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An investigation into the challenges associated with the dual role of guidance counsellor and subject teacher in the post-primary setting, and how these may impact on the identity and wellbeing of the individual in the role.

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An Investigation into the Challenges associated with the Dual Role of Guidance Counsellor and Subject Teacher in the Post-Primary setting, and how these may impact on the Identity and Wellbeing of the individual in the role.

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Development

Research Supervisor: Dr. Orla McCormack

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Declaration

The author hereby declares that this thesis is entirely his/her own work. No element of the work described in this dissertation has been previously submitted for any degree in University of Limerick, or in any other institution.

Signature _____

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Glossary

ASTI	Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland
CPD	Continual Professional Development
DES	Department of Education and Science (up to 2010)
DES	Department of Education and Skills (2010 - present)
IGC	Institute of Guidance Counsellors
JMB	Joint Managerial Body
NCGE	National Centre for Guidance in Education
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
NGF	National Guidance Forum
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development
TC	The Teaching Council of Ireland
WSA	Whole-school Approach
WSGF	Whole School Guidance Framework

Abstract

The main aim of this research was to investigate how working in the dual role of subject specific classroom teacher and guidance counsellor impacts on the identity and the wellbeing of the individual in that role. This research focus' specifically on the challenges faced and the supports available to those who work in this role. This research used an interpretivist paradigm to undertake this qualitative research. A convenience sample of six semi-structured interviews, with fully qualified teachers and guidance counsellors, currently working in the dual role were undertaken as the method of data collection. Data was analysed and synthesised using the constant comparative method followed by theme mapping. The findings of this research suggest that there are many challenges faced by the professionals working in this dual role in post-primary school in Ireland. The everyday challenges encountered in the dual role include time constraints, timetabling difficulties, and relationships with students and staff alike. The access of the individuals to well-being and self-care supports emerged as an ongoing issue for those in the role. The findings show that the impacts of the removal of the ex-quota status of guidance counsellors in post-primary allocation (DES 2012) are still being felt in practice today. This research concludes that the dual role is creating undeniable challenges for those working in it, and in turn, is having a notable impact on the identity and wellbeing of these individuals. There are certainly steps which need to be taken in both policy and practice with an aim of negating these impacting factors as experienced by the participants in this research study.

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.0 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the topic of this research study. It will provide and outline and justification for the research, the aims, objectives, and methodology. Finally, this chapter will serve as a map to inform and direct the reader through and outline the structure of the thesis.

1.1 Context and Justification of this research study.

The dual role, as referred to in this study indicates the professionally qualified guidance counsellor, working a portion of their timetabled hours in the guidance counselling role, and the remaining portion of their timetabled hours as a subject specific classroom teacher in the post-primary school setting in Ireland (ASTI 2013, JMB 2013 and NCGE 2013). The occurrence of this dual role has increased in instance since the 2012 budget changes to guidance counselling allocation in post-primary schools in Ireland (DES 2012). This change in policy saw an increase in the timetabled hours for subject specific teaching to the timetables of guidance counsellors, and a return to the classroom for some who had been working full time in the role of guidance counsellor (IGC 2016). Speaking on this 2012 policy change Hearne (2016) remarked that the increased instance of the dual role was resulting in a “compromising the professional boundaries of both roles” (p.2) and in 2017 described the role as ‘problematic’.

This research will investigate, synthesise, and highlight challenges which are faced by the individuals working on the frontline, so to speak, of this dual role now. The findings of this research will provide new knowledge regarding the challenges to both identity and wellbeing which the individuals in the dual role may be facing. It will also serve to offer effective strategies and recommendations, being used by individuals in this dual role, to minimise any negative impacts which may be present.

The findings of this research will not only be beneficial to those working in this dual role, but also to key stakeholders including post-primary school management, teachers, parents, professional bodies involved in the development of CPD and supervision. The findings of this research may serve to inform future professional practice at a post-primary level. Finally, this

research will serve to strengthen the professional understanding of the researcher of the complexities of the role of the Guidance Counsellor.

1.2 Aims and Objectives of this research study

Overall, the aim of this research is to examine the impacts working in the dual role in the post-primary setting has on the identity and wellbeing of the individual. Through interviewing six professional working in this role, it is hoped that a true and in-depth depiction of the dual role can be achieved. This aim involves the gathering of qualitative data so that the true realities of those in the role and the issues they recognise, and encounter can be shown.

The specific objectives of this research are to:

1. Review and critically evaluate the relevant literature including primary textbooks, relevant journals, appropriate web articles, policy documents and previous research reports.
2. Plan and carry out semi-structured interviews with six fully qualified post-primary teachers and guidance counsellors working in the dual role at present throughout Ireland.
3. Develop a deeper knowledge and understanding of the dual role, the current situation, and realities of the participants of this research through these interviews, allowing them the time and space to share their experiences.
4. Analyse and evaluate the data to report on the findings of this research and make recommendations for future professional practice and further study.

1.3 Position of the researcher

I, the researcher am a post-primary school teacher in Ireland with seven years' experience to date in a number of post-primary schools around the country. Through my experience in these different schools, I have formed an assumption on the role of the teacher, of the guidance counsellor and collectively, the dual role involving both, to varying extents. It is my assumption that both roles have hugely demanding elements and so the combination of the two in the dual role must have the capability to cause difficulty, stress and potential burn-out out the person in the role (Hearne 2012, Connor 2013 and McGurkin and O'Brien 2013). It is my experience, as a guidance counsellor in training and an outsider to the dual role, that these individuals are juggling many different important, and oftentimes challenging tasks at once,

perhaps resulting in negative impacts on them themselves. It is my belief that there is a huge demand on the ability to prioritise, and an understanding of all the balls being juggled, which are made of plastic and which of glass.

It is of huge importance that throughout this research, I, as the researcher am aware of my assumptions as described here. To ensure researcher neutrality is maintained throughout the entire research process, it is essential that I am self-aware and professional reflective of my work. (McLeod 2015). This matter will be discussed in greater detail in chapter three.

1.4 Research Methodology

As outlined at the start of this chapter, this research study investigates the impact to both identity and wellbeing of individuals working in the dual role in Irish post-primary schools. In order to fully investigate this topic and gather appropriate data, six semi-structured interviews are carried out with professionals currently working in this dual role. The semi-structured nature of the questions allows for flexibility, follow on questions and prompts to be used so that data is a true reflection of the experience of the interviewee (Bell 2005).

The qualitative data which is gathered using this primary field research method will be analysed using a constant comparative method whereby the data is reviewed multiple times, comparing the answers given from each participant to each other until themes in the data emerge (Thomas 2017, Thorne 2016).

Throughout the data collection, analysis, and synthesis, it is critical that ethical and moral standards be upheld, and the research be carried out in an honest and transparent way (IGC 2012, NCGE 2008). Protection of the volunteering participants and accurate portrayal of the data gathered are crucial (Hearne 2013).

1.5 Outline of the Thesis

Chapter 1 This chapter provides an introduction to the thesis, the aims, and objectives which it plans to achieve. It outlines the research to be undertaken and explains how this research will be carried out. It provides the reader with a brief synopsis of each of the chapters within.

Chapter 2 This chapter introduces and provides a critical evaluation of the relevant literature available on the research topic. It serves to conceptualise and act

as a point of reference upon which the researcher will base their data collection.

- Chapter 3 This chapter describes the chosen paradigm, design frame and methods of data collection, synthesis and evaluation which will be employed throughout this research and a justification of same. It will address issues of ethical significance, objectivity, validity, and reliability.
- Chapter 4 This chapter presents the primary findings of the qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews. It describes the method of data analysis and outlines the findings in key themes.
- Chapter 5 This chapter provides a detailed discussion and synthesis of the research findings. It evaluates the research questions of the study in light of the literature from chapter two and links this to the findings from the data collection.
- Chapter 6 This chapter concludes and delivers a final appraisal of the research study. It outlines the strengths and limitations of the research and the personal learning gained by the researcher. It offers recommendations for policy, professional practice and further study on the research topic.

1.6 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the main aims and objective of this research study while providing an outline of the thesis from start to finish. The next chapter, chapter two will examine the relevant literature on this research topic.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

Hart (1998) gives an extremely comprehensive definition of the literature review, he states that it is

“the selection of available documents (both published and unpublished) on the topic, which contain information, ideas, data and evidence written from a particular standpoint to fulfil certain aims or express certain views on the nature of the topic and how it is to be investigated, and the effective evaluation of the these documents in relation to the research being proposed”.

(Hart 1998, p.13)

The aim of this literature review is to position this research within the context of literature and policy on the topic (Ridley 2008). It is essential that the researcher understands fully what has been published to date about this research topic to be fully immersed in the subject area and “grasp what the key issues that need addressing” (Hart 2018, p.3).

This review will allow the researcher to understand the intricacies of the dual role of guidance counsellor and classroom teacher, uncover issues surrounding its complexities and the impact it may have on both the wellbeing and identity of the individual. It will allow the researcher to look for gaps in information and so to formulate the research questions which will seek to gather this missing knowledge and be answered by this research (Robbins 2008).

This literature review seeks to not only present key facts from the relevant literature but provide a critical evaluation of them. This chapter will be divided into three key distinct areas of review. Firstly, it will compare and contrast the singular roles of subject specific classroom teacher and guidance counsellor in the post-primary setting in Ireland. It will then look at the current reality in relation to the fallout of the 2012 changes to provision of guidance counsellors in post-primary schools in Ireland. Finally, it will critique relevant literature relating to factors impacting on the identity and wellbeing of the individual in this split role.

2.1 A comparison of the roles of the subject specific classroom teacher and the role of the guidance counsellor in the post-primary setting in Ireland.

In the Irish post-primary setting, the guidance counsellor and subject specific classroom teacher work as colleagues in a shared setting. There are several distinct similarities between the two roles, and conversely there are some notable differences in their day-to-day duties and activities. Before we can discuss these similarities and differences, it is important first, to define both roles individually.

There are varying definitions referring to the responsibilities, expectations of and the role of the guidance counsellor which fluctuate dependant on the literature and author (Sultana 2004). According to the Institute of Guidance Counsellors “The role of the Guidance Counsellor is to engage in personal, educational and vocational counselling with clients throughout the lifespan, in particular circumstances in their life” (2007, p.3). Furthermore, the Institute of Guidance Counsellors (IGC 2007) have identified seven areas of professional practice within the role of the Guidance Counsellor; the practice of personal, educational and vocational guidance throughout the lifespan, labour market education and training, equality and diversity, managing of guidance service and programme delivery, information and resource management, counselling skills and ethical principles and professional practice. The NGF (2007) outline five key areas of competencies for guidance counsellors in Ireland, including vocational, educational, and personal/social guidance throughout the lifespan, labour markets education and training, counselling, information and resource management as well as professional practice. The DES state that “Guidance in schools refers to a range of learning experiences provided in a developmental sequence that assist students to develop self-management skills which will lead to effective choices and decisions about their lives. It encompasses the three separate, but interlinked, areas of personal and social development, educational guidance and career guidance” (DES, 2005, p.4). The NCGE (2017) state that the role of the guidance counsellor involves several tasks, including personal counselling of students, support to parents, teachers and principals, psychometric assessment for students, provision of information to students which may help their personal, educational or career development, classroom-based guidance activities, organisation of workplace learning, referrals to outside agencies as well as training and continuous professional development in the guidance discipline.

Though all include varying elements and levels of detail, there are some central elements to the role in which all are in agreement. The DES (2005), The IGC (2012, 2018), The NGF (2007) and the NCGE (2017) are all in agreement on the three central elements of guidance education and in turn, the role of the guidance counsellor in Irish post-primary schools, which involves “personal and social development, educational guidance and career guidance” (DES 2005, p.4).

Legally, the provision of guidance counselling is a statutory requirement as defined by Section 9(c) of the Education Act, 1998 states that schools must “ensure that students have access to appropriate guidance to assist them in their educational and career choices”. However, as highlighted by the OECD “no definition exists of what appropriate guidance should be” (2002, p. 9). This ambiguity causing much difficulty in post-primary schools as not all views of the definition of ‘appropriate’ will be consistent. Therefore, guidance provided throughout post-primary schools may not be consistent.

Counselling is recognised as a central part of the post-primary guidance service, it is “a key part of the school guidance programme, offered on an individual or group basis as part of a developmental learning process and at moments of personal crisis”. (DES 2005, p. 4) The NCGE recognising the importance of the counselling element of the guidance counselling role stating that it “should be part of the support structure that a school provides to students” (2004, p. 21). Although others are involved, including teachers in the school, the guidance counsellor holds the primary responsibility for the provision of the guidance counselling service within the school.

It is important to note that the guidance counsellor may spend some time in the classroom, dependant on the agreement with management in their particular school with regard to timetabling of hours, this in-classroom activity is aside from their subject specific teaching and is included in the role of the post-primary guidance counsellor.

Having looked in detail at the role of the guidance counsellor, focus will now shift to the singular role of the Teacher. The Teaching Council of Ireland states that “the role of the teacher is to educate” (Teaching Council, 2016, p.6). It lists four specific areas within this ‘educating’ role of the teacher, namely: respect, care, integrity, and trust (Teaching Council 2016). The code outlines a great number of standards which should be upheld by the teacher giving specific examples within each of these four areas.

Respect	Teachers uphold human dignity and promote equality and emotional and cognitive development. In their professional practice, teachers demonstrate respect for spiritual and cultural values, diversity, social justice, freedom, democracy and the environment.
Care	Teachers' practice is motivated by the best interests of the pupils/students entrusted to their care. Teachers show this through positive influence, professional judgement and empathy in practice.
Integrity	Honesty, reliability and moral action are embodied in integrity. Teachers exercise integrity through their professional commitments, responsibilities, and actions.
Trust	Teachers' relationships with pupils/students, colleagues, parents, school management and the public are based on trust. Trust embodies fairness, openness and honesty.

(Teaching Council 2016, p. 6)

The distinct merge between the two roles is that most guidance counsellors in Ireland are “qualified secondary school teachers with a specific recognised qualification in the area of guidance and counselling” (McGurkin and O’Brien 2013, p.274). They have spent time working in and understand fully the expectations and complexities of the classroom teacher role. There are, of course, guidance counsellors in Irish post-primary schools who are not also qualified as teachers, but these are in the minority. (IGC 2016) To practice as a Guidance Counsellor, it is not mandatory to first be a qualified teacher, you must however hold “a DES recognised Guidance Counselling Qualification” (NGCE 2020).

Both roles involve teaching and learning in specific nuanced areas. In the role of the guidance counsellor, as mentioned above, this involves vocational, personal/social, and educational development. In the role of the teacher, this is concerned with their individual subject (Irish, English, Maths, Geography etc.). Both roles require a relationship with the students. Perhaps a somewhat different one in each case.

2.2 The post 2012 situation, eight years on. The current reality of the impact of the 2012 budget on the provision of guidance counselling services in post-primary schools in Ireland.

In 2012 the ex-quota allocation of Guidance Counselling hours which “operated in Irish schools for forty-plus years” (IGC 2016, p.2) was removed in the wake of the 2012 budget stipulations. Previous to the 2012 changes, there were 27.6% more hours allocated to Guidance Counsellors in Irish post-primary schools (ICG 2016). Coupled with this, no consideration was made for the school type in this allocation, DEIS, non-DEIS, fee-paying and FES were all treated in the same manner, with the impacts hitting some harder than others (ICG 2016).

“Budget 2012 gravely wounded the frontline allocation of professionally qualified guidance counsellors in Irish second-level schools” (McGurkin and O’Brien 2013, p.273). In 2012, the budget outlined changes to come into place which would see the roles become more closely intertwined with one another. That being the individual, working a proportion of their timetable in each of the roles. Eight years on, the impact of these changes in guidance counselling provision are clear to be seen in the post primary schools around Ireland. The movement of provision from ex-quota to in-quota has had an impact, not on the guidance counsellor, but also on the teachers, students and parents associated with post primary schools (Hearne *et al.* 2017, McGurkin and O’Brien 2013, IGC 2016).

Coupled with this, the emphasis placed on the ideal of the Whole school Guidance Framework and whole school approach to guidance counselling, meant that it was no longer the sole responsibility of the guidance counsellor to cater for the whole of the guidance education which would take place in the post primary setting (NGCE 2017). The 2012 changes putting the guidance counsellor back in the role of classroom teacher and this, in reverse, giving some responsibility for guidance counselling to the teachers in post primary schools, knitting the two roles in an even closer fashion, through the whole school Guidance approach (NCGE 2017).

As is highlighted by Hearne *et al.* (2017) and Hearne and Galvin (2015) the increased expectation of teachers to be actively involved in the whole school approach was not something which they felt involved in and believed would further increase their own workload. Perhaps there is a gap here in the professional development and understanding of teachers in aspects of guidance and counselling. If this is not a formal part of the professional

development programmes of post-primary teachers, they may not feel equipped with the necessary skills to be a core part of the whole school guidance model (McCarthy 2004).

As outlined by Leahy *et al.* (2017), the intricacy of the role of the Guidance Counsellor has certainly increased in the wake of the 2012 changes, now we are seeing the dual role in a much-increased incidence than ever before (ICG 2016). Guidance counsellors, who are also qualified as teachers, and completed their subsequent training for the additional role, may not have been in a classroom teacher capacity for a number of years prior to this change, (McGurkin and O'Brien 2013) are now pushed back in the classroom setting at the decision of management to achieve the decreased allowance as outlined by the 2012 circular (DES 2012).

Guidance counsellors now find themselves in a position whereby, they are endeavouring to maintain a guidance service which allows students to receive 'appropriate guidance' as is required by the Education Act (1998), while also sustaining the many necessary elements, as outlined above, required of a subject specific classroom teacher (McGurkin and O'Brien 2013, Leahy *et al.* 2017, Hearne and Galvin 2015). There are a number of issues which have become evident as a result of this, perhaps over-stretched role.

The concept of 'one good adult' has been highlighted in recent years in ranging literature. The importance of at least one helping person in a child's life, who can have an immense impact on their life, in some cases can be the turning point which leads them on a better path than they may have travelled in the absence of that person. In the post-primary setting, 25% of participants stated that they would seek support from a teacher or guidance counsellor (Dooley and Fitzgerald 2012, p.35). Given the reduction in one-to-one guidance as a result of the 2012 changes, the availability of that 'one good adult' could be reduced due to the increased workloads of both teachers and guidance counsellors alike. "Access to a professionally qualified guidance counsellor is crucial when supporting and enhancing the emotional wellbeing of young people" (McGuckin and O'Brien 2013, p.277). The pressure on both to support every student who needs support and to not allow any student who needs support, to potentially fall through the cracks is enormous (IGC 2016).

"Equality of opportunity is the philosophical cornerstone of the Irish education system" (McGuckin and O'Brien 2013, p.277). However, with Budget 2012 came a guidance counselling premium, time. As mentioned, the time available for the guidance counsellor to focus on one-to-one counselling, reduced dramatically. Students from higher socio-economic

status backgrounds in comparison to those in less advantaged, could financially, if needed seek counselling outside of the school, those in the less financially able situations, likely could not (ICG 2016). Thus, certainly not creating a balanced level of opportunity to access the services. (McGurkin and O'Brien 2013, Leahy *et al.* 2017) "Guidance counselling is the entitlement of all, not a luxury for those who can afford it" (IGC 2016, p.3), but this is not always the reality.

Coupled with this is the time pressure the individual is now under to plan for, undertake and evaluate the elements in both of the sides of the dual role. McCoy *et al.* reported that in smaller schools, the majority of guidance counsellors were balancing the dual role of guidance counsellor with teaching responsibilities (McCoy *et al.* 2006).

2.3 The impact of the dual role of both subject specific classroom teacher and guidance counsellor in the post primary setting on the identity and wellbeing of the individual in that role.

Wellbeing may be a subjective term, but it is universally understood as a description of how a person is doing, their mental or physical state of being. Self-care, self-esteem and mental health are all contributing factors to a person's wellbeing. Identity on the other hand, is how a person sees themselves to be (Burke 2014). Both are separate, but the links between the two cannot be denied. When a person is sure of who they are and their identity, it follows that their sense of wellbeing will benefit.

To be an effective guidance counsellor, you must be a helping person and the person-centred individual in this role will embody the core conditions as outlined by Rogers (1951). In that, they are people who will give their best to the benefit of their client, the student in the post-primary setting in this case.

As articulated by Burke (2014) "It is almost a truism to say that people have multiple identities" (p.1), this is certainly the case for the individual in this dual role holding both roles in symbiosis. McCarthy (2004) discusses a European study (Watts *et al.* 1994) which refers to the ambiguity of the role of the guidance counsellor as 'inter alia' – a changing role due to the varying identities of the individuals who occupy the role. The dual role forcing the individual to swap between one role and the other possibly up to three to four times in a working day – this cannot but lead to identity confusion in some way. Moreover, the individual in the dual role, potentially problematically, holds "multiples identities within a single group" (Burke 2014). In this case, as a member of staff in a post-primary school where

both identities are activated concurrently as a result of the changing from one to the other in quick succession as a result of timetabling. This, leading to stress on the individual and the potential internal tension as a result of both identities competing for verification, constantly activated. (Stryker 2002).

Coupled with the individual confusion, is the potential for confusion of the students and other members of staff. The role of the teacher and the role of the guidance counsellor, though they have similarities, are distinctly different on the whole as explained earlier in this chapter. Working as both in the single setting may lead to confusion on the part of the student seeking help, unsure of approaching their subject teacher regarding a personal or career guidance issue.

Self-esteem is an important indicator of wellbeing, among other factors. Stets and Burke (2014) synopsis self-esteem as having three dimensions, self-worth, self-efficacy, and authenticity. To focus on authenticity here, the researcher questions whether one individual can be truly authentic to two roles at the same time. Stets and Burke (2014) go on to further describe authenticity as “involving one’s internal and personal standards as to who one really is” (p.411). This questions the ability to be truly authentic in one’s self while maintaining two identities simultaneously. If an individual is not, at least, authentic to one’s self, a negative impact on their wellbeing could be the result. This showing that wellbeing and identity can certainly have some overlap with the lack of certainty on identity impacting on their wellbeing. For the individuals in the dual role, this may be an impacting factor on their wellbeing.

Conversely, it would be fair to state that one role influences the other in some ways and vice versa. That the two roles are “jointly operated to influence behaviour” (Burke 2014, p.195). This relationship between the two identities, in this case, both sides of the dual role, could be seen as a positive one as both are working towards a common goal, namely, helping the students in their school (Burke 2014).

Burnout is now a real issue within this dual role and a potential threat to a person’s wellbeing. It has been highlighted by numerous authors, the negative impact of the increased workload and its facets on the individual in the role (Hearne 2012 and Greenham *et al*, 2019). On the same topic, Leahy *et al*. (2017) specifically state that the dual role “now requires guidance counsellors to prioritise an extensive workload, thus bringing a whole new meaning to the issue of self-care” (p.100). An important support available to guidance counsellors to negate

the possibility of burnout, is supervision (Hearne 2012, IGC 2014, IGC 2016). The IGC stated that there was “recognition of the benefits and importance of counselling supervision” (2016, p.41) and described it as “a necessity” (2014, p.9).

Supervision, as funded by the Department of Education and skills, is “a crucial service to maintaining the mental health of guidance counsellors” (IGC 2016, p.41). It has been highlighted here as it was in 2014, (IGC 2014) that although it is a necessary element of the role, taking care of the wellbeing of the individual, because of the increased demands of the dual role, guidance counsellors were finding themselves being timetable for subject classroom teaching during the hours of available supervision. It was also observed that “their absence would negatively impact the learning of the same student group, each supervision afternoon” (IGC 2016, p.41). As mentioned previously, the responsibility for ensuring students receiving ‘appropriate guidance’ lies now with the school management. It seems that this is a situation whereby only the student or guidance counsellor’s wellbeing can be catered for, as the demands of the dual role simply cannot easily accommodate both. The wellbeing of the guidance counsellor seems lacking, potentially leaving them pouring from an empty vessel at times.

2.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, there are similarities and differences between the two roles – subject teacher and guidance counsellor which are outlined in the definitions and examination of both in this chapter. The impacts, which are still apparent eight years on, of the 2012 change to guidance provision in Irish post-primary schools are clear to be seen in the day to day actions undertaken by the individual in the dual role, to the detriment of the ability of the guidance services to fulfil their duties. Finally, the wellbeing and identity of the individual is explored to understand the impact the dual role may be having, highlighting the need for deeper examination of the availability and provision.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.0 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology which underpins the study. “Methodology provides the reasons for using a particular research” (Clough and Nutbrown, 2012 p.24), and as such are the justification of paradigm, methods, and design. The methodology chosen for this piece of research, the details of which are outlined in this chapter, were influenced by the research questions, essentially the goals of this piece of work. Combined with this, the chosen methodology has been influenced by the constraints of the research design which dictates the collection of, analysis and interpretation of the data. Finally, critical considerations are discussed in relation of issues of validity, reliability, and objectivity in this research as well as ethical concerns and considerations to be taken into account, to ensure neutrality of the researcher is maintained throughout. All the above are discussed in detail throughout this chapter.

3.1 Identification of Research Questions

Thomas (2017) highlights the importance of this stage of the research. Its importance as it is a framing of the parameters of the research going forward, giving it direction. These questions will determine the entire approach to the research. The overarching aim in this research is to investigate the dual role of the guidance counsellor and subject specific classroom teacher in the post primary setting in Ireland. More specifically, the impact that working in this dual role has on the individual in the position’s wellbeing and identity.

The research questions have been outlined below.

1. What are the challenges associated with the dual role of Guidance Counsellor and subject specific classroom Teacher in Irish post-primary schools?
2. Is working in the dual role having an impact on the wellbeing and identity of the individual working in that role?
3. Is there an adequate provision of, and access to, support for those professionals working in the dual role?
4. Are the changes made in 2012, to the provision of guidance counselling hours in Irish post-primary schools still having an impact today?

To answer these research questions, an appropriate methodology must be used. A misaligned marriage to an unsuitable methodology will not allow for the accurate and pertinent information to be gathered. “A methodology shows how research questions are articulated with questions asked in the field” (Clough and Nutbrown 2012, p.24). The finer details including how the questions are phrased, how they will be asked, how the data will be recorded, and its analysis must all align from the starting point of these research questions.

3.2 Research Paradigm

Paradigms are, as articulated by Thomas (2017, p.71) “shared ideas in a particular community of inquiry”, put simply, they are a school of thinking. Paradigms exist for many topics; economics, religion, and research for example (Robbins 2008).

As mentioned, the aim of this research is to gather data based on the thinking of the participants, their feelings, their experience, their thoughts. To achieve this aim, the paradigm unpinning this research is that of interpretivism. Both Thomas (2017) and McLeod (2015) describe interpretivism as a way of understanding. “What understandings do the people we are talking to have about the world, and how can we in turn understand these?” (Thomas 2017, p.111). To truly understand how the research participants see and interpret the world around them, specifically in relation to their understanding of the impact of their work role on themselves, interpretivism is the key to unlock this knowledge. Cohen *et al* (2000) summarise the interpretivist paradigm to be “the subjective world of human experience” (p.22).

As articulated in chapter two, there has been some research carried out in this area of the dual role since the 2012 change to allocation in post-primary schools in Ireland. However, as noted, qualitative data is lacking. This research aims to capture the ‘thick’ explanations and the personal qualitative, deep story of the individuals involved (Stake 2010 p.49). Semi-structured interviews as the data collection method allow for this type of data to be collected as they lend themselves seamlessly to an interpretive paradigm.

Using an interpretivist paradigm does not come without limitations. To collect the thick description (Stake 2010) and meaningful data necessary, the sample size is small to allow for the time constraints of this in-depth method. By nature, a qualitative approach to research “often takes a long time to come to understand what is going on, how it all works” (Stake 2010. P.29).

When carrying out research in an interpretivist paradigm, there must be an awareness of the potential for researcher bias. In that, the researcher may choose to see in the data what they want to see to, either consciously or unconsciously (Denscombe 2007). A high level of self-awareness is necessary coupled with the constant reflexivity practices to counteract the chance of bias impacting on the research.

3.3 Procedures/Methods

There are many different types of data collection methods, and furthermore are many different types of interview which can be employed in research (Cohen et al 2007). It is the intention of the researcher to employ a semi-structured interview pattern. Semi-structured interviews are a popular choice in qualitative research as they allow questioning around researched and agreed topics, and the space for expansion and depth to be reached. (Qu and Dumay 2011). In this research, it is hoped that the semi-structured format will allow opportunities for the realities, feelings, and insights of the interview participants to be captured. Overall, that an in depth understanding of the experience of the interview participants will be gained by the researcher.

There are several strengths to the semi-structured interview, adaptability, and flexibility certainly at the fore here. The flexibility in the questioning allows the interviewer to probe and follow-up on answers given by the interviewee (Bell 2005). This, allowing for more in-depth explanations to be given and deeper insight on thoughts and experiences. “This format allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent and to new ideas on the topic” (Merriam 2009, p.90). This method will provide me with the ‘thick’ data as referred to by Stake (2010).

The one-to-one nature of the interview allows for much more information to be gathered than ever could be by a set of written survey responses, for example (Bell 2005). It is not just the answer given, but also the manner in which it is given which I refer to here, the non-verbal communication between the interviewer and interviewee, “the tone of voice, facial expression, hesitation, and so on” (Bell 2005, p.161), which can be hugely insightful as to the true feelings of the interviewee. These may provide the opportunity to follow a line of questioning not previously planned by the interviewer.

As with all methods of data collection, semi-structured interviewing is not without its limitations. Primarily, its time limitations. As aforementioned, the researcher needs to be realistic in planning the number of interviews that can be carried out successfully (Bell 2005).

Each interview is deserving of the necessary time and respect as the next, and so it is planned that six interviews will be the maximum number which can be expect to be achieved in this research.

3.3.1 Research Sample

The participants in this research are six qualified guidance counsellors who work in varying post-primary schools throughout Ireland. All these participants work a portion of their timetabled hours as a subject specific classroom teacher, and the remainder of their timetabled hours fulfilling the role of a guidance counsellor. The age of the participants ranges between 30 and 60 years. The research participants have differing levels of experience, knowledge, and these multiple realities will bring varying perspectives to the research (Figure 3.1). All of the participants are female, this is not a planned gender selection, but based on the respondents who were willing to participate.

A population is the entire group to which the findings of any study or research may relate. This research sample was chosen by convenience sampling. The participants of this research are members of the research population, qualified guidance counsellors working in the dual role, who agreed to participate and were easily accessible at the time needed during the research process (Robbins 2008).

Given the relatively small participant cohort of six, consideration must be given to the generalisability of the data collected. “Care has to be taken not to attempt generalizations based on insufficient data” (Bell 2005, p.210). With this sample size the data collected cannot claim to be generalisable. That said, given the experience brought by the participants, “relativity may be entirely possible” (Bell 2005, p.201). This data will be valuable and draw valid conclusions and usable recommendations (Cohen at al. 2007).

Several steps were undertaken to assemble the participants for this research. Initially, a request was made via email to the chairperson of the local branch of the IGC who was provided with a ‘Subject Information Letter’ and ‘Consent Form’ [Appendix A], outlining the particulars of the research and giving permission for branch members to participate. It was planned to confine this research within this branch area only. This request was announced at the next branch meeting and from these three participants came forward to be involved and were provided with the ‘Volunteer Information letter’ [Appendix B]. Through contacts of these three participants, three more participants were contacted from other branch areas in the country. Due to the lack of adequate response locally, it was decided to expand the sample

nationally, including these three participants. Due to the global situation of the Covid-19 pandemic and its impact both nationally and locally, it became impossible to meet these participants face to face.

Participants were made aware of the subject being researched and that the information they provided would be used only for the purpose of this research. “Securing informed consent involves providing adequate information on the purpose of the research, the voluntariness of the client, and the nature of confidentiality” (McLeod, 2003 cited in Hearne, 2013, p.10). This consent was discussed with each participant over the phone before each was forwarded the ‘Research Privacy Notice’ [Appendix C] and ‘Participant Consent Form’ [Appendix D] to sign and return in advance of the interview.

The interview schedule is outlined below (Figure 3.1). This schedule shows that in line with ethical practice, pseudonym’s have been assigned to each of the participants to maintain their anonymity, the participants will be referred to using these given pseudonym’s throughout. Their gender, age grouping, school type in which they were employed at the time of interview and their consent to have their information be used in this study.

Fig 3.1: Interview Schedule

	Pseudonym	Date of Interview	Gender	Age Group	School Type	Consent form
1	Fiona	15/04/2020	Female	40-50	Community School	Yes
2	Aisling	04/06/2020	Female	30-40	Community School	Yes
3	Mary	05/06/2020	Female	40-50	Voluntary Secondary School	Yes
4	Noelle	10/06/2020	Female	40-50	Community School	Yes
5	Elaine	15/06/2020	Female	50-60	Private fee paying	Yes
6	Aoife	17/06/2020	Female	30-40	Voluntary Secondary School	Yes

3.3.2 Study Design

The intention was to complete six one-to-one, in person semi-structured interviews. The overarching aim here is to “replicate in a research setting the elements of a natural conversation” (Savin-Baden and Howell Major 2012, p.357) and so the semi-structured interview being the most efficient method to gather the most valuable data for this research (Savin-Baden and Howell Major 2012). However, as aforementioned, the situation in relation to the Covid-19 global pandemic, did not at this time allow for this in person contact. It was agreed with each participant over a phone conversation that these interviews would take place using Google Hangouts. The purpose of the video call, in comparison to the also possible voice call is the face-to-face feature it allows. There is importance for both the researcher and the participant being able to see each other during the interview, the subtleties of non-verbal communication and reactions which allow the researcher to probe on necessary topics and questions further where appropriate. The very nature of the semi-structured interview is its flexibility and natural flow, hugely important to the data which is gathered (Bell 2005, Stake 2010).

3.3.3 Data Collection/Storage

All data collected for the purpose of this research will be securely stored for a period of no more than seven years, at which point all information will be permanently digitally deleted. All information which is sorted in a digitalised version will be stored only on a password protected device. Transcriptions of each interview will be kept as a part of this data; audio files will be permanently digitally deleted after transcription has been completed during the research (Hearne 2013).

3.3.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of using the data which has been collected to analyse the topic the researcher is investigating (Thomas, 2017). Put simply, “data analysis is the process of making sense of the data” (Merriam 2009, p.175, Cohen *et al*, 2007).

The process of data analysis is described by Bogdan and Biklen (2003) as a two staged process. Initially, a sorting through of the data, organising it into manageable units. Followed by stage two, interpreting this data. The data analysis process and the data collection process are two which can happen simultaneously with each impacting on the other (Thorne 2016). This method of qualitative analysis involves organising, ordering, clarifying, and analysing

the information gathered from the primary data collection fieldwork, the interviews (Cohen *et al.* 2007, Lindlof and Taylor, 2011).

The researcher analysed the data collected during this research using the constant comparative method, followed by thematic analysis and theme mapping. As highlighted by Braun and Clarke (2006), qualitative data can be quite diverse and so, thematic analysis can be viewed as the foundation method for the review of the information and data collected therein. This method was chosen as it is thought to be the most thorough and efficient way to ensure all issues and themes are identified in the raw data (Thomas 2017).

This process involved examining the interview transcripts several times, comparing the comments made and answers given by participants to each other, again and again. (Thomas 2017). Throughout this process the researcher used the split-page method for analysing and coding the interview transcripts coupled with note writing. Following this process, themes began to emerge from the data. Codes could then be used to map out the themes and the linkages between various elements within them (Thomas 2017). This theme map once created can serve as a “mini-representation of the interview” (Thomas 2017, p.248). An excerpt of his process can be seen below (Fig 3.2), taken from the total document [Appendix E], showing how the data mapping and linkage lead to the emergence of significant themes which are discussed in detail in chapter four.

Figure 3.2: Issue Mapping and Theme Identification Excerpt

Issues emerging from interviews	Themes
Definition of the dual role. Misunderstanding of the expectations of the dual role Referral concerns –incorrect/inappropriate Relationship with students Parents expectations Prioritising as a necessity	Everyday challenges associated with the dual role of subject specific teacher and guidance counsellor.

There are limitations to this approach as the potential manipulation of data to strengthen the occurrence of theme is very possible. As always, to ensure this is not an issue, issues of ethical and moral importance are always kept in mind by the researcher.

3.3.5 Interview Framework

A pre-designed interview framework was devised prior to the interviews as a roadmap for progression through the interview. The questions asked were done so in a sectioned sequence. With several questions asked on a number of pre-defined topics as outlined [Appendix F]. These questions, as mentioned in previous chapters, were chosen to be asked in order to gather the relevant information to answer the defined research questions for this research. The initial three questions focused on the settling into the interview, basic questions to obtain factual data, to understand the experience and current working reality of the respondent. As the interview progressed the questions became more in depth and specific to the experience of the interviewee. The following four questions focused on the perceived role definitions of both the classroom teacher and the guidance counsellor from the perspective of the respondent in the post primary setting in Ireland. Following on from this were three questions relating to the experienced challenges and/or benefits to the individual working in the dual role. These followed by two questions focusing on the identity of the individual, followed by three questions specific to the self-care and wellbeing strategies and resources available and undertaken by the respondent. Finally, the remaining three questions asked about the experienced impact the changes to the provision of guidance counselling in Irish post-primary schools underwent in 2012. The Majority of the questions were open ended allowing for further expansion and explanation by the interviewee on the given subjects. It was hoped that this strategy, as outlined, would suffice in gathering sufficient and meaningful data to answer the research questions.

3.4 Objectivity, Validity and Reliability in Qualitative research

Objectivity is an essential foundation in qualitative research. The researcher must assume the role of an outsider to ensure that an objective standpoint is achieved. The researcher, for the purpose of objectivity must park their own personal beliefs, feelings and experiences as to not do so will distort the collection of data, its objective analysis and the accurate picture of reality emerging (Cohen et al. 2007).

In qualitative research issues of a validity and reliability nature are a great concern. McLeod poses a question on each, which sum up these concerns accurately. “Reliability (would that person have told a different story to a different interviewer?) and validity (how can I know whether the themes I have identified in the data are a true reflection of participants’ experiences?)” (McLeod 2015, p.140).

Reliability refers to the ability of the research method to consistently provide similar results on different occasions (Thomas, 2017). The selection of interviewees needs to be considered. Having either a professional or personal relationship may impact on the answers given. “Interview participants may be more willing to say certain things to some interviewers rather than others” (McLeod 2015, p.97). Should this occur in research, it could potentially undermine the integrity of the research and its findings (Stake 2010).

Reflexivity on the part of the researcher is essential. “All qualitative research needs to take into account, one way or another, of the subjectivity, personal involvement and reflexivity of the researcher” (McLeod 2015, p.93). The researcher will maintain a reflexive journal for the duration of this research. The purpose of this is to control the potential for researcher bias, ensure the feelings and experience of the researcher do not taint the research in any way (Ortlipp 2008). The researcher must bracket their own beliefs to remain truly objective and support the validity and reliability of the research (Cohen 2013).

Coupled with this, “A key aspect of researcher reflexivity consists of the awareness of participant reflexivity” (McLeod 2015, p.97). As mentioned, my sample selection must maintain an ethically sound method (Oliver 2010).

Validity refers to “the ability of the test to measure the actual construct it claims to be measuring” (McLeod, 2003, p.55). Thomas (2017) breaks validity down into two distinct types:

1. Instrument-based validity: the level of effectiveness in an instrument measuring what it is supposed to measure.
2. Experimental validity: the degree to which the design of an experiment controls and eliminates factors which could affect the research.

The detailed analysis of the data, as explained, will ensure that all possible themes in the data are outlined and accounted for. Rigour in the question wording and transcription are essential to ensure that nothing is missed and a true account of the experiences of the interviewee is given in the findings of the research. The researcher undertook a pilot interview as a method of trialling the research questions in the interview so that alterations could be made before commencing the research.

3.5 Ethics in Guidance Research

Ethics can be generally be referred to as asset of moral guiding principles adhered to by an individual or group of people (Robbins 2008). A knowing of what is morally right or wrong in any given situation. While most will do what is right, in research, there must be an understanding on the part of the researcher that what is right may not necessarily be right for the individual research participant (Thomas 2017), and this must be used in decision making throughout the research process.

It is the researcher's duty to "protect the dignity of wellbeing of the research participants" (IGC 2012) first and foremost. Two essential elements of ethical practice in this research will be to maintain the confidentiality of the interviewees and ensure informed consent (Hearne 2013 and Oliver 2010). It is the duty of the researcher to make them aware that they may withdraw from the research at any point before analysis and offer them the appropriate support information which may be relevant.

Within the realm of research within the Guidance counselling profession both the IGC (2012) and the NCGE (2008) outline clearly codes of professional practice and standards within research. These principles of professional and ethical practice are upheld throughout this research.

3.6 Conclusion

In summary, this chapter outlined, in detail, the methodology which underpins the various methods used to gather and analyse data for the purpose of answering the identified research questions. The chapter identified the paradigm as interpretivist and the rational supporting this choice. It outlined the data collection method as a single method approach of six video and audio supported and recorded semi-structured interviews. Access to research participants, analysis of data, and issues around objectivity, validity, reliability, and ethical issues were also addressed.

Chapter 4

Findings

4.0 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present and critically analyse the key findings of the field research undertaken. This chapter will synthesise these key findings, presenting them in a series of emergent themes.

Firstly, the everyday challenges associated with working in the dual role of guidance counsellor and classroom teacher. Followed by, the impact the dual role has on the identity of the individual in the role in the post primary setting. The third theme was wellbeing and self-care provision and practice amongst guidance counsellors working in this dual role. Finally, the fourth theme, was the lasting changes, still being felt 8 years later, as a result of the 2012 shift in provision of guidance counsellors in post-primary schools in Ireland. Each theme will be discussed and critically analysed in succession throughout the remainder of this chapter.

To add to the information provided in Figure 3.1 regarding the interview participants, further information is provided in Figure 4.1 below. The purpose of this additional information is to give context as to their varying levels of experience in the post-primary setting, as a teacher primarily and then in the dual role.

Fig 4.1: Participants background information

	Pseudonym	Date of Interview	School Type	No. of students	Years in PP	Years in DR
1	Fiona	15/04/2020	Community School	300	15	5
2	Aisling	04/06/2020	Community School	510	10	5
3	Mary	05/06/2020	Voluntary Secondary School	610	18	12
4	Noelle	10/06/2020	Community School	552	20	8
5	Elaine	15/06/2020	Private fee paying	520	25	15
6	Aoife	17/06/2020	Voluntary Secondary School	280	6	2

4.1 The everyday challenges associated with working in the dual role.

The first theme which emerged from this data analysis was challenges, those associated with this dual role. Firstly, the apparent difficulty in defining the role of guidance counsellor, which it seems is more difficult than reaching a definition of classroom teacher. A number of the participants noted that there was a common misconception as to the job specification of the guidance counsellor, but the teacher role appeared to be more easily understood. This is reflected in the following excerpts:

“The role of a teacher is fairly straight forward, the majority of people have experienced the role of a teacher first hand, in a classroom and so know what they do. However, not all have had experience with a guidance counsellor, so the experience is not the same” (Aisling).

“The roles certainly have similarities. The teacher has the set curriculum in their subject area, the guidance counsellor does also in the classroom, but arguably. It is more flexible. In the other side of the role, their main area, outside of the classroom is the one-to-one sessions, both personal counselling and career guidance. Most people, inside or out of a school know what a teacher does, I would argue that not all know that there is also this huge side to guidance counselling.” (Mary).

“A classroom teacher is clear cut, to be quite reductionist, they teach the curriculum as set out. The role of the guidance counsellor is not so clear cut and many looking in from the outside don't appreciate all the elements involved” (Fiona).

If the role is not understood, then expectations of the role may not be realistic and so unachievable in the eyes of many. There are many stakeholders in the role of the guidance counsellor, including post-primary school management, other teachers, parents, and professional bodies. Each have a vested interest in the role and its effectiveness and so hold expectations of the role and consequently, of the person undertaking that role. In this research, it was highlighted by some of the participants, that role of the guidance counsellor may be misunderstood even by other staff in post-primary setting. In this case, causing an increase in stress and a potential unnecessary increase in workload also. This can be seen clearly in the excerpts that follow from the participants:

“There are many in the post-primary schools, both staff and students, who are a bit unsure of what a guidance counsellor spends their time doing” (Noelle).

“A lot of school staff are yet unsure of what the guidance counsellor in the school actually does all day. In my school, each member of staff has access to all other staff timetables, and it has been commented in passing to me that I have an awful lot of free time” (Fiona).

The challenge coming to light here is the extra strain being placed on the individual in the role as a result of this misconception, causing possible unnecessary referrals. “I have even had a student sent to me for first aid during a lesson. When staff do not understand fully what it is I actually do then they send them to me for all kinds of reasons” (Fiona).

Coupled with this ambiguity around the role of the guidance counsellor was also the varying explanations given to it by those in the role, the perceived importance of varying elements of the role and how they, themselves define it.

“The main aim of the guidance counsellor is to provide education including personal and social, educational and careers” (Elaine).

“I would say that the primary part of the guidance counsellors’ job is both creating and maintain the relationship they have with the students. This is hugely important to the job in the one-to-one setting” (Aisling).

“I think the important difference here between the two roles is the way of working with the student. There is a trust that must be built with the students by the guidance counsellor and I’m not convinced that this can be achieved in the same way by the classroom by the teacher where discipline must be also considered” (Noelle).

Discipline as mentioned here by Noelle is a key factor which may separate both roles. It would appear that the issue of discipline and the school’s requirements, is dealt with by teachers a greater amount than guidance counsellors. Yet, it needs to be implemented seamlessly by the individual working in the dual role.

Though the relationship between the guidance counsellor and student was highlighted here as a central part of the role by some, it was also noted as being a challenge for other respondents. Mary stated “The students see you in a certain light when you are their teacher. Of course you can get on well with them and have a good working relationship, but I have found that if they are a student who finds the subject you teach challenging, then they may relate to you as the teacher of that subject in a negative way – I have seen them then not want to come and talk to me openly as the guidance counsellor, especially so for personal counselling”.

In addition to Mary, Fiona made a very good point on the same topic in saying that “some have asked to speak with the other guidance counsellor, who does not teacher them for a subject and some are just reluctant to open up much and can cause the process to be difficult for both of us. I suppose they are not keen to see the person they open up to about something very personal in class every single day”.

It is clear here the potential challenge for both the student seeking help and the guidance counsellor in this dual role in this situation. This reluctance on the part of the student is highlighted by respondents particularly in the case of personal counselling where potentially sensitive and personal information is being shared in comparison to the more career focused guidance situations.

4.2 The impact the dual role has on the identity of the individual in the role in the post primary setting.

The individuals who participated in this research, as mentioned previously are all employed in the dual role of both classroom teacher and guidance counsellor, the researcher wanted to understand what this means for them in terms of identity in the post primary school setting. Respondents were asked questions specific to how they identify their own role and if this has an impact on how they interact with other staff. Some of the participants had little difficulty in explaining their self-perception of their role as can be seen in the following quotes:

“I call myself a teacher first and foremost, maybe because I’ve been in that role the longest, and even though I know am a guidance counsellor too, I am still primarily a teacher” (Fiona).

“I am a guidance counsellor who also teaches” (Mary).

“I would state that I am the school guidance counsellor. If asked any further I would include my teaching role, but I feel that guidance counselling is my career now. It has been for some time” (Elaine).

A common theme which is obvious here is that the respondents seem to identify more closely with the role which they have held for the longest amount of time, for some, teaching and others, guidance counselling. This, despite the fact that they are all completing both roles concurrently in the dual role at the time of interviewing. This self-identification of their role is a key factor in each of their individual identities.

Following on from this information, the respondents also indicated a number of ways in which they feel their relationship with other staff is impacted by their being in the dual role. Some feel that they are different or apart from the rest of the teaching staff and some feel that others have perceptions about their role which impacts on them. No two experiences are the same, and the data suggests that the impact is dependant on the individual school and the other individuals who work there and make up the greater staff. Some of the following excerpts portray how this impact is being felt:

“I do think it has had some impact, yes. I have been working in this same school since I first qualified as a teacher with a lot of the same staff. When I was completing my masters and started working in guidance there were certainly a few comments about moving away from teaching to ‘an easier job’ and a few smart comments again in 2012 when my timetable changed again and I had more teaching than guidance hours for the first time in years” (Mary).

“When I started working as a guidance counsellor, I seemed to become the person that people could dump stuff on a little bit. I felt this in particular of late with the New Junior Cycle and the introduction of the wellbeing hours, because my area was guidance, it was assumed that I would take the lead on the wellbeing aspect” (Fiona).

A thread that emerged within this, and was highlighted by two of the respondents, that the role of guidance counsellor in post-primary schools is often perceived to be a form of managerial role, or at least possible route to management. The relationship towards those in the guidance role seems to be similar to that which staff may have with management in some schools, perhaps more reserved than they would be amongst peers. This was noted by both Aoife and Noelle below:

“I have noticed in my current school that I’ve seen a bit as being in the ear of management. I do not feel that I am at all, but as the guidance counsellor I do speak to them and meet with them a lot discussing various students and so on. I do feel that I am not seen as ‘one of the rest’ in the staffroom with the teaching staff” (Aoife).

“when I began working as a guidance counsellor, I was cast out from the teaching staff a bit, I spoke to friends on staff about this and they told me that some see me as a bit threatening now as I work so closely with the management in the school. There is a difference in my social circle in the staffroom for sure” (Noelle).

This is particularly interesting as participants of this research do not see themselves in this way and recognise this close working relationship with management as just a part of their role.

4.3 Access to wellbeing and self-care provision and practice amongst guidance counsellors working in this dual role.

Attending IGC branch meetings, group supervision and CPD were highlighted as the most readily available options for both self-care and wellbeing in this research by all of the research participants. Each highlighted the importance of these services to them in their role:

“A huge part of self-care for guidance counsellors is attending supervision and branch meetings. There is a therapeutic aspect to the group supervision, but also a hugely important social aspect” (Fiona).

“Supervision is extremely helpful and necessary for your own personal wellbeing; you really do need to mind yourself in this job. I would say that the support at branch meetings can be just as important too” (Noelle).

“Currently, as a result of Covid-19, we are working very differently, in both teaching and guidance in a remote fashion. It is new and our supervision is as important now, if not more than before to help us to work effectively and to take care of ourselves during this time” (Elaine).

The areas of support and community among guidance professionals are truly clear to see from the participants responses here. It is important to note that a large number of guidance counsellors are working alone in a school or in a small guidance department, depending on the number of students in the school. The individuals working in the dual role, because of the constraints of their teaching timetable may find it difficult to communicate with the others in the department, as highlighted by Mary, “Because we both work in the dual role, there are weeks we might not see each other for days on end, it can make it really difficult to plan for events and trips, and we end up doing most of our planning in our own time after school hours”.

Given the importance placed by the participants in this research on these supports there is a real concern for them then when barriers exist which prevent them from accessing these supports. Namely, time constraints and timetabling, both of which inhibited the ability to engage in effective wellbeing and self-care practices as outlined in the following excerpts:

“Due to my teaching timetable, it is not always possible for me to attend my IGC branch meetings. For me, they are an integral part of my own well-being because they are a chance to speak to others in the same position as you, talk about the challenges and get ideas for things I can try myself. I cannot always be covered by supervision to attend and I do feel like I miss out when I cannot go” (Elaine). As articulated by Elaine here, the team attitude and community among guidance counsellors is strong and the local branches of the IGC are an integral element in this.

Time is a resource which is scarce for all of the participants in this research. Each participant detailed how time constraints are a factor in their day to day role:

“Time is a huge issue for me. I have free periods on my timetable for planning and preparation, but to be honest with you, I cannot remember the last time I actually got to use one for p and p. Mostly, I’ll be using it to pick up a student, follow up with a teacher, meet a parent” (Noelle).

“I can often start a day with a to-do list to prepare for my teaching duties that I simply cannot complete because the guidance duties get in the way. Sometimes the duties from the guidance side of the dual role cannot be planned for and, dependant on what does arise, can take priority” (Aoife).

“being a teacher and not having a permanent job for a number of years can turn you easily into a ‘yes man’, it’s what you’ve got to do to try to get and keep a job, it’s a learned behaviour I suppose. Since taking on the role of guidance counsellor on top of teaching, I have had to retrain myself to prioritise and say ‘no’ to things I cannot take on. If I took on everything I was asked to do I’d have run myself into the ground, I’d have been burnt out years ago” (Aisling).

It is apparent that even though a dual timetable is split between timetabled hours for both of the roles in the dual role, the expectations on the individual from the guidance counselling side can be quite demanding, particularly with regard to time. This is not to say that the teaching side does not equally take time, however the oftentimes erratic nature of the guidance demands seem to be almost impossible to plan for and certainly are causing a noted strain on the participants of this research. This is summarised aptly by Fiona in saying “A lot of the time it feels as though I am squashing the expectations of two separate full-time jobs into the time allowed for one” (Fiona).

Among the participants in this research, all highlighted the need to engage in their own personal wellbeing activities of choice in their own time. Some mentioned the importance of physical exercise, getting out for walks to clear their head after a stressful day, and some meditation to ground themselves at the beginning or the end of a day. Good preparation and time management, using the network of support in school, having a positive outlook, have a good humour and setting personal limitations were all mentioned by various participants. Regardless of the chosen activity, as articulated by Fiona, “looking after yourself has to be a priority in this job, you can’t pour from an empty cup”.

4.4 The lasting changes as a result of the 2012 change in provision of guidance counsellors in post-primary schools in Ireland.

As mentioned in previous chapters, in the wake of the 2012 Budget the DES announced the removal of the ex-quota allocation of guidance counsellors (DES 2012). This change had a specific impact on some of the respondents in this research and still does eight years on. Two out of the six respondents had their timetable altered as a result of this change as they were qualified and working as guidance counsellors before 2012.

“The change caused me to be back in the classroom teaching Geography at all levels which I had not done in quite a few years. The expectation was almost to continue to maintain all of the guidance responsibilities I had, and now also had all that teaching on my timetable. There was nobody else to pick up the things that still needed to be done” (Mary).

“This change, because there is another guidance counsellor in my school left my with little hours for guidance and a lot more back in the classroom. My timetable was really put in reverse I suppose. It did take some adjusting” (Elaine).

The changes made were significant and led to the reduction of the hours allowance for guidance counselling in post-primary schools across the country. These changes felt in a greater way in some schools than others. It is fair to say that as articulated by Elaine, who experienced an almost complete reversal of her timetable, appropriate time to adjust was not allowed.

Noelle detailed how she completed her qualification in guidance counselling in 2012 and so was lucky to have the opportunity to take up some hours in her school, she was aware that she was lucky given the circumstances and added that “I know that the impact as greater for

other graduates at the same time as the jobs were just not available in the same way as they had been previous”.

Today, this impact is still being felt as neither experienced a full return to their role as it was previous to the 2012 changes. Both had some changes in hours as they years have moved on from 2012, but not enough in their opinion to allow them to cater for needs of the students and negate the negative impacts experienced.

“After two years working in reverse, I suppose, I did receive some more hours back in guidance, the management was able to reshuffle the hours a little to allow for this” (Elaine).

“I increased the hours I have in guidance counselling in the years following the 2012 change, but they haven’t gone back to what they were before, not close to where they should be in my opinion” (Mary).

Elaine did note that she hoped that as a result of Covid-19 post-primary schools might see a change and a reinstating of a number of the lost hours as they “would be necessary when students return to schools, issues around anxiety and coping with the return to school after such a long time will be huge”.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter presented and briefly analysed the main findings from the primary data collection of six semi-structured interviews with individuals working in the dual role of guidance counsellor and subject teacher. Using the thematic analysis as outlined at the start of the chapter, four main themes were identified and presented here.

Chapter 5

Discussion

5.0 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present a synthesis of the findings of this research, in the context of the research questions and the literature review (Thomas 2017). Firstly, the chapter will present an overall analysis of the research findings linking back to the research questions. This will be followed by a discussion of the themes as presented in chapter four, which emerged as a result of this research.

5.1 Overview of research findings

The research questions which are the foundations for this research as outline in chapter three are:

1. What are the challenges associated with the dual role of Guidance Counsellor and subject specific classroom Teacher in Irish post-primary schools?
2. Is working in the dual role having an impact on the wellbeing and identity of the individual working in that role?
3. Is there an adequate provision of, and access to, support for those professionals working in the dual role?
4. Are the changes made in 2012, to the provision of guidance counselling hours in Irish post-primary schools still having an impact today?

The four distinct themes which emerged from the data analysis, as were detailed in chapter four are as follows.

- The everyday challenges associated with working in the dual role.
- The impact the dual role has on the identity of the individual in the role in the post primary setting.
- Access to wellbeing and self-care provision and practice amongst guidance counsellors working in this dual role.
- The lasting changes as a result of the 2012 change in provision of guidance counsellors in post-primary schools in Ireland.

The purpose of the research questions was to provide a starting point for this research, The paradigm, methods and interview questions were all chosen to answer these questions. It is

clear here that the four themes which have emerged from this research are clearly aligned with the initial research questions.

5.2 The everyday challenges associated with working in the dual role.

There were a number of challenges highlighted in this research which those in the dual role encounter on a daily basis. The lack of universal understanding of the role of the guidance counsellor, time pressure, prioritising issues, relationships with students and discipline being those most prominent in the findings of this research.

Each of the participants raised the issues of prioritising and time pressure as key challenges they experience in the dual role. Since the introduction of the new Junior Cycle, teachers have ‘professional time’ allowed each week to complete their own chosen tasks to support their planning and teaching. “full-time teachers involved in the delivery of Junior Cycle are provided with 22 hours of professional time per year” (DES 2020, p.3). Many other participants in the dual role found that they would use up their given ‘free’ time to prioritise getting things done during the school day, this primarily included meeting students for one-to-one sessions.

As a result, the work that a teacher might get done in ‘free’ time during the school day, marking tests, marking homework and planning as some examples given, those in the dual role are less likely to complete in school and so this gets done in their own time outside of work. It must be noted here that the majority of teaching professionals are taking work home with them regularly (Bubb and Early 2004), but it does seem that this is a certainty and perhaps happening more so with those in the dual role.

To be a guidance counsellor, you need to be a caring person and want to help those students who you work with (Rogers 1951). This key trait of guidance counsellors here may be creating a cross for their own backs in a situation when prioritising is key, their very nature it seems will result in them using their own time for the betterment of a student in need. It could also be said that this is something which is learned as tenure is matured in the role. Hearne (2012) describes this as sometimes an inability to say ‘no’ and so the issues of a so-called ‘treadmill effect’ occurring. One cannot pour from an empty vessel and so those in the dual role so need to ensure they look after themselves in order to look after the students. Aisling stated this of her re-learned behaviour to say ‘no’ to optional things she simply did not have the time to manage.

The lack of clear understanding of the role of the guidance counsellor has led to a lack of awareness of the details of their role, which in turn is causing an issue for many of the participants in this research. It is noted a number of times by Mary, Fiona and Noelle, in response to interview questions, that a lack of understanding of their role has led to unnecessary and incorrect referrals to them, students being out of class to see them when they should not and overall an increase of their workload, needlessly. With the introduction of the Whole School Guidance Framework (2017) following on from the guidance of the NEPS publication of a continuum of support for post-primary schools (2010), one might assume that there would be a greater awareness on the ground of the specific role, but the findings in this research would suggest that this is unfortunately not their experience. The purpose of the framework, to ensure that the requirement of “access to appropriate guidance to assist in their educational and career choices” (Education Act 1998, sections 9c), is met for all students in post-primary schools throughout Ireland, not just from the guidance department, but with the involvement of “the guidance counsellor in collaboration with school management and staff, and external organisations and personnel” (NCGE 2017, p.13). The findings suggest that there is still some ground to be covered to ensure this provision is being met.

Sharing the two identities of teacher and guidance counsellor, though similarities are apparent and have been discussed previously, result in two differing ways to relate to students. Though qualities such as being kind, approachable and caring are often shared in both roles, discipline is something which is primarily described in the role of the teacher and not guidance counsellor. If a student wishes to see somebody about a personal issue, they may not want to see the person who is also their teacher as they see that individual in a certain way and not necessarily a counsellor. Discipline, as mentioned here provides a difficult barrier in this situation as it may be the sticking point for the student, the way they are accustomed to seeing the individual. Leahy *et al.* (2017) describe the issue of discipline in the role of the guidance counsellor as a challenge and find it to cause a “professional tension” (p. 103) for the individual in the dual role. The role of the guidance counsellors perhaps not aligning well with the concept of discipline which could detract from the support and care described in the helping relationship (Rogers 1951).

As will be described in greater depth in section 5.5 below, 2010 saw 12% of guidance counsellors return to the classroom in some capacity, increasing the occurrence of this issue for students (Teaching Council 2012). This, as was mentioned by three of the research participants is an issue for the provision of guidance services.

5.3 Access to wellbeing and self-care provision and practice amongst guidance counsellors working in this dual role.

Kyriacou (2001) described teaching as being a high stress profession. Coupled with this, Hearne's (2012) description of guidance counselling as a career prone to burnout among its professionals, wellbeing a self-care then must be central to any research of the dual role which combines both of the aforementioned.

The IGC, in their core competencies and professional practice document name self-care, CPD and supervision of guidance professionals as essential so that one can be effective in their role. "Self-care and maintaining a balanced lifestyle contribute to stress management and a well-rounded guidance service" (IGC 2016, p. 53).

This is directed towards all guidance counsellors, there is no specific reference made to individuals working in the dual role explicitly. A lot of the issues which are present for full time guidance counsellors in the post-primary setting are also issues for those working in the dual role. However, the findings of this research would suggest that those in the dual role encounter additional issues which may not be applicable to the full-time role, as discussed in the previous section of this chapter above.

The issues outlined, have resulted in a struggle or inability by the participants in this research to access the available services and resources. It was noted by two of the participants that it was difficult to attend the local branch meetings of the IGC because they were timetabled to teach at this time. It was also highlighted by those same participants how important the local branch meetings were for them, Fiona described the branch meetings as "A huge part of self-care for guidance counsellors". Noelle compared branch meetings to supervision saying, "I would say that the support at branch meetings can be just as important too".

In addition to timetabling issues, some of participants found it difficult to leave school at the time allowed for branch meetings as they had students to meet and jobs which needed to be done in that time and they took priority over the branch meetings on many occasions. As was mentioned already in the section on prioritising above.

Supervision is mandatory for guidance counsellors, it "provides support for guidance counsellors in their individual work and ensures client safety, quality control and professional practice safety by safeguarding against ethical malpractice" (IGC 2016, p.54). Noelle described supervision in her experience as "extremely helpful and necessary for your own personal wellbeing". Guidance counsellors in the post-primary setting are required to attend

supervision five times in the academic year for a period of three hours (NCGE 2020). As this is mandatory, those timetabled to teach at the organised time must be granted cover by their school to allow them to attend, but the findings show that this is not always straightforward. The findings of this research would suggest that the participants share the view that the local branch meetings of the IGC are just as important for their wellbeing as supervision, but as outlined here, it is not always possible for them to attend as often as they would like.

5.4 The impact the dual role has on the identity of the individual in the role in the post primary setting.

Connor (2013) stated the angst among some other staff in post primary schools towards the guidance counsellor in the dual role. He highlighted in his findings that there were some teachers who not happy that they have an office space and a closer relationship with management than other staff because of the dual role, as they were still teachers at the same time. What was described here by Connor (2013) seems to be very closely aligned with the findings in this research on the same theme. As mentioned by Fiona, Aoife and Aisling in particular, though their experiences vary, they all highlight their being seen as different to other staff in their respective schools, for reasons of relationship with management, timetabling of classes and perceptions of the role. No doubt, feeling in some way alienated from you colleagues impacts on one's self-perception and identification of one's own identity. Aoife stating that "I sometimes am unsure of where I fit in in the staff". The challenge then, for these individuals to work alongside colleagues who view them in it could be said, a negative light. The lack of synchronicity between the two sides of the role were certainly felt by the participants of this research, which made it difficult for them to define their own identities and space amongst the staff. Conversely, for some participants in this research, the very opposite was felt, they were very sure of their place and sure of their identity. The defining factor between the two seems to be tenure in the workplace. Those, namely, Noelle, Mary and Elaine, described knowing their role and being comfortable in it, had been in their positions for much longer than those who felt yet uneasy in them.

With tenure comes experience and so a confidence in one's abilities and, on the whole, one's identity (Hearne, 2012; Stetes and Burke, 2014). It seems that though not an easy or quick fix, time is needed to allow for those choosing or being placed in the dual role to learn their way into it to become sure of their place. It could be argued that as well as time for the individual, a culture change is needed in some staffrooms, to allow the person feel

comfortable and supported in the role also, to perhaps allow them to ‘learn into’ the role in a shorted time frame, more succinctly.

Burke (2014) describes the issues with multiple activated identities in the same group, which is a constant reality for those working in the dual role. As mentioned, the change from one role to the other can occur a number of times in a given day. The individual in a decision-making situation is trying to come to a conclusion which will be beneficial and fair for both roles. A difficult task and often when internal conflict can occur. “meanings and expectations for each identity come into conflict when both identities are activated” (Burke 2014, p. 202). Fiona and Aoife describe two such instances, whole staff meetings and parent teacher meetings. Both, on a common agreement that in both situations, people, be that other staff or parents, expect you to behave and respond in a certain way because they see you as holding one of your two roles. Fiona described meeting a parent of a senior cycle student who had been failing her subject. The parent was seeing one side of her identity as Fiona was trying to engage with her from the other. Of course, the two sides of this dual role are intertwined and cannot ever be totally separated as one will always influence the other (Burke, 2014; Connor, 2013), but in some situations some division is necessary and not always easy to achieve.

5.5 The lasting changes as a result of the 2012 change in provision of guidance counsellors in post-primary schools in Ireland.

In 2013, McGuckin and O’Brien summarised that the impact of the, then very recent, 2012 budget amendments to the provision of guidance counselling “was a significant cause for concern for the guidance counsellors participating in this study” (p.102). Many years on from that change, the same feelings remain and are apparent in the data collected, particularly from those guidance counsellors who experienced this change in their career first-hand, in this research. It was noted throughout by these respondents that the impact is lasting to this day and has had negative impacts on both the guidance counsellors, more specifically those in the dual role as highlighted in this research and equally, on the students who they work with in their schools.

In many schools across Ireland, these removed Guidance counselling hours were gradually reinstated in differing degrees by individual schools, however, this was not the first-hand experience of those who were involved in this research. It was noted by those who the changes impacted on most – those who were working in the dual role at the time, Elaine and

Mary, that the change in hours through the years did return in a small way, but certainly not back to a level of being fully reinstated.

At the time of writing this research it has been stated by the Department of Education that 120 new posts for guidance counsellors would be created as a part of the roadmap for re-opening schools as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. “Schools have flexibility to consider how best to align this resource with their School Guidance Plan. This allocation of guidance posts will bring guidance provision in schools back to the level last seen before the financial crisis in 2012” (DES 2020, p.1). This announcement has been met with some doubt and scepticism to date.

It was also raised as an issue that teachers in schools who had no formal qualification in guidance counselling were being used to cover some of the hours lost as a repatriation to guidance counselling services. Highlighted in this research by two respondents whose experience was the teaching of Transition Year careers by newer members of staff to “fill up their timetables as they were contracted on less hours” (Fiona). This, understandably, was not met with a positive reaction by the professionals in this research who have taken the time and effort to achieve this qualification status. This particular issue was raised by a number of authors. Hearne (2016) reinforced what was stated in the IGC audit (IGC 2016) stating that “in some schools, non-qualified teachers, support staff and other para-professionals are fulfilling the guidance counsellor’s role since 2012” (p.2). This was also described aptly by McGuckin and O’Brien (2013) as resulting in a “broken guidance service had to be ‘propped up’ by other staff members who were unqualified in the area of guidance counselling” (p.102). This issue has reared its head again in the current Covid-19 climate where the IGC have urged schools to use qualified guidance personal and not make use of cheaper alternatives (IGC 2020).

The balancing of the many expectations included in both roles in this dual role holds its individual challenges as discussed earlier in this chapter, coupled with the added strain as a result of reduced hours and time allocation as noted in much literature and policy published in the years following this budget 2012 alteration in allocation (Connor, 2013; ASTI, 2013; IGC, 2013; IGC, 2014; NCGE, 2013) are mirrored with the findings of this research.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has given a detailed synthesis of the primary findings, bridging the gap between the literature discussed in chapter two and the themes emergent in chapter four. The critical

discussion in this chapter will provide the basis for the recommendations which will be made the final chapter of this thesis, chapter six, the conclusion.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

6.0 Introduction

This chapter will deliver an appraisal of the entire research study discussing the conclusions reached, the implications of those conclusions for future professional practice and research. It will detail the personal learning undertaken by the researcher through the course of the research. It will highlight the strengths and limitations of this research study and suggest recommendations for the future of the research topic.

6.1 Overview of the research Findings

As previously noted, the main aim of this research study was to understand the impacts the dual role of guidance counsellor and subject teacher is having on the individual in the role. In order to meet this aim, the researcher used a qualitative approach whereby six semi-structured interviews were carried out with six professional working in the dual role, as the data collection method. Through synthesis of the findings, it became apparent that quite strong themes were emerging in the data for the participants. The everyday challenges encountered in the dual role, the access of the individuals to well-being and self-care supports, the impact of the dual role on identity and, finally, the current situation as a result of the fallout of the 2012 guidance allocation changes.

There were a number of challenges highlighted by the participants of this research which included role definition ambiguity, expectations placed on the individual, time constraints, prioritising and discipline as a barrier to relationships. The challenges, as uncovered in this research are in line with previous similar research on the topic (Connor 2014, McGurkin and O'Brien 2013, Leary *et al.* 2017). In NCGE (2017) in an explanation of the incorporation of WSG framework in the light of the requirement from the Government of Ireland, for each student to receive “appropriate guidance” (1998), in fact added fuel to the fire of role uncertainty. The perceptions of ‘appropriate’ as the findings of this research would suggest, are not so clear cut and differ school to school, dependant on a number of factors.

The time constraints placed on teachers and guidance counsellors alike have been prominent in much literature as they have been specifically in relation to the dual role (Hearne 2013, Leary *et al.* 2017, IGC 2016). Each of the six participants in this research were in agreement that time is a lasting issue in the dual role with more than half of the participants feeling that

even though they are timetabled for a percentage of both roles, they are in fact, expected to completed much of the work involved in both roles, but in half of the time allowed to a professional in the singular roles. All participants noted that they are always completing work at home in their own personal time as well as that completed during the workday. This leads naturally to the expectations of the role, which the findings show are influenced both by the ambiguity of the role and the time constraints experienced.

The access of individuals working in the dual role to supports such as supervision, IGC branch meetings and CPD is an ongoing and worrying issue. These have been stated by all participants in this research as well as in previous literature as being the most important forms of self-care (IGC 2013, 2014, 2016). All of the participants in this research stated that they have missed out on these opportunities which support their own wellbeing either regularly or on occasion for the prioritisation of supporting a student in need or completing a task which positively impacts on a student. This highlights the issue of prioritising in the dual role and seems that there is a constant process of juggling occurring for these professionals, impacting negatively on their own wellbeing.

The findings of the research would suggest that the dual can lead to identity confusion. It appears that tenure and experience in the role, leading to a confidence of the constraints and definition of the parameters of the role are met with a reduction in identity issues of the individual. Of course, swapping from one role to the other, possibly multiple times in a day requires some work on the part of the individual to be present in each of the roles at any given time.

Though eight years have passed since the 2012 budget impacted on the allocation of guidance counsellors, the findings of this research show that the effects of this change are still being felt today. The number of hours allocated to guidance counselling in post-primary schools, particularly the percentage of time spend by the dual role professional as a subject teacher in the classroom show this clearly. As 2020 has been a year for huge change in education, we are still seeing a call for the changes made in 2012 to be reversed, showing how the impact is still being felt (IGC 2020).

6.2 Strengths and Limitations of the Research Study

A clear strength of this research was the use of a qualitative method and interpretivist approach. This, coupled with the use of the semi-structured interviews, allowed for an immersion into the realities of the six participants in this research. The flexibility of the

questioning allowed for a real thick explanation to be given and in turn, understanding of their experience by researcher (Stake 2010, Thomas 2017).

Researcher bias can be a concern in all qualitative research studies. The researcher was aware, and stated, from the beginning, their position held and the need for professional reflexivity throughout (Cohen *et al.* 2007). This professional and ethical rigour insured that the research was accurate and a true reflection of the experiences of the participants only.

It was stated in the introduction that there is limited research completed into the experience of the dual role in the post-primary setting. A strength of this research is the data and information it provides on the role from those who are in the best position to provide it, from an immersive perspective. Thought, as recognised in chapter three, the data can not claim to be generalisable due to the small sample size, it is insightful and useful nonetheless.

The initial intention was to complete face-to-face semi-structured interviews, however, as was detailed in chapter three, the global Covid-19 situation at the time of undertaking this research deemed that impossible. It must be noted that, even though the interviews were carried out in video format, there is a possibility that much of the non-verbal communication may have been lost through this medium. The lack of familiarity of some of the participants with this technology may have also had an impact on their level of comfort and in turn on the fluidity of the interviews undertaken.

6.3 Recommendations

The researcher suggests the following recommendations arising from the completion of this research study.

Policy

To provide ‘adequate guidance’ to the student in Irish post-primary schools the researcher believes that a reverse of the reduction in allocation of guidance provision is necessary, which would result in “a return to the pre 2012 circular for guidance allocation” (ICG 2020).

Practice

An assurance by the DES and school management that guidance counsellors working in the dual role will not be timetabled to teach during the planned time for supervision and IGC branch meetings so that they have certain access to these important support services.

Research

This research has looked critically at the impact of the dual role on those individuals working in this role, from their own perspective. The researcher believes that there is scope for further research on this dual role. but rather of the student experience of it in Irish post-primary schools.

6.4 Personal Learning

This research study has proven itself to be an impactful learning experience. Though there were assumptions held at the start of the research process, it could not have been foreseen just how much knowledge could be gained throughout the process to understand the role so fully and the implications of it. The assumptions were certainly surface level and now the understanding is much deeper.

The methodology used in this research has allowed me to gain a true awareness of the real experience of those working in the dual role. The participants in this research allowed me to be immersed into their truth through their open and honest answers, and for that I feel truly fortunate. An appreciation of the effort on the part of the researcher and the participants in all research has been gained along the way.

Going forward in my own personal practice, I have an awareness of the potential issues which I may encounter. The research has allowed me to be aware of not only these possible issues, but also the steps that I may need to take to look after myself, and my wellbeing should I be working in this dual role, which is a very real possibility. This will not only have an impact on me in my professional role, but also on the students who I will work with. If I am not looking after myself and managing myself well, then I could not hope to provide them with the support and guidance that they deserve to receive.

6.5 Conclusion

This concluding chapter has presented a brief overview of the research findings, and the personal learning of the researcher as a result. It has recognised the strengths and limitations of this research study and made suggestions for future practice and research in the light of the completion of this research.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Subject Information Letter



Subject Information Letter (IGC Branch Chairperson)

Date: 6th April 2020

EHS REC no. 2020_03_50_EHS (ER)

Research title: An investigation into the challenges associated with the dual role of guidance counsellor and subject teacher in the post-primary setting, and how these may impact on the identity and wellbeing of the individual in the role.

Dear IGC Branch Chairperson,

I am a student of the MA in Guidance Counselling and Lifespan Development programme in the School of Education, University of Limerick, under the supervision of Dr. Orla McCormack.

I am undertaking a research dissertation on a topic related to guidance counselling as part of my studies. In my research I aim to explore the topic of the dual role of guidance counsellor and subject specific classroom teacher in the post-primary setting in Ireland.

In order to recruit volunteers, I would greatly appreciate your support by disseminating the Volunteer Subject Information Letter and Consent Form to your Branch members in order to

recruit participants. If they wish to take part in the study they can then contact me directly to make further arrangements.

All information gathered will be held in the strictest of confidence and pseudonyms will be used to ensure the anonymity of participants. The interviews will be audio tape-recorded and the data will be destroyed after analysis according to UL guidelines.

Participation in the study is voluntary and participants can withdraw from the research at any time prior to data analysis phase. The results from this research study will be reported in my thesis and may be disseminated through other professional publications and conferences.

The collected data will be stored in a secure location approved by the University of Limerick. If you have any queries or require further any further information on the research study, please contact me or my supervisor:

Sinead Holmes

18151329@studentmail.ul.ie

Dr. Orla McCormack

+353 61 202760

orla.mccormack@ul.ie

This research has received Ethical approval from the Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee (*need to insert EHSREC no. here when approved*). If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent you may contact:

Chairman Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee

EHS Faculty Office

University of Limerick

Tel (061) 234101

ehsresearchethics@ul.ie



Consent Form (IGC Branch Chairperson)

Date: 6th April 2020

EHS REC no. 2020_03_50_EHS (ER)

Research Title: An investigation into the challenges associated with the dual role of guidance counsellor and subject teacher in the post-primary setting, and how these may impact on the identity and wellbeing of the individual in the role.

I have read the project Information Sheet and understand in detail the particulars of the research project.

I understand that the identity of the participants will not be revealed in the reporting of this research study.

The conditions involved in the research which are designed to protect the privacy of participants and respect their contribution are:

1. Participation is entirely voluntary.
2. Participants are free to withdraw at any time prior to the data analysis stage and any contribution made will be subsequently destroyed.
3. The interviews will be kept strictly confidential and will be available only to the researcher and the Principal Investigator. Excerpts from the interviews may be part of the final research dissertation but under no circumstances will names or any identifying characteristics be included in the report.

I hereby give my consent for Sinead Holmes to carry out this research with IGC Branch
Members who may volunteer independently.

Signature: _____

Printed name: _____

Signature of Researcher: _____

Date: _____

Appendix B: Volunteer Information Letter



Volunteer Information Letter

Date : 20th April 2020

EHSREC no. 2020_03_50_EHS (ER)

Research title: An investigation into the challenges associated with the dual role of guidance counsellor and subject teacher in the post-primary setting, and how these may impact on the identity and wellbeing of the individual in the role.

Dear Guidance Counsellor,

I am a student of the MA in Guidance Counselling and Lifespan Development programme in the School of Education, University of Limerick, under the supervision of Dr. Orla McCormack. I am undertaking a research study on a topic related to guidance counselling.

In my research I aim to explore the topic of the dual role of guidance counsellor and subject specific classroom teacher in the post-primary setting in Ireland. In order to gather information on the topic I would appreciate if you would agree to participate in a face-to-face audio-taped interview. The interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes and be held in a confidential location agreeable to you.

All information gathered will be held in the strictest of confidence and pseudonyms will be used to ensure anonymity. Interviews will be audio tape recorded and the data will be destroyed after the analysis process. Participation in the study is voluntary and participants can withdraw from the research at any time prior to the data analysis phase. The results from this research study will be reported in my final dissertation and may also be disseminated through other professional publications and conferences.

The collected data will be stored in a secure location approved by the University of Limerick. It is important to note that your name will not be used in the reporting of the research. If you have any queries or require further any further information on the research study, please contact me or my supervisor:

Sinead Holmes

18151329@studentmail.ul.ie

Dr. Orla McCormack

+353 61 202760

orla.mccormack@ul.ie

This research has received Ethical approval from the Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee (*need to insert EHSREC no. here when approved*). If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent you may contact:

Chairman Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee

EHS Faculty Office

University of Limerick

Tel (061) 234101

ehsresearchethics@ul.ie

Appendix C: Research Privacy Notice



RESEARCH PRIVACY NOTICE

This Privacy Notice governs the use and storage of your personal data by the University of Limerick (the University). The processing of this data is carried out in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) / Data Protection Acts 1988-2018 (“Data Protection Law”) and in accordance with this Data Protection Privacy Notice. The University is the Data Controller for personal data we process about you.

The purpose of this Data Protection Privacy Notice is to explain how the University uses and processes personal data we collect and hold about you as a research participant (“you”, “your”). This notice extends to all your personal data as defined under Article 2(1) of the General Data Protection Regulation (EU) 2016/679.

1. Title and Purpose of the research project

An investigation into the challenges associated with the dual role of guidance counsellor and subject teacher in the post-primary setting, and how these may impact on the identity and wellbeing of the individual in the role.

The dual role in this study refers to the professionally qualified guidance counsellor, working part of their time in the guidance counselling role and part of their time as a subject specific classroom teacher, in the post-primary school setting. The instance of guidance counsellors working in this dual role has increased since the 2012 budget changes to guidance counselling allocation in post-primary schools in Ireland. This research aims to explore and highlight challenges and impacts which are faced by the individuals working in this dual role.

2. Research Ethics Committee

2.1 Ethical approval was granted by the EHS Research Ethics Committee on the 26th of March 2020.

3. Identity of the Data Controller.

3.1 The Data Joint Controller is:

- University of Limerick, Plassey, Limerick.

4. Identity and Contact Details of the Data Protection Officer of the Data Controller.

4.1 You can contact the University of Limerick's Data Protection Officer at dataprotection@ul.ie or by writing to Data Protection Officer, Room A1-073, University of Limerick, Limerick.

5. The Identity of the Principal Investigator

5.1 The Principal Investigator for this Research Project is Dr. Orla McCormack, Lecturer in Education in the School of Education and Programme Director for the Professional Master of Education in the University of Limerick.

6. Why the University Holds Your Personal Data

6.1 The University must process your personal data in order to undertake research relating to your participation in this study on the topic of the challenges and impacts which are faced by the individuals working in the dual role of guidance counsellor and subject specific classroom teacher.

7. Research Participant Personal Data held by the University

7.1 You provide us with your personal data to enable us to undertake the research project. Participation in this research project is voluntary and participants may withdraw without giving any reason. Should you wish to withdraw you may do so by contacting the Principal Investigator at orla.mccormack@ul.ie or writing to her at School of Education, Room CM-049, Main Building, University of Limerick.

7.2 The categories of personal data collected/recorded may include:

- The participants contact details: Name, email address, telephone number. Only by the researcher for the purpose of contacting and setting up an interview with the participant. This information will under no circumstances be included in any way in the research materials.
- The participants work setting, i.e. Post-primary school setting.
- The length of tenure in their current position.

8. Lawful Basis for University Processing Personal Data

- 8.1 Data Protection Law requires that the University must have a valid lawful basis in order to process personal data.
- 8.2 The University will rely on your explicit consent in order to process your personal data for research purposes. Consent must be freely given, specific, informed and an unambiguous indication of your wishes by which you (by a statement or by a clear affirmative action) signify agreement to the processing of personal data relating to you. Your decision not to consent will have no adverse consequences for you.
- 8.3 You are free to withdraw this consent and you can do so by contacting the Principal Investigator at the following email address Orla.McCormack@ul.ie

9. Protecting Your Personal Data

- 9.1 Reasonable appropriate administrative, technical, personnel procedural and physical measures are employed to safeguard Personal Data against loss, theft and unauthorised uses access, uses or modifications.
- 9.2 All researchers of the University must adhere to the University's Data Protection Policy when processing Personal Data on behalf of UL (available at www.ul.ie/dataprotection). Non-adherence to the University's Data Protection Policy may lead to disciplinary action.
- 9.3 Personal data collected for this research project will be pseudonymised within one day after collection and will fully anonymised within 12 months. Truly anonymised data is not Personal Data. Once data is anonymised for the purposes of this research project, the terms of this Privacy Notice will no longer apply.

10. Sharing Your Personal Data with Third Parties

- 10.1 The University will not disclose your personal data to third parties.

12. Retention of your Personal Data

- 12.1 All Personal Data collected for this research project will be retained in accordance with the University's [Records Management and Retention Policy](#). *The Retention Policy currently states a retention period of 7 years (August 2027). Where the personal data collected for this research will be held for a longer/shorter period, this should be stated here. Note that truly anonymised data is not personal data.*

13. Your Rights

- 13.1 Depending on the legal basis which we rely on to process your Personal Data, you may have the right to request that we:
- provide you with information as to whether we process your data and details relating to our processing, and with a copy of your personal data;
 - rectify any inaccurate data we might have about you without undue delay;
 - complete any incomplete information about you;
 - under certain circumstances, erase your Personal Data without undue delay;
 - under certain circumstances, be restricted from processing your data;
 - under certain circumstances, furnish you with the Personal Data which you provided us within a structured, commonly used and machine readable format;
- 13.2 Requests for any of the above should be addressed by email to the Principal Investigator at orla.mccormack@ul.ie and the Data Protection Officer at dataprotection@ul.ie. Your request will be processed within 30 days of receipt. Please note, however, it may not be possible to facilitate all requests, for example, where the University is required by law to collect and process certain personal data including that personal information that is required of any research participant.
- 13.3 It is your responsibility to let the Principal Investigator know if your contact details change.

14. Queries, Contacts, Right of Complaint

- 14.1 Further information on Data Protection at the University of Limerick may be viewed at www.ul.ie/dataprotection. You can contact the Data Protection Officer at dataprotection@ul.ie or by writing to Data Protection Officer, Room A1-073, University of Limerick, Limerick.
- 14.2 You have a right to lodge a complaint with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner (Supervisory Authority). While we recommend that you raise any concerns or queries with us first at the following email address [insert PI's email address], you may contact that Office at info@dataprotection.ie or by writing to the Data Protection Commissioner, Canal House, Station Road, Portarlington, Co. Laois.

15. Review

- 15.1 This Privacy Notice will be reviewed and updated from time to time to take into account changes in the law and the experience gained from the Notice in practice.



EHS RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

PARTICIPANT CONSENT

Title of Study: An investigation into the challenges associated with the dual role of guidance counsellor and subject teacher in the post-primary setting, and how these may impact on the identity and wellbeing of the individual in the role.

Should you agree to participate in this study please read the statements below and if you agree to them, please sign the consent form.

- I have read and understood the participant information sheet.
- I understand what the project is about, and what the results will be used for.
- I understand that what the researchers find out in this study may be shared with others but that my name will not be given to anyone in any written material developed.
- I am fully aware of what I will have to do, and of any risks and benefits of the study.
- I know that I am choosing to take part in the study and that I can stop taking part in the study at any stage without giving any reason to the researchers.

This study involves audio/video recording. Please tick the appropriate box

- I am aware that my participation in this study may be recorded (video/audio) and I agree to this. However, if I feel uncomfortable at any time I can ask that the recording equipment be switched off. I understand that I can ask for a copy of my recording. I understand what will happen to the recordings once the study is finished.
- I do not agree to being audio/video recorded in this study.

After considering the above statements, I consent to my involvement in this research project.

Name: (please print): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Investigator's Signature _____

Date: _____



EHS RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Data Protection Consent Section: Individual Interview/Questionnaire

I, the undersigned, declare that I am freely giving specific, informed and an unambiguous consent to the University to process my Personal Data for the purposes of undertaking the research project entitled “An investigation into the challenges associated with the dual role of guidance counsellor and subject teacher in the post-primary setting, and how these may impact on the identity and wellbeing of the individual in the role.”

- I declare that I have read and fully understand the contents of the Research Privacy Notice, which is appended at Appendix 1 of this Consent form and I explicitly consent to my personal data being processed in line with this Research Privacy Notice. Yes No [checkbox] [checkbox]
I explicitly consent to the University contacting me as part of current or similar future research and holding my contact details on its database for the purpose of contacting me. Yes No [checkbox] [checkbox]

Signatures

1.

Name of participant [IN CAPITALS] Signature Date

For participants unable to sign their name, mark the box instead of signing

[Empty box for marking]

2. Note: The form only needs to be witnessed in very specific circumstances e.g. if the person giving consent is unable to sign their name. The witness section may be omitted if this does not apply.

I have witnessed the accurate reading of the consent form with the potential participant and the individual has had the opportunity to ask questions. I confirm that the individual has given consent freely.

Name of witness [IN CAPITALS] Signature Date

3.

I have accurately read out the information sheet to the potential participant and, to the best of my ability, ensured that the participant understands to what they are freely consenting.

Name of researcher [IN CAPITALS] Signature Date

Appendix E: Issue Mapping and Theme Identification

Issues emerging from interviews	Themes
Definition of the dual role. Misunderstanding of the expectations of the dual role Referral concerns –incorrect/inappropriate Relationship with students Parents expectations Prioritising as a necessity	Everyday challenges associated with the dual role of subject specific teacher and guidance counsellor.
Relationship with other staff in the post primary setting Discipline Personal role confusion	Impact of the dual role on the individual working in the post-primary setting.
Access to supervision Access to IGC branch meetings CPD Personal wellbeing	Provision of and access to self-care and wellbeing supports.
Value placed on the role Whole-school approach to guidance Time constraints Increased workload since 2012 Concern for provision of counselling to students in need	Lasting impact of the 2012 removal of ex-quota status of guidance counsellors.

Appendix F: Interview Questions

Interview Questionnaire

These questions are proposed for use in semi-structured interviews with participants working in the dual role of both Guidance Counsellor and classroom, subject specific teacher. Fluidity is expected during the course of the interview. It is envisaged that more follow-up questions may arise during the interview to seek clarification or further information based on the initial answers given by the participants.

Research Title:

An investigation into the challenges associated with the dual role of guidance counsellor and subject teacher in the post-primary setting, and how these may impact on the identity and wellbeing of the individual in the role.

Introduction

1. Please tell me a little bit about yourself and your current role. How long have you been working in the post-primary school setting?
2. What classroom subjects do you/did you teach?
3. Why did you decide to go into the area of Guidance Counselling?

Role definitions

4. What do you see as being the main differences between being a classroom teacher and a Guidance Counsellor?
5. What, in your opinion and experience are the positive aspects to having both of these different roles?
6. What, in your opinion and experience are the negative aspects to having both of these different roles?
7. Is it your choice to be in this dual role of classroom teacher and a Guidance Counsellor?

If yes, what would you say is your primary reason for this choice?

If no, what would the ideal situation be for you in your work?

8. What changes, if any, would you make to your work in this dual role?

Challenges/Benefits

9. What challenges do you encounter daily in this dual role of classroom teacher and a Guidance Counsellor?
9. How might being a classroom teacher benefit your practice as Guidance Counsellor?
10. How might being a trained Guidance Counsellor benefit you in your role as a classroom teacher?
11. How does this dual role impact, if at all, on your relationships with students?

Identity

12. How do you identify as a member of the staff in your post-primary school setting? / If you are asked what your job is, how do you answer this?
13. How, if at all, does this dual role impacts on your relationships with other staff members or management?

Self-care/Wellbeing

14. How important is self-care for you in this dual role?
15. What, if any, techniques of self-care and wellbeing do you engage in regularly?
16. Is there something/things which you think are needed to ensure wellbeing amongst Guidance Counsellors and those in the dual role at this time?

Post 2012 inclusion of Guidance Counsellor in quota.

15. What impact do you think the removal of Guidance Counsellors from ex-quota status in post-primary schools has had on your role? Explain.
16. Do you think the removal of Guidance Counsellors from ex-quota status in post-primary schools has had an impact on the provision of Guidance Counselling for students? If so, how?
17. What did you see as the biggest impact this change had on your working role, if any?