and leadership responsibilities located at both the school-level and grade-level (Struyve, Meredith, & Gielen, 2014; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). In this study, we focus on formally appointed SENCOs who combine special needs responsibilities with teaching duties as one particular form of teacher leaders. Although we acknowledge that this way of organizing special needs care in schools

might not be universally applied, it is an important trend in many European countries to which educational scholars have paid little attention so far.

## **2. To be or not to be a teacher leader**

### 2.1 Teacher leadership challenged

Teacher leadership has become a topic of interest in international educational research and policy. It has been described as a panacea to several educational problems, such as poor student achievement and student retention, a lack of opportunities for professional development, and limited school innovation (e.g., Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Margolis, 2008; Taylor, Yates, Meyer, & Kinsella, 2011). The underlying rationale is that, when teachers are given significant responsibilities, schools' organizational capacity increases (Silins & Mulford, 2004).

However, within the large body of literature on teacher leadership, several critical voices (e.g., Harris, 2003; Smylie, 1995, 1997; Smylie & Mayrowetz, 2009) question the overall accepted assumption of the benefits of teacher leadership. They point out that the literature offers a rosy view of the implementation of teacher leadership, while it can be assumed that diverse structural and cultural barriers operating in schools inhibit the implementation of teacher leadership. According to Harris (2003), schools rely on a clear demarcation of roles and responsibilities that functions as a major barrier to the idea of teachers as leaders. Smylie (1997) argues that the introduction of teacher leadership roles requires simultaneously the process of reshaping the prevailing beliefs and expectations of teacher roles in order to be regarded as legit. Macbeath (2005) assumes that rethinking institutional roles might lead to people feeling uncomfortable, to role conflict, as well as to discussion regarding who is in charge and has the authority to make certain decisions. Smylie and Mayrowetz (2009) fear that this all may lead to resistance amongst school actors and even to the point where teacher leaders raise concerns about their working relationships with their colleagues (both teachers and the school principal) and ask themselves the question: is this really worth the hassle?

The above voices, expressing doubts about the self-evidence of the implementation of teacher leadership, are based on advocacy rather than on empirical evidence. In general, many scholars indicate that empirical studies on teacher leadership are relatively scarce, compared to the amount of opinion pieces developed on this topic (e.g., Smylie, 1995; Taylor et al., 2011a). Furthermore, the existing empirical studies are often criticized due to the lack of focus on the interactions between teachers, teacher leaders, and their school principal(s). They mainly describe what teacher leaders do and how they are prepared on taking on leadership responsibilities (e.g., Conley & Muncey, 1999; Struyve, Meredith, & Gielen, 2014). Other studies investigate the effects of teacher leadership on, for example, student achievement (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999; 2000), teachers' attitudes and professional development (Bogler, 2001), and schools' innovation capacity (Muijs & Harris, 2007). Smylie (1992) was one of the first to open this black box by reporting on teachers' experiences of their interactions

with teacher leaders concerning classroom instruction. His findings show that the more strongly teachers believe that exchanging advice with other teachers implies obligation and the more strongly they agree on professional equality among teachers, the less likely they were to interact with teacher leaders about matters of classroom instruction. In another study, Smylie and Brownlee-Conyers (1992) reported on the perceptions of teacher leaders and of school principals about their new role and relationships in the school. They illustrated that differences in perceptions may result in interpersonal tension, role conflict, and even lower levels of task accomplishment. Since then, more studies reported about teacher leaders' experiences regarding interactions with their colleagues, both teachers and school principals, when studying teacher leadership (see e.g., Margolis, 2008; Scribner et al., 2007), some of them even focusing on the SENCO as one particular form of teacher leadership (Hakkarainen, Palonen, Paavola, & Lethinen, 2004; Tuomainen, Palonen, & Hakkarainen, 2010). These studies, many of them conducted in the Nordic countries, explained that SENCO's work environment might be described as a 'war zone' because they seem to experience troubles when convincing and guiding teachers to support students with special educational needs in their classroom (Cole, 2005; Lindqvist, Nilholm, Almqvist, & Wetso, 2011). In particular, these studies report on the difficulties that SENCOs experience in establishing their new role in the prevalent school culture due to the fact that they are the only one who see their responsibilities at the level of school development and not at the level of individual student guidance (Ahlberg, 1999; Bladini, 2004; Szwed, 2007; Vlachou, 2006). Consequently, SENCOs feel they cannot realize their pivotal role in school due to different perceptions about their exact responsibilities (Lindqvist, 2013).

## 2.2 Introducing the notion of positioning

Previous studies have paid little attention to how SENCO's role and the responsibilities attached to this role are negotiated between the SENCO, teachers, and the school principals within the prevailing structure and culture of schools. Recent studies point out that, to fully understand leadership, the field needs to move away from focus on the solo actions of individuals with a formal leadership role towards studying leadership as *constructed* and *practiced* in the interactions between several actors (see e.g., Crevani, Lindgren, & Packendorff, 2010; Gronn, 2002a, 2002b; Ogawa & Bossert, 1995). Leadership is presented "in the flow of activities in which a set of organization members find themselves enmeshed" (Gronn, 2000, p. 331) and therefore needs to take reactions of other school actors who function as followers into account (Kaiser, Hogan, & Craig, 2008). This shift in leadership conception provides a way of thinking and studying how leadership can be enacted by both formal leaders (school principals or formal teacher leaders) as well as by any other school team member. In addition, it implies that holding a formal leadership role does not naturally provide the evidence for receiving the legitimacy of other school members to lead and thus for influencing their actions (e.g., Gronn, 2000, 2002a, Spillane, 2005, 2006). Looking at how the role of the SENCO is co-constructed by taking the assumptions and actions of other school team members into account, is therefore essential.

A promising framework for studying teacher leadership as a practice, that inherently contains negotiation processes, is Positioning Theory (e.g., Harré, 1995; Harré & Van Langenhove, 1999). Positioning Theory assumes that positions are always formed in the interactions of individuals who project a particular position of themselves and other members of the organization who respond to this position with affirming or disaffirming acts (Hatch & Schultz, 2000). The concept of *positioning* – originally from Hollway (1984) – moves beyond the more static and restrictive concept of role (Davies & Harré, 1990) and enables us to make sense of the dynamics of social interactions between school team members. Positioning Theory helps us to understand the positions of actors rather than the roles they assume (Francis, 2012). The noun ‘position’ is used as a single fragment in this ongoing process, and thus as the expectations one has about how one should behave, including a set of rights and duties to perform specific actions. It is about how people present themselves and others, as actors in a drama. The term ‘positioning’ refers to an ongoing process of positioning the self and the other while simultaneously being positioned by this other person.

Positioning Theory functions as a tool to understand “what people are doing in context and in the full concreteness of their situations” (Harré, 1995, p.135). More specifically, it supports us in focusing on how individuals ‘call’ each other to look at themselves, to act, and to relate to each other in a particular way (Harré & Van Langenhove, 1999). According to Harré, Moghaddam, Cairnie, Rothbart, and Sabat (2009), Positioning Theory makes us able to reveal “the explicit and implicit patterns of reasoning that are realized in the ways that people act towards others” (p. 5). In particular, the analysis of narrative discourses can help us to investigate the positions assumed by and attributed to school team members because “narratives can be viewed as a way in which people socially define and position themselves with regard to others” (Bloome, 2003, p. 300).

### **3. Present study and research questions**

The aim of the present study is to examine how SENCOs, as formally appointed teacher leaders, negotiate their position and become subject to the negotiation of others. In particular, SENCOs are considered to support and professionalize regular teachers in fulfilling special needs care in their classroom. In doing so, they intervene in teachers’ instruction and overall classroom practice, which makes that the clear demarcation of roles and responsibilities is challenged. Positioning Theory has the potential to offer us an in-depth understanding of how reshaping the existing structures and responsibilities includes processes of positioning, or, in other words, how the role of the SENCO and the responsibilities attached to this role are formed and discussed in the context of and between all members of an organization. Therefore, in this study, our aim is to obtain a thorough comprehension of the present negotiation and its underlying processes that are inescapably part of, and that have a significant influence on, the presence or absence of the legitimacy of the SENCOs to fulfill their responsibilities.

Our research questions are phrased as follows:

RQ1. How do SENCOs position themselves and others (teachers and school principal) in the fulfillment of special needs care and how are they positioned by others?

RQ2. What are the underlying processes that help us understand the differences between schools regarding the position of the SENCO?

## **4. Method**

### 4.1 Design

In order to grasp the notion of the way in which SENCO's role is negotiated between members of an organization as well as the processes underlying this negotiation, a qualitative-interpretative research methodology was adopted, using a multiple case study design (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Qualitative case-studies allow us to develop detailed descriptions of actors and their actions, practices, and contexts (Bryman, 2008). According to Merriam (1998), "qualitative case studies are intensive, holistic descriptions and analyses of a bounded phenomenon such as a program, an institution, a person, a process, or a social unit" (p. 19). The focus of this study is thus on obtaining an in-depth understanding rather than on empirical generalization.

### 4.2 Case selection

This study was carried out in two Flemish secondary schools, selected by using an extreme case sampling strategy (e.g., Seawright & Gerring, 2008). In particular, two completely opposite cases were chosen in order to enlarge how positioning makes part of teacher leadership practices, in our case special needs care practices, and thus to clearly illustrate the fine-grained (inter)actions that give concrete expression to how special needs care happens in schools. To select our two cases we used data from a large data collection project, containing, among other data, social network data on several social networks within the school team, including the instrumental special needs care network. In particular, a social network survey was administered to all teachers and school principals of 20 secondary schools in Flanders, comprising the following question: 'Whom do you go to to discuss special needs care issues within your class and school (such as, how to deal with students with learning difficulties, with disruptive behavior of students, with social-emotional problems of students, but also to discuss school's special needs care policy)?' We used a bounded sample in which all names of a school's teachers and other pedagogical personnel were listed alphabetically in a name roster. The respondents could indicate a relationship with as many colleagues as they preferred and were asked to also indicate the frequency of their interactions on a scale from once a year to once a day. Based on the nominations, a matrix was constructed for every school and the network was visualized by using UCINET 6.491 (Borgatti, Everett, & Freeman, 2002). We did only include nominations with a frequency of at least one time a month as an indication of the stability of the interactions within the school. Because we could only include schools

in which a SENCO was appointed and that had a response rate of 80%, which is considered a minimum for social network analysis (see e.g., Huisman & Steglich, 2008), we ended up with a sample of 14 schools. Based on these social network data, we selected the school with the most centrally located SENCO (St. Catherine's College, see Figure 1), as well as the school with the least centrally located SENCO (St. George's College, see Figure 2)<sup>1</sup>. The centrality of the SENCO was calculated by means of the in-degree measure. In-degree indicates the proportion of possible ties that an actor could receive and that were realized to capture the extent to which actors were consulted by their colleagues to discuss special needs care issues. In other words, in-degree gives an indication of the social acknowledgement of the SENCO and thus the legitimacy to effectively accomplish their tasks as a SENCO. In St. Catherine's College, the SENCO was consulted by 41.3% of all colleagues concerning special needs care issues, whereas in St. George's College, the SENCO was only consulted by 1.4% of all colleagues. With a population of respectively 47 and 73 school team members, St. Catherine's and St. George's College can both be considered as small to medium secondary mainstream schools. Both schools are Catholic but offer different tracks. Whereas St. Catherine's college offers only technical and vocational education, St. George's College only offers general education.

[Enter Figure 1 here]

[Enter Figure 2 here]

Within these two schools, we selected respondents for further in-depth research. Our respondents were the SENCO, the school principal<sup>2</sup>, and two (full-time) teachers. In Flanders (Belgium), SENCOs are teachers who, based on their experiences with or interest in special needs care, are formally appointed to take on the responsibility of coordinating the school's special needs care practice. Although several Higher Education Colleges in Flanders have recently installed a full-scale one year programme on special needs care for teachers, no certification is (yet) required for becoming a SENCO in a school. SENCOs mostly enroll in one of the many short-term professionalization trainings on special needs care that are available.

Teachers were selected by using a purposeful sampling technique. Based on our social network data concerning the special needs care network, we selected one teacher who nominated the SENCO and one teacher who did not nominate the SENCO, assuming they might position the SENCO differently. However, in St. George's College, we interviewed two teachers who did not nominate the SENCO because the only teacher who nominated the SENCO was not available for an interview. In St. Catherine's College, more teachers were eligible and therefore they were randomly chosen out of all teachers who were willing to participate. The general characteristics of the selected respondents are summarized in Table 1.

[Enter Table 1 here]



### 4.3 Data collection

Because acts of positioning can be identified through people's speech acts (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999), we combined semi-structured interviews (approximately 1,5h each) and non-participative observations. The combination of interview and observational data allowed us to, on the one hand, listen carefully to the stories of the respondents, and, on the other hand, grasp how their perceptions and experiences result in specific stances towards each other during interactions.

In the semi-structured interviews, information on three broad topics was collected, containing narrative accounts of their feelings and experiences and how they make sense of them: (a) general background information and information on the individual's specific responsibilities in the school; (b) their view on the main goals of the school, including the special needs care policy and the responsibilities that they and the other respondents should fulfill in obtaining these goals, and (c) their view on the relationship with each other. We added an observational component to this study (see Adler & Adler, 1998), focusing on the ongoing positioning between our respondents, and thus on the narrative discourse in which our respondents socially define and position themselves and each other within the interactions. Observations took place during three class councils per school at the end of the school year (2013-2014). We also registered informal interactions by means of field notes.

### 4.4 Data analysis

All interviews and observations were audio-taped, transcribed verbatim and coded, using descriptive and interpretative codes. Whereas descriptive codes summarized the content of the fragment, interpretative codes, derived from our literature study, were used as a first interpretation of the fragments. For the observations, we only coded the episodes in which our respondents participated in a substantive discussion concerning special needs care in the broad sense. After coding, data analysis progressed in three phases.

*First*, a within-case analysis was conducted using each individual respondent as the unit of analysis. We applied a systematic approach, resulting in a synthesis text with a common structure of paragraphs for each respondent. In particular, for each synthesis text, extractions of data from the coded interview transcripts were guided by three core questions: (1) how does the respondent position the SENCO, (2) how does the respondent position the teacher, and (3) how does the respondent position the school principal, in the fulfillment of special needs care. Based on these elements (extractions of interview data and its codes), a position was derived for each core question. Each positioning can be considered as a cohesive pattern of beliefs about the responsibilities that this particular respondent should assume regarding special needs care, and the concrete actions that he or she undertakes to make these ideas and beliefs clear (see Table 2 for an example).

*Second*, a cross-case analysis was done comparing the position that the different respondents ascribe to themselves and each other per school. The aim was to identify commonalities and differences

regarding the responsibilities that they allocate to themselves and their colleagues in each school (see Table 3 and 4).

*Third*, a second cross-case analysis was completed, using the school as the unit of analysis and thus comparing findings of both schools (see Miles & Huberman, 1994). In doing so, a thematic analysis approach was used in uncovering underlying processes of why both schools differ in the positions that their members ascribe to each other and how this results in two opposite cases. In particular, we searched for specific patterns in positioning that go beyond sheer association by showing that “stories are not capricious, but include underlying variables, and that variables are not disembodied, but have connections over time” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 147).

The results of the first and second phase, in which we searched for how all actors position themselves and each other (RQ1), are presented in Table 2, 3 and 4. In what follows, we elaborate on the third phase, explaining the underlying processes of positioning (RQ2).

[Enter Table 2 here]

[Enter Table 3 here]

[Enter Table 4 here]

## **5. Findings**

Our analyses illustrate that the processes, underlying the negotiation of the position of the SENCO, can be summarized into three themes: (1) the expertise of the SENCO, (2) the task perception of teachers, and (3) the power release of the school principal. In what follows, we will elaborate on each theme.

### **5.1 Expertise of the SENCO**

In *St. Catherine's College*, Elisabeth indicates that expertise is central to her responsibilities as a SENCO in the school (see Table 5:1). She explains that she has expanded her knowledge regarding special needs care issues, and how to deal with those issues during the last 17 years by means of both experiences and professionalization programs. According to her, to become a good SENCO, both theoretical and practical expertise are necessary because it gives the right tools to approach and support students in the

[Enter Table 5 here]

best way, in accordance to their needs. Because Elisabeth possesses this expertise, it is self-evident to her that other school members listen to her and agree with her when talking about special needs care. Moreover, she feels that her expertise gives her the right to tell teachers what to do regarding special needs care issues in their classroom (Table 5:2). Elisabeth considers supporting teachers in dealing with students with special educational needs in their classroom as her main responsibility.

Elisabeth's expertise is acknowledged by the other respondents. Both teachers, Lisa and Carine, as well as the school principal, Roger, bring forward that a SENCO in a school should be someone who is an expert in the field of special needs care and thus one to whom they can turn with questions or problems. According to all of them, Elisabeth has the expertise regarding special needs care that is missing or insufficiently present with teachers (Table 5:3). During the observed interactions, we could see how Elisabeth's interventions were appreciated. Because she is seen as a person who possesses a lot of knowhow, her input was always taken seriously and could lead to a total new perspective on a certain case. In other words, Elisabeth's expertise in special needs care was clearly present, which gave all other actors confidence in what she said and did regarding special needs care. Her expertise also functioned as a safe conduct for taking on the position of the SENCO. No one questioned the fact that Elisabeth took on a leadership role concerning special needs care and that she could make certain decisions that have an impact on teachers' classroom practice. Elisabeth's expertise in special needs care, which was clearly recognized by all others, provided the basis for having influence and to function as a teacher leader.

A different story took place at *St. George's College*. Although Kate indicated that taking on the position of the SENCO involves guidance of teachers in how to support these students in their classroom (Table 5:4), she felt resistance in fulfilling her role. In particular, although she considers herself as the only one in the school with expertise regarding special needs care, she indicated that teachers rather go to the school principal when having questions about how to deal with students with special educational needs. However, what Kate experienced as resistance rather seemed to be ignorance of her expertise. During the interviews, teachers expressed that they only have limited knowledge regarding special needs care, which makes them in favour of having an expert available in the school for information and support on special needs care issues (Table 5:5). Teachers indicated that the school does not have a real SENCO and that Kate's expertise lies in offering study guidance classes (Table 5:6). Therefore, due to a perceived lack of available expertise, teachers go to the school principal for special needs care issues. During the observed interactions, it was confirmed that teachers did not consider Kate as a person with specific expertise regarding special needs care. In particular, we saw that Kate tried to make some special needs care interventions by asking colleagues not to look exclusively at the academic result of students. A few times, Kate tried to broaden the perspective of teachers on students by asking them to take into account contextual issues. However, she mostly did not succeed. In other words, and compared to *St. Catherine's College*, Kate had difficulties in taking on the position of the SENCO since other actors did not recognize her as a person with expertise regarding special needs care. Therefore, Kate was unable to have an influence on teachers' classroom practice and thus to function as a teacher leader. Having expertise is one thing, but making sure that this expertise is clear to and known by other members is as much crucial.

So far, many scholars agree on the idea of teacher leaders as important sources of expertise and information (e.g., Day & Harris, 2003; Muijs & Harris, 2007; Tuomainen, Palonen, & Hakkarainen, 2011). In addition, several authors found that teachers only emerge, and thus are considered, as leaders if they developed high-level expertise and are able to empower teachers based on their expertise (Snell & Swanson, 2000). They see expertise at the foundation of increasing teacher quality and advancements in teaching and learning (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). The purpose of appointing teacher leaders in schools is to make this expertise available through modelled effective practices and to, in the end, create a more professional work environment (Barth, 2001). In our two cases, both SENCOs differ in the degree in which they are regarded by others as experts. This leads to different negotiation processes regarding the position of the SENCO, and, in the end, to a different degree in which expertise is made available within the school. This contrast might also be influenced or enlarged by the fact that both SENCOs differ in the number of years that they are member of the school and that they fulfill special needs responsibilities.

## 5.2 Task perception of teachers

In *St. Catherine's College*, both Lisa and Carine indicate that all teachers in school should function as 'first-line helpers' in the fulfillment of special needs care, providing the 'first aid' to students and especially to those with special educational needs. Carine and Lisa do not see special needs care as the exclusive responsibility of the SENCO but of all teachers in the school, to the extent to which they can approach these needs, with the knowledge and expertise they possess (Table 5:7). When they cannot solve a certain problem on their own, the SENCO is invoked. In the meantime, it is, according to all respondents, the task of schools' SENCO to professionalize teachers in special needs care, and thus to make sure teachers can take on their responsibility as first-line helper. The idea of teachers as first line helpers makes part of the special needs care policy that Elisabeth pursues in the school. According to her, the educational practice has become more complex over the years and asks from teachers to see their responsibilities broader than merely teaching (Table 5:8). During the observed interactions, we could see how teachers effectively fulfilled their task as first-line helpers. In particular, during the meetings, teachers always brought in important information on the strengths and weaknesses of every student. Remarkably is that, during many class councils, the SENCO was not present. Elisabeth is only present at the class councils when the growth or study progress of students with exceptional needs is discussed. Those cases exceed the knowledge and skills of the teaching team and ask for more than merely first line help. This rule, introduced by Elisabeth herself, is also an expression of how she wants teachers to perform as first-line helpers. Because the teachers in this school agree on their ascribed responsibilities regarding special needs care, and thus perceive their task in the fulfillment of special needs care in the same way as the SENCO, that is, being first-line helpers, Elisabeth receives legitimacy to empower teachers in meeting students' needs in their classroom.

Again, a different story took place at *St. George's College*. Teachers indicated that they prefer to pass on the responsibility regarding special needs care to the school principal because, on the one hand, they feel that they have only limited knowledge on this issue, and, on the other hand, they see special needs care as a distraction of their core responsibility, that is, teaching students specific content knowledge (Table 5:9). In particular, teachers felt that their responsibility is merely detecting and passing on students with special needs in the classroom to the responsible person in the school, while continuing teaching all other students. Remarkable is that this behavior of teachers is stimulated by the school principal. According to him, teachers should be protected from too many responsibilities (Table 5:10). Kate, on the contrary, ascribes many more responsibilities to teachers. She argues that teachers are key actors in the fulfillment of special needs care because they are the ones who are able to continuously follow-up students. To her, special needs care is only successful when all teachers feel in charge for special needs care and when they function together as a team. She regrets that this does not take place in reality and even becomes low priority for many teachers (Table 5:11). During the observed interactions, it was clear that most teachers do not pay attention to special needs care issues and how this seems to be stimulated by the school principal. All discussions regarding students focused mostly on academic results. Teachers did not bring in any important information on how students behave or other important contextual elements. If someone dares to bring in those kind of information, mostly the SENCO, the school principal seemed to frame these elements as problems that exceed the borders of the school. In other words, teachers' task perception regarding special needs care seems to be very different from what Kate desires from teachers. Teachers do not agree with Kate's idea of teachers playing a crucial and intensive role in the fulfillment of special needs care. This friction implies difficulties for a SENCO for being allowed to empower teachers in meeting students' needs in their classroom practice.

The actual practice in *St. George's College* seem to be in conflict with the aims of international policy and research, arguing that special needs care should become an integral part of the educational curriculum (see e.g., Jacobs, Struyf, & De Maeyer, 2013; Puurula, Neill, Vasileiou, Husbands, Lang, Katz, ..., Vriens, 2001; Szwed, 2007). It considers teachers as the vital link for the integration of special needs care into the classroom practice. Special needs care should no longer be a 'one-man-show' of the SENCO who tries to remedy the special educational needs of children by pulling them out of their classroom but should develop a 'whole-school approach', rooted in a shared vision and responsibility (Galassi & Akos, 2004; Hui, 2000; Robson, Cohen, & McGuinness, 1999; Rothi, Leavy, & Best, 2008). A whole-school approach considers teachers' real participation as of crucial importance. In our two cases, teachers vary in the degree to which they agree with taking on a prominent position in special needs care. They perceive their task regarding special needs care differently. As a consequence, different negotiation processes take place, which has implications for the degree to which the SENCO is allowed to empower teachers with regard to special needs care. This finding clearly demonstrates that teacher leadership should be studied by moving beyond the role of the teacher leader, in this case the SENCO. Together, both cases illustrate that teachers who engage or - in the case of *St. George's College* - who

do not engage in special needs care influence the degree to which teacher leadership can be considered as successful. The contrast between both schools also seems to align with the social networks of the schools (see Figure 1 and 2), illustrating that our two cases differ regarding the density and the number of school actors participating in the special needs care network.

### 5.3 Power release of the school principal

In *St. Catherine's College*, the school principal indicates that Elisabeth, the SENCO, should function as the key actor in the school regarding the fulfillment of special needs care. According to him, Elisabeth is the most important source of knowledge for teachers regarding the guidance and support of students with special educational needs. This expertise should encourage teachers to go to her rather than to him when dealing with questions or facing problems that are related to special needs care (Table 5:12). It seems thus that Roger does not have problems with relinquishing power to Elisabeth when it comes to special needs care. However, one condition needs to be fulfilled: he argues that he always wants to be informed about all issues regarding all students, because, in the end, he is the one who holds the final responsibility (Table 5:13). Without being informed, he feels he cannot fulfill his task as the principal, which he defines as being the general coordinator of the school. Elisabeth is satisfied with the released power of the school principal because it provides her the space to develop and implement the special needs care approach that she sees as favorable. Elisabeth receives the entire autonomy and responsibility to fulfill special needs care in school, which makes her even sometimes wish for a slightly higher involvement of the principal. During the observed interactions, we could see that Roger always openly consulted Elisabeth, when being present, to give her view on the development of a certain student or on how to approach this student in the classroom. It was clear that Elisabeth functioned as school's responsible for dealing with students with special educational needs.

In *St. George's College*, an opposite story took place. In particular, Kate indicated that she, as the school's SENCO, should be the person who keeps a bird's-eye view on the whole domain of special needs care and who outlines the contours of the special needs care practice in the school (Table 5:4). However, because the school principals pulled special needs care towards himself, Kate felt constrained in her efforts to take on the lead in developing and implementing a special needs care approach in the school. Consequently, although she took on the job with the idea to become a SENCO, her responsibilities were swiftly reduced to merely organizing study guidance classes. According to Kate, the reason for this turnaround is that the school principal still considers Kate as a teacher, not a teacher leader, and teachers should not have access to student information because of its private nature (Table 5:14). Kate points out that a reorganization of special needs care, entailing the appointment of a 'real' SENCO with the autonomy to cover the whole special needs care domain, urges. During the observed interactions, we could see that Paul never consulted Kate about the development of a certain student. In fact, Paul did not consult anyone regarding special needs care issues and even tried to avoid to talk about special needs care. Paul never gave Kate the opportunity to explain her view on the situation and to offer

suggestions for improvement. This way, Kate could never display her expertise regarding special needs care to other school team members, which makes it not surprising that other school team members do not consider her as school's special needs care expert.

According to many studies, teacher leadership implies changes in structures and a redistribution of command and control (Harris, 2003; Smylie & Mayrowetz, 2009). In particular, school principals are required to relinquish power to others, and thus to hand over direct control over certain activities, in order to enable and facilitate teacher leadership. Therefore, school principals are considered to play a pivotal role in a successful adoption and implementation of teacher leadership roles (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). According to Smylie and Brownlee-Conyers (1992), they are the ones who are in first order positions “to block, to support and facilitate, and to shape the nature and function of teacher leadership in their schools” (p. 151). Several empirical studies have illustrated that, on the one hand, school principals struggle in granting domains of teacher leadership (Little, 1995; Silva, Gimbert, & Nolan, 2000) and that, on the other hand, teacher leadership started to flourish in schools where principals actively support teacher leadership (see e.g., Buckner & McDowelle, 2000; Crowther et al., 2002). Or, using the words of Harris (2012), distributive leadership implies a fundamental change in principals' understanding of leadership and in the ways they enact their leadership roles. In particular, it implies “the relinquishing of some authority and power (...) and a repositioning of the role from exclusive leadership to a form of leadership that is more concerned with brokering, facilitating and supporting others in leading innovation and change (p. 8)”. In our study, both cases differ in the degree in which the school principal hands over the lead and control over special needs care to the SENCO and gives the SENCO the authority to enhance teachers' skills in supporting students with special educational needs. In doing so, our cases illustrate that the presence or absence of the school principal's support installs different negotiation processes regarding the position of the SENCO, which finally leads to different special needs care practices. This contrast might also be influenced or enlarged by the different personalities of both principals. Whereas the principal of St. Catherine's College seems to apply a rather democratic leadership style, the principal of St. George's College can be considered as an authoritarian school principal.

## **6. Discussion**

Our findings show that the positioning of the SENCO, and, closely related, the positioning of the teacher and the school principal regarding special needs care issues, find place in a very different way in St. Catherine's and St. George's College. In St. Catherine's College, the SENCO, the teachers, and the school principal all agree on each other's position in the fulfillment of special needs care. In other words, they all think along the same lines about what exactly their responsibilities are regarding special needs care in the school. It follows that these positions are well aligned in the sense that they work in tandem with each other. The position of the SENCO implies a reciprocal position of the teacher and the school

principal, and vice versa, and only if the one fulfills his or her responsibilities, the others can do too. As a consequence, a well-tuned and stable special needs care practice finds place in St. Catherine's College, which is reflected in constructive moment-to-moment interactions.

In St. George's College, on the contrary, we discovered more tensions related to the position of the SENCO as well as to the position of teachers and the school principal. In this school, Kate, the SENCO, mostly ascribes different positions to all other school team members in comparing to her colleagues, who take all the same line. There is no consensus between the SENCO and all other members of the school on the type of responsibilities of each of them in the fulfillment of special needs care. This seems to create a less well-tuned and much more unstable special needs care practice in the school.

In this study, we elaborated on the processes that are underlying to positioning. We illustrated that three themes are related to the position of the SENCO as a teacher leader: (1) possessing expertise and being recognized by others as the expert, (2) being surrounded by teacher colleagues who see themselves and act as first-line helpers, and (3) being supported by the school principal to take on the lead in fulfilling special needs care. Our analyses suggest that these themes help us understand whether the SENCO receives legitimacy to lead other school members and thus to influence their actions regarding the fulfillment of special needs care in their classroom and in the school. These findings are in line with the ideas of Dornbush and Scott (1975), who give two conditions for a leader to effectively function as a leader. First, relationships need to be legitimized, that is, those higher up in the organizational structure should grant power to certain individuals (which they call 'authorization'). Second, power relations need to be enforced by other school actors who are subjected to the exercise of that power (which they call 'endorsement'). Both authorization and endorsement are present in St. Catherine's College but are missing in St. George's College. In St. George's College, it seems that the lack of endorsement evolves mostly out of the lack of authorization. In particular, because the school principal Paul does not grant authority to the SENCO Kate to take on the lead regarding special needs care, Kate cannot fulfill her responsibilities and is not recognized as the SENCO by other members in the school.

Our analysis started from the need to consider teacher leadership as more than the assignment of a formal role and its responsibilities to a certain teacher in the school. In addition, in order to understand teacher leadership, we stressed the importance to look further than the actions and perceptions of the teacher leader, assuming that teacher leadership is constructed and practiced within the interactions between the teacher leader and his or her colleagues (i.e. teachers and the school principal). Therefore, in this study, attention was also paid to the beliefs and actions of other school team members in order to illustrate that teacher leadership is always co-constructed. More particular, we looked at how the role of the teacher leader, in our case the SENCO, and the responsibilities attached to this role, are negotiated in the interactions with other school team members. We illustrated that taking on a teacher leadership role is not merely a matter of how teacher leaders position themselves, but also of how they are simultaneously positioned by others. Positioning Theory functioned as an informative lens that helped us to obtain an



in-depth understanding of the positioning and of the underlying processes of this positioning that are inherent to teacher leadership practices. Positioning Theory proved to be very useful in revealing subtle processes that are fully part of teacher leadership practices and that influence the degree to which teacher leadership is successfully or rather arduously implemented in schools. In doing so, Positioning Theory helped us to open the black-box of the negotiation processes that are embedded in teacher leadership practices but that have never been studied in-depth before. Our study therefore offers an explanation and illustration of why the practice of teacher leadership in St. George's College is no exception according to many existing studies on teacher leadership (see e.g., Harris, 2003; Hart, 1990; Smylie, 1995; Smylie & Brownlee-Conyers, 1992; Smylie & Mayrowetz, 2009). These studies indicate that internal support from both the administrative leadership team and from the teacher colleagues is not self-evident. They point out that many school principals experience difficulties with relinquishing power and responsibilities to others as they lose control over certain activities (e.g., Frost & Durrant, 2003; Harris, 2003; Smylie & Brownlee-Conyers, 1992; Smylie & Mayrowetz, 2009). These studies also demonstrate that teacher leaders might struggle in obtaining recognition for their expertise and responsibilities by their teacher colleagues due to rooted norms of autonomy, privacy, and egalitarianism and the lack of participative structures that inhibit teachers to learn from each other (e.g., Hart, 1990; Smylie, 1997; Struyve, Meredith, & Gielen, 2014; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Consequently, taking on leadership responsibilities as a teacher is only successful when it goes hand in hand with authorization and endorsement. And, using the words of Coburn, Bae, and Turner (2008): "in the absence of agreed-upon norms legitimizing power relations, authority relations fail to materialize" (p. 368), which can lead to conflict, misunderstandings, power struggles, and an inability to move the work forward.

In sum, this study confirms and illustrates that teacher leadership is a messy field of study that needs an organizational lens to capture the complexity of the phenomenon. This study suggests to adopt a broad focus that takes into account the mutually influential interactions and negotiation processes between the particular teacher leader and other school actors regarding the role and the responsibilities attached to this role. Based on our results, we argue that, to fully understand teacher leadership, it must be conceived and studied as *a practice*, involving different members of the organization who ascribe similar or different responsibilities to each other in the school. Therefore, in order to further develop and implement the idea of teacher leadership in schools as a path to professional development and school innovation, it is important to pay attention to the fit or congruence between the ascribed positions, and to make sure the responsibilities of all actors are clear and accepted. Only then, teacher leadership can be considered as a possibility instead of a heresy or fantasy (Harris, 2003).

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> We used pseudonyms for reasons of confidentiality for both schools and respondents.

<sup>2</sup> In St. George's College, two school principals were appointed. However, at the moment of the data collection, one school principal just left the school. The school is not sure yet whether they will replace her.

## References

- Adler, A. A., & Adler, P. (1998). Observational techniques. In K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials* (pp. 79-109). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Agaliotis, I., & Kalyva, E. (2011). A survey of Greek general and special education teachers' perceptions regarding the role of the special needs coordinator: Implications for educational policy on inclusion and teacher education. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 27*, 543-551.
- Ahlberg, A. (1999) *På spaning efter en skola för alla (IPD-rapport 1404-062X; 1999: 08)*. Gothenburg: Gothenburg University, Faculty of Special Education.
- Barth, R. (1999). *The teacher leader*. Providence, RI: The Rhode Island Foundation.
- Beveridge, S. (1999). *Special educational needs in schools*. Routledge: London.
- Bladini, K. (2004) *Handledning som verktyg och rum för reflektion*. Dissertation. Karlstad, Sweden: Karlstads Universitet.
- Bloome, D. (2003). Narrative discourse. In A. Graesser, M.A. Gernsbacher, & S. Goldman (Eds.), *Handbook of discourse processes* (pp. 287-319). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Bogler, R. (2001). The influence of leadership style on teacher job satisfaction, *Educational Administration Quarterly, 37*(5), 662-683.
- Borgatti, S. P., Everett, M. G., & Freeman, L. C. (2002). *UCINET for windows: Software for social network analysis*. Cambridge, MA: Analytic Technologies.
- Bryman, A. (2008). *Social research methods* (3th ed.). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Buckner, K. G., & McDowelle, J. O. (2000). Developing teacher leaders: Providing encouragement, opportunities, and support. *NASSP Bulletin, 84*(616), 35-41.
- Coburn, C. E., Bae, S., & Turner, E. O. (2008). Authority, status, and the dynamics of insider-outsider partnerships at the district level. *Peabody Journal of Education, 83*, 364-399.
- Cole, B. A. (2005) Mission impossible? Special educational needs, inclusion and the re-conceptualization of the role of the SENCO in England and Wales. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 20*(3), 287-307.
- Conley, S., & Muncey, D. E. (1999). Teachers talk about teaming and leadership in their work. *Theory Into Practice, 38*, 46-55.
- Crevani, L., Lindgren, M., & Packendorff, J. (2010). Leadership, not leaders: On the study of leadership as practices and interactions. *Scandinavian Journal of Management, 26*, 77-86.

- Crowther, D., Dyson, A., & Millward, A. (2001). Supporting pupils with special educational needs: Issues and dilemmas for special needs coordinators in English primary schools. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 16*(2), 85-97.
- Crowther, F., Kaagen, S. S., Ferguson, M., & Hann, L. (2002). *Developing teacher leaders: How teacher leadership enhances school success*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Davies, J. D., Garner, P., & Lee, J. (1998). *Managing special needs in mainstream schools : The role of the SENCO*. London: David Fulton.
- Davies, B., & Harré, R. (1990). Positioning: The discursive production of selves. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour, 20*(1), 43-63.
- Day, C., & Harris, A. (2003). Teacher leadership, reflective practice and school improvement. In K. Leithwood & P. Hallinger (Eds.), *Second international handbook of educational leadership and administration* (pp. 957-977). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic.
- Dean, J. (1996). *Managing special needs in the primary school*. Routledge: London.
- Dornbush, S. M., & Scott, W. R. (1975). *Evaluation and the exercise of authority*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Dyson, A., & Gains, C. (1995). The role of the special needs coordinator: poisoned chalice or crock of gold? *Support for Learning, 10*(2), 50-56.
- Forlin, C. (2001). The role of the support teacher in Australia. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 16*(2), 121-131.
- Francis, D. A. (2012). Teacher positioning on the teaching of sexual diversity in South African Schools. *Culture, Health & Sexuality, 14*(6), 597-611.
- Frost, D., & Durrant, J. (2003). Teacher leadership: Rationale, strategy and impact. *School Leadership & Management, 23*(2), 173-186.
- Galassi, J. P., & Akos, P. (2004). Developmental advocacy : Twenty-first century school counseling. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 82*, 146-157.
- Gronn, P. (2000). Distributed properties: A new architecture for leadership. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 28*, 317-338.
- Gronn, P. (2002a). Distributed leadership. In K. Leithwood & P. Hallinger (Eds.), *Second international handbook of educational leadership and administration* (pp. 653-696). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic.
- Gronn, P. (2002b). Distributed leadership as a unit of analysis. *The Leadership Quarterly, 13*, 423-451.
- Hakkarainen, K., Palonen, T., Paavola, S., & Lethinen, E. (2004). *Communities of networked expertise*. Professional and educational perspectives. Amsterdam: Elsevier.
- Harré, R. (1995). Agentive discourse. In R. Harré & P. N. Stearns (Eds.), *Discursive psychology in practice* (pp.120-136). London: Sage.
- Harré, R., & van Langenhove, L. (1999). *Positioning theory*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers Inc.

- Harré, R., Moghaddam, F. M., Cairnie, T. P., Rothbart, D., & Sabat, S. R. (2009). Recent advances in positioning theory. *Theory and Psychology, 19*(1), 5-31.
- Harris, A. (2003). Teacher leadership as distributed leadership: Heresy, fantasy of possibility? *School Leadership and Management, 23*(3), 313-324.
- Harris, A. (2012). Distributed leadership: Implications for the role of the principal. *Journal of Management Development, 31*(1), 7-17.
- Hart, A. W. (1990). Impacts of the school social unit on teacher authority during work redesign. *American Educational Research Journal, 24*(4), 479-503.
- Hatch, M. J., & Schultz, M. (2002). The dynamics of organizational identity. *Human Relations, 55*, 989-1018.
- Hollway, W. (1984). Gender difference and the production of subjectivity. In J. Henriques, W. Hollway, C. Urwin, L. Venn, & V. Walkerdine (Eds.), *Changing the subject: Psychology, social regulation and subjectivity* (pp. 227-263). London: Methuen.
- Hui, E. K. P. (2000). Guidance as a whole school approach in Hong Kong: From remediation to student development. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling, 22*, 69-82.
- Hui, E. K. P. (2002). A whole-school approach to guidance: Hong Kong teachers' perceptions. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling, 30*(1), 63-80.
- Huisman, M., & Steglich, C. E. G. (2008). Treatment of non-response in longitudinal network studies. *Social Networks, 30*, 297-308.
- Jacobs, K., Struyf, E., & De Maeyer, S. (2013). The socio-emotional guidance questionnaire (SEG-Q) : Construct validity and invariance across teacher groups. *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment, 31*(6), 538-553.
- Jones, F., Jones, K., & Szwed, C. (2001). *The SENCO as teacher and manager. A guide for practitioners and trainers*. London: David Fulton.
- Kaiser, R. B., Hogan, R., & Craig, S. B. (2008). Leadership and the fate of organizations. *American Psychologist, 63*, 96 –110.
- Katzenmeyer, M., & Moller, G. (2001). *Awakening the sleeping giant: Helping teachers develop as leaders*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Lam, S. K. Y., & Hui, E. K. P. (2010). Factors affecting the involvement of teachers in guidance and counselling as a whole-school approach. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling, 38*, 219-234.
- Leithwood, K., & Jantzi, D. (1999). The relative effects of principal and teacher sources of leadership on student engagement with school. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 35*, 679-706.
- Leithwood, K., & Jantzi, D. (2000). Principal and teacher leadership effects: A replication. *School Leadership and Management, 20*(4), 415-434.
- Lindqvist, G. (2013). SENCOs: Vanguards or in vain? *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs, 13*(3), 198-207.

- Lindqvist, G., Nilholm, C., Almqvist, L. & Wetso, G.-M. (2011) Different agendas? The views of different occupational groups on special needs education. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 26(2), 143–57.
- Little, J. W. (1995). Contested ground: The basis of teacher leadership in two restructuring high schools. *The Elementary School Journal*, 96(1), 47-63.
- MacBeath, J. (2005). Leadership as distributed: a matter of practice. *School Leadership & Management*, 25(4), 349 - 366.
- Margolis, J. (2008). When teachers face teachers: Listening to the resource “right down the hall”. *Teaching Education*, 19(4), 293-310.
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis. An expanded sourcebook* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Muijs, D., & Harris, A. (2007). Teacher leadership in (In)action. Three case studies of contrasting schools. *Educational management, administration & leadership*, 35(1), 111-134.
- Ogawa, R. T., & Bossert, S. T. (1995). Leadership as an organizational quality. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 31(2), 224-243.
- Pijl, S., & Van den Bos, K. (2001). Redesigning regular education support in the Netherlands. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 16(2), 111-119.
- Puurula, A., Neill, S., Vasileiou, L., Husbands, C., Lang, P., Katz, Y. J., Romi, S., Menezes, I., & Vriens, L. (2001). Teacher and student attitudes to affective education: an European collaborative research project. *Compare*, 31(2), 165-186.
- Robson, M., Cohen, N., & McGuinness, J. (1999). Counselling, careers education and pastoral care: Beyond the national curriculum. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 27(1), 5-11.
- Rothi, D. M., Leavy, G., & Best, R. (2008). On the front-line: Teachers as active observers of pupils’ mental health. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 24, 1217-1231.
- Scribner, S. M. P., & Bradley-Levine, J. (2010). The meaning(s) of teacher leadership in an urban high school reform. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 46(4), 491-522.
- Scribner, J. P., Sawyer, R. K., Watson, S. T., & Myers, V. L. (2007). Teacher teams and distributed leadership: A study of group discourse and collaboration. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 43(1), 67-100.
- Seawright, J., & Gerring, J. (2008). Case selection techniques in case study research: A menu of qualitative and quantitative options. *Political Research Quarterly*, 61, 294-308.
- Silins, H., & Mulford, B. (2004). Schools as learning organisations. Effects on teacher leadership and student outcomes. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 15(3-4), 443-466.
- Silva, D. Y., Gimbert, B., & Nolan, J. (2000). Sliding the doors: Locking and unlocking possibilities for teacher leadership. *Teachers College Record*, 102, 779–804.

- Smylie, M. A. (1992). Teachers' report of their interactions with teacher leaders concerning classroom instruction. *The Elementary School Journal*, 93(1), 85-98.
- Smylie, M. A. (1995). New perspectives on teacher leadership. *The Elementary School Journal*, 96(1), 3-7.
- Smylie, M. A. (1997). Research on teacher leadership: Assessing the state of the art. In B. J. Biddle, T. L. Good, & I. F. Goodson (Eds.), *International Handbook of Teachers and Teaching* (pp. 521-592). Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Smylie, M. A., & Brownlee-Conyers, J. (1992). Teacher leaders and their principals: Exploring the development of new working relationships. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 28(2), 150-184.
- Smylie, M. A., & Mayrowetz, D. (2009). Footnotes to teacher leadership. In L. J. Saha & A. G. Dworkin (Eds.), *International Handbook of Research on Teachers and Teaching* (pp. 277-289). New York: Springer Science.
- Snell, J. & Swanson, J. (2000) *The Essential Knowledge and Skills of Teacher Leaders*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA.
- Spillane, J. (2005). Distributed leadership. *The Educational Forum*, 69(2), 143-150.
- Spillane, J. (2006). *Distributed leadership*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Struyve, C., Meredith, C., & Gielen, S. (2014). Who am I and where do I belong? The perception and evaluation of teacher leaders concerning teacher leadership practices and micropolitics in schools. *Journal of Educational Change*, 15(2), 203-230
- Szwed, C. (2007). Managing from the middle? Tensions and dilemmas in the role of the primary school special educational needs coordinator. *School Leadership & Management: Formerly School Organization*, 27(5), 437-451.
- Taylor, M., Goeke, J., Klein, E., Onore, C., & Geist, K. (2011). Changing leadership: Teachers lead the way for schools that learn. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 27, 920-929.
- Taylor, M., Yates, A., Meyer, L. H., & Kinsella, P. (2011). Teacher professional leadership in support of teacher professional development. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 27(1), 85-94.
- Tuomainen, J., Palonen, T., & Hakkarainen, K. (2011). Special educators' social networks: A multiple case study in a Finnish part-time special education context. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 56(1), 21-38.
- Vlachou, A. (2006). Role of special/support teachers in Greek primary schools: A counterproductive effect of inclusion practices. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 10(1), 39-58.
- York-Barr, J., & Duke, K. (2004). What do we know about teacher leadership? Findings from two decades of scholarship. *Review of Educational Research*, 74(3), 255-316.

**Table 1.**  
Overview of the respondents

	<b>Name</b>	<b>Responsibilities</b>	<b>Experiences</b>
<b>St. Catherine's College</b>	Roger	School principal	5 years of teaching + afterwards 12 years as school principal
	Elisabeth	SENCO	6 years of teaching + afterwards 17 years combining teaching with special needs care (8h a week),
	Lisa	Teacher	17 years of teaching
	Carine	Teacher	32 years of teaching
<b>St. George's College</b>	Paul	School principal	18 years of teaching + afterwards 22 years as school principal
	Kate	SENCO	6 years combining teaching with special needs care (5h a week)
	Robin	Teacher	20 years of teaching
	Simon	Teacher	15 years of teaching

**Table 2.**

Abridgment of the within-case analysis of respondent Roger

---

**POSITION OF THE SENCO**

“She (Elisabeth) is actually the person who made things work here, who managed that everything goes well here. There are many aspects that made our school a real special needs care school, but she is unequivocally one of the reasons due to her way of doing things. She brought special needs care close to teachers’ responsibilities. And also, she has a lot of ‘knowhow’ and she has realized many things that wouldn’t have succeeded when I would have been in charge.” (CODE: KNOWHOW)

“She always recognizes when students have special needs and need special support. And she supports many other teachers too who also take care of students’ special needs.” (CODES: KNOWHOW; SHARING)

“I think that most teachers really recognize and acknowledge her expertise and really listen to her.” (CODES: KNOWHOW; LEGITIMACY)

“During many class councils, it was Elisabeth who came up with the solution, saying, how we actually should do this, so yeah, the knowhow.” (CODE: KNOWHOW)

“When, for example, a child with autism enrolls, and we organize a special activity, different than during a normal school day, she will be the one who is very alert to this and draws our attention, saying to take into account what this means for this child.” (CODES: KNOWHOW; SHARING)

...

*Label: SENCO as an expert*

---

**POSITION OF THE TEACHER**

“In general, teachers care about the students and I think this is very important.” (CODE: CARE)

“A teacher has the task to be the first person who cares about and supports students.” (CODES: CARE; FIRST LINE)

“For a student, the teacher is the first contact person.” (CODE: FIRST LINE)

“It is more, like, well, I also do special needs care. Actually, Elisabeth is the main responsible but everyone in the school is involved in special needs care.” (CODE: SHARED RESPONSIBILITY)

“Teachers are like sheepdogs, by their conversations with students, by fulfilling the first support of students. So they are skilled, lots of content knowledge, but also seeing students as individuals who develop.” (CODES: FIRST LINE; CARE)

...

*Label: Teacher as first line helper*

---

**POSITION OF THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL**

“I want to be informed about everything that happens in this school. What happens in this school is my responsibility. I do not want to notice on a certain moment that one of my students, for example, committed suicide, while I was never informed about his or her specific problems. Or of course, this counts for other less problematic problems as well.” (CODE: OVERALL RESPONSIBILITY)

“At a certain stage, you cannot pass the principal.” (CODE: CONTROL)

“When decisions should be made about a certain issue, I think I will never make this decision myself. I will always ask teachers what they think we should do.” (CODES: POWER RELEASE; DEMOCRATIC LEADER)

...

*Label: School principal as general coordinator*

---



**Table 3.**  
Positions concerning special needs care in St. Catherine's College

According to:	School principal Roger	SENCO Elisabeth	Teacher Lisa	Teacher Carine
Position of the SENCO	Person who disposes of and shares knowledge concerning special needs care with teachers = <b>SENCO as an expert</b>	Person who disposes of and shares knowledge concerning special needs care with teachers = <b>SENCO as an expert</b>	Person who disposes of and shares knowledge concerning special needs care with teachers = <b>SENCO as an expert</b>	Person who disposes of and shares knowledge concerning special needs care with teachers = <b>SENCO as an expert</b>
Position of the teacher	Person who is dedicated to taking care of all students next to the pure teaching duties Person who only has a basic level of knowledge concerning special needs care = <b>Teacher as first line helper</b>	Person who is dedicated to taking care of all students next to the pure teaching duties Person who only has a basic level of knowledge concerning special needs care = <b>Teacher as first line helper</b>	Person who is dedicated to taking care of all students next to the pure teaching duties Person who only has a basic level of knowledge concerning special needs care = <b>Teacher as first line helper</b>	Person who is dedicated to taking care of all students next to the pure teaching duties Person who only has a basic level of knowledge concerning special needs care = <b>Teacher as first line helper</b>
Position of the school principal	Person who ultimately is responsible for all students Person who follows-up all school issues = <b>School principal as general coordinator</b>	Person who ultimately is responsible for all students Person who follows-up all school issues = <b>School principal as general coordinator</b>	Person who ultimately is responsible for all students Person who follows-up all school issues = <b>School principal as general coordinator</b>	Person who ultimately is responsible for all students Person who follows-up all school issues = <b>School principal as general coordinator</b>

*Note:* This table contains descriptive and **interpretative codes (bold)**. The box indicates how this position is, according to the respondent, not fulfilled in reality. All other positions are, according to our respondents, both desired and practiced.

**Table 4.**  
Positions concerning special needs care in St. George's College

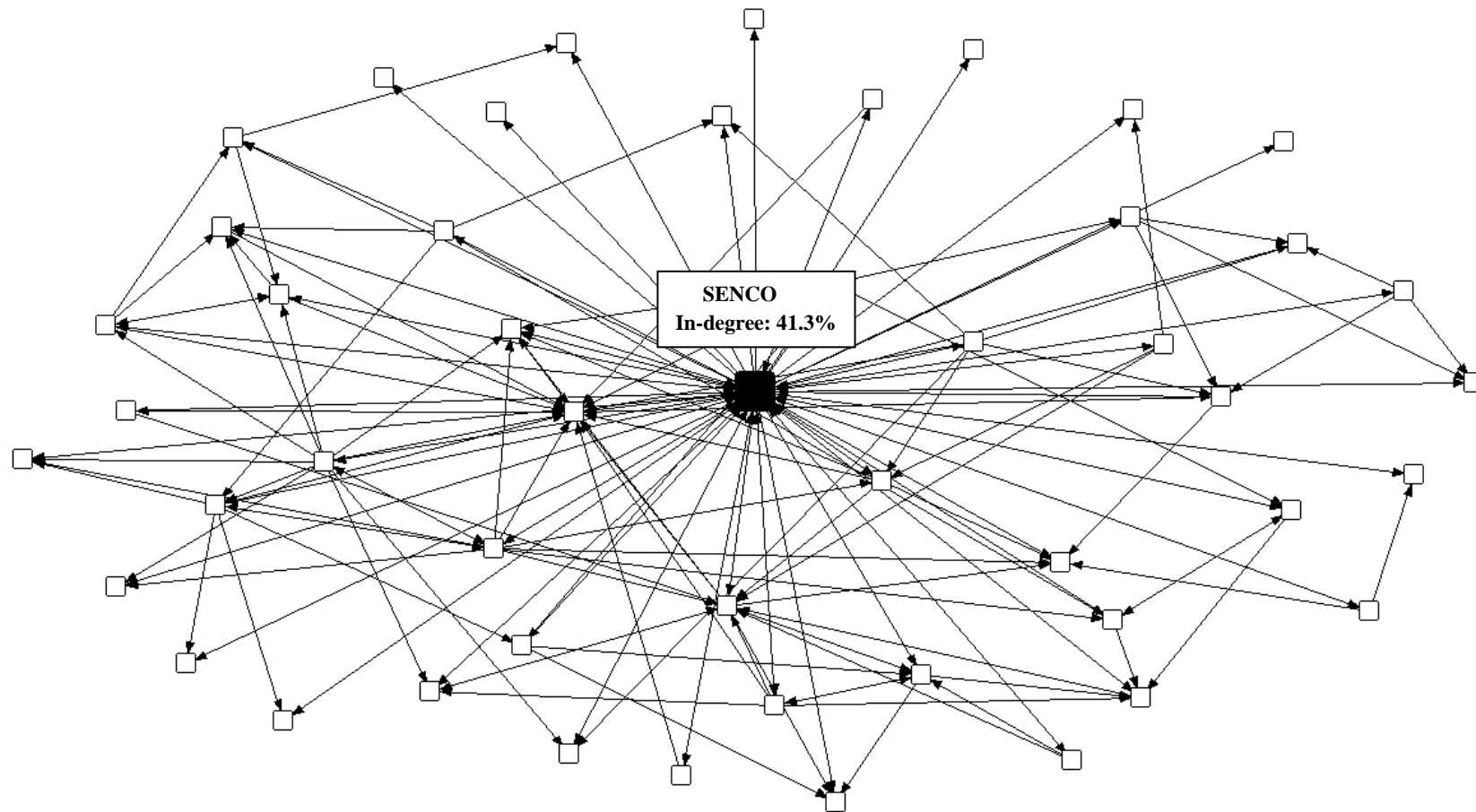
According to:	School principal Paul	SENCO Kate	Teacher Robin	Teacher Simon
Position of the SENCO	<p>Person who disposes of and shares knowledge concerning special needs care with teachers</p> <p>= <b>SENCO as an expert</b></p>	<p>Person who disposes of and shares knowledge concerning special needs care with teachers</p> <p>= <b>SENCO as an expert</b></p>	<p>Person who disposes of and shares knowledge concerning special needs care with teachers</p> <p>= <b>SENCO as an expert</b></p>	<p>Person who disposes of and shares knowledge concerning special needs care with teachers</p> <p>= <b>SENCO as an expert</b></p>
Position of the teacher	<p>Person who detects special needs in the classroom and pass it on asap to the person responsible for special needs care.</p> <p>Person who's focus is on teaching students specific content knowledge.</p> <p>= <b>Teacher as signaler</b></p>	<p>Person who is dedicated to taking care of all students next to the pure teaching duties</p> <p>Person who only has a basic level of knowledge concerning special needs care</p> <p>= <b>Teacher as first-line helper</b></p>	<p>Person who detects special needs in the classroom and pass it on asap to the person responsible for special needs care.</p> <p>Person who's focus is on teaching students specific content knowledge.</p> <p>= <b>Teacher as signaler</b></p>	<p>Person who detects special needs in the classroom and pass it on asap to the person responsible for special needs care.</p> <p>Person who's focus is on teaching students specific content knowledge.</p> <p>= <b>Teacher as signaler</b></p>
Position of the school principal	<p>Person who observes all students and intervenes when necessary</p> <p>Person who takes on the general responsibility concerning special needs care</p> <p>= <b>School principal as SENCO</b></p>	<p>Person who gives responsibility concerning special needs care to a lower level</p> <p>Person who follows-up all school issues</p> <p>= <b>School principal as general coordinator</b></p>	<p>Person who gives responsibility concerning special needs care to a lower level</p> <p>Person who follows-up all school issues</p> <p>= <b>School principal as general coordinator</b></p>	<p>Person who gives responsibility concerning special needs care to a lower level</p> <p>Person who follows-up all school issues</p> <p>= <b>School principal as general coordinator</b></p>

*Note:* This table contains descriptive and **interpretative codes (bold)**. Each full box indicates how this position is, according to the respondent, not fulfilled in reality. All other positions are, according to our respondents, both desired and practiced.

**Table 5.**

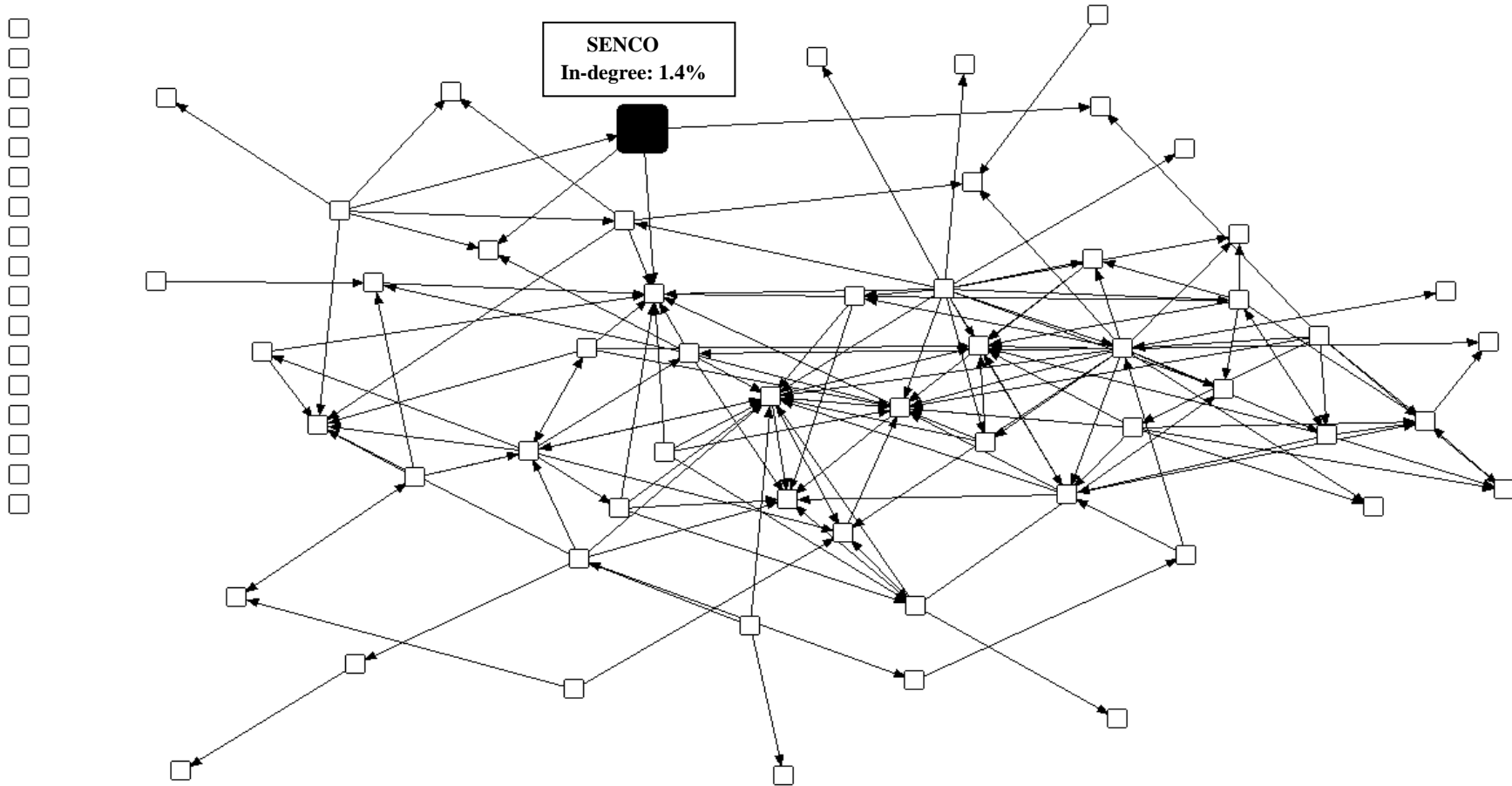
## Illustrative interview fragments of respondents of St. Catherine's and St. George's College

Number	Respondent	Interview fragment
1.	Elisabeth	I think, it is hard to find the right metaphor, but you really need to have a lot of background knowledge, which I would not have if I would not have followed all those courses. Without those courses I would not have developed a vision on how to approach students (...) I also know how to encourage students to tell what is going on, because of some typical techniques I have learned. And yes, my 17 years of experiences helps me too.
2.	Elisabeth	If teachers would come to me with questions about book-keeping, well, I do not know anything about book-keeping (...) But I do know something about special needs care!" (...) I think I can impose some guidelines to other school members, I mean, not because I'm a dictator, but you cannot leave this to fifty other people. When I would do so, there is too much discussion and too many differences. And if you want to create some consistency in special needs care, then I have to say 'I want it that way'.
3.	Lisa	She (Elisabeth) has a lot of knowhow, I mean, we teachers, we are not all psychologists! (...) She knows a lot, for example specific tools and techniques. Well, she does not only know about it, she also knows how to use them.
4.	Kate	A SENCO is someone who makes part of the team and who steers special needs care, who follows-up special needs care in the broad sense, who builds up a special needs care approach and skills in the school (...) but also someone whom you can go to [as a teacher] with questions.
5.	Simon	To me that is the most important responsibility of a SENCO, using his or her expertise (...).
6.	Robin	Well, she (Kate) only does study guidance, that is all. (...) We could use a real SENCO. We have a SENCO in the primary school (...) but not here.
7.	Carine	To me, next to the pure task of teaching, we also spend lots of attention to students with, for example, learning problems or who have socio-emotional issues, those who have behavioral problems. We really observe the students from very close. Our school is very driven when it comes to follow-up students. But I fully agree on this.
8.	Elisabeth	Special needs care should make part of the task of every teacher. (...) What I do with students, well, I think every teachers should do this in his or her classroom.
9.	Simon	The essence of schooling is that we educate students, we need to educate them and we need to teach them, we need to bring them knowledge, making sure they reach the attainment targets in education (...) My task as a teacher is in the first place to teach, and then, to pay attention to problems that students encounter (...) I don't think I should enter the classroom with the idea that I need to 'care'. I enter my classroom to teach.
10.	Paul	You cannot handle everything. Sometimes you need to pass things on (...). We try, on the one hand, to deepen our knowledge but, on the other hand, to protect our team. You cannot saddle teachers with everything. We also need to care about teachers. They are expected to do so many things (...) Also, I am very matter-of-factly (...). I think that the society can ask a lot of the school, but it needs to be reasonable (...). I cannot say that teachers don't what do take actions, but I protect them.
11.	Kate	To me, the follow-up of students is very important. But we do that too little (...). Also communicating about students, that is just necessary for special needs care, that is something we should do more (...). More and more teachers focus too much on their own and less on the students.
12.	Roger	There are many aspects that made our school a real special needs care school, but she is unequivocally one of the reasons due to her way of doing things. She brought special needs care close to teachers' responsibilities.
13.	Roger	I want to be informed of everything that happens in this school. What happens in this school is my responsibility. I do not want to notice on a certain moment that one of my students, for example, committed suicide, while I was never informed about his or her specific problems. Or of course, this counts for other less problematic problems as well.
14.	Kate	One of the school principals, she fulfills most of special needs care and the guidance of students (...) Can I say it this way? Well, she really railed against it [leaving special needs care to another school team member] (...). This was originally not the plan. The plan was that I would do this, but yeah.



**Figure 1.** Special needs care network of St. Catherine's College

*Note:* Every node represents an actor of the school team. Each line between two nodes represents a tie, i. e., the presence of an interaction of at least once a month between two actors.



**Figure 2.** Special needs care network of St. George's College

*Note:* Every node represents an actor of the school team. Each line between two nodes represents a tie, i. e., the presence of an interaction of at least once a month between two actors.