

**A case study of an approach to whole school guidance counselling
in a second level school; focusing on the classroom aspect.**

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Declaration

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

Signature: _____

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I am dedicating this dissertation to the wonderful men in my life my father, Michael Murphy who would have been very proud to see me graduate with this accomplishment. I miss him every day. To my husband, Gerry, a very patient man, who I love dearly and our two sons, Conor and Adam, who are my motivators in life. I sincerely appreciate your tolerance during the madness surrounding this research project. The stress levels were high at times. Your encouragement and support got me through the last three years.

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Glossary of Terms

ACCS Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools
CAO Central Applications Office
CMS Career Management Skills
CSPE Civic, Social and Political Education
DES Department of Education and Science (1997-2010)
DES Department of Education and Skills (2010- Present)
ELGPN European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network
ESRI The Economic and Social Research Institute
HEI Higher Education Institutions
HSCL Home School Community Liaison
ICT Information and Communications Technology
IGC Institute of Guidance Counsellors
IUHPE International Union for Health Promotion and Education
JC Junior Cycle
LCVP Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme
NCCA National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCGE National Centre for Guidance in Education
NEPS National Educational Psychological Services
NEWB National Education Welfare Board
NGF National Guidance Forum
OECD Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
RSE Relationship and Sexuality Education
SC Senior Cycle
SPHE Social Personal and Health Education
SSE School Self-Evaluation
SST Student Support Team
TY Transition Year
WHO World Health Organisation
WSA Whole School Approach

Abstract

The aim of this research study was to investigate how a whole school approach to guidance counselling (DES, 2017a) is adopted in one secondary school, particularly in the context of the delivery of classroom guidance across the Junior and Senior Cycle (DES, 2014, 2016b, Gysbers, 2010). The researcher was interested in investigating this topic due to the re-allocation of guidance counselling hours in second level schools in the 2012 Budget which has hampered guidance counselling provision in schools (DES, 2016a).

A case study through the interpretivist approach was used in this research to gather in depth information (Thomas, 2013). The design aimed to gain a concise understanding of the approach used in the school incorporating the views of key personnel and students (Cohen et al. 2011; Mc Leod, 2001; Yin 2009). The gathering of data involved semi-structured qualitative interviews with a number of key personnel, and a student focus group with participants randomly sampled from both the Junior and Senior Cycle. The data was analysed by combining the themes from both the focus group and the semi-structured interviews. This unified approach provided a clearer understanding of the data gathered (Wertz, 2005). A six-step thematic analysis was followed (Braun and Clarke 2006).

In conclusion, the findings of this case study were interpreted from one second level school and are not representative of other schools' delivery of classroom guidance. The findings highlight the need for a more structured approach to guidance counselling, and its classroom delivery in the Junior Cycle programme in particular. Further consideration is needed for ongoing research in classroom guidance delivery in second-level education. This dissertation concludes with a number of recommendations for policy and practice in the delivery of guidance counselling in second level education.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Chapter One Introduction

1.0 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to introduce the topic under investigation in this research study. The following sections address the background and justification for the research study, positionality of the researcher, the aims and objectives of the research and the methodology employed. A brief outline of the chapters in this dissertation is offered in the final section of this chapter.

1.1 Background and Justification for the Research Study

The central focus of this research study is the provision of guidance counselling, specifically classroom guidance delivery, in second level education under the structure of a whole school approach. The Education Act (1998, Section 9c) states that schools are obliged to provide students with “access to appropriate guidance to assist them in their educational and career choices” (Government of Ireland, 1998). The DES (2005) interprets the Education Act as guidance counselling being a whole school responsibility. More recently, this model has been recommended by the NGCE (2017) which proposes a framework for schools to follow in the delivery of guidance counselling. It is proposed that the delivery of a whole school approach to guidance is managed by all the stakeholders within a second level school and it is usually directed by the guidance counsellor (NCGE. 2017). The classroom delivery of guidance plays an integral part in the success of a whole school approach. Literature emphasises that guidance incorporates the integrated model of guidance counselling; personal and social, educational and vocational.

There has been a restructuring of the delivery of guidance counselling (DES, 2016a) in secondary education more recently with the roll out of the Wellbeing programme in the Junior Cycle (DES, 2014a). Guidance services are still recovering from the fallout of the 2012 budget cutbacks (IGC, 2016a), and the negative impact that has had on the provision of guidance counselling services, the situation has improved but there is still a gap in the system. Even though there has been progression with the recent restoration of posts in guidance counselling in second level education (DES, 2017a; 2017b, 2018) this study looks at the current staffing arrangements from a whole school context as outlined by the DES circular 0009/2018. The circular informs school managers of the autonomy they have regarding allocating staff for the provision of guidance in their schools. However, as

supportive as this may seem to the work of the guidance counsellor this study aims to research the delivery of classroom guidance at Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle level. This study seeks to hear the perspectives of the key stakeholders involved in the delivery of classroom guidance and the perspectives of students in receiving classroom guidance at both Junior and Senior Cycles.

1.2 Positionality of the Researcher

According to Sultana (2007), it is critical to pay attention to the positionality of the researcher in order to undertake ethical research. While conducting this research study the researcher worked as a qualified secondary school teacher in a second-level school, as well as a trainee guidance counsellor. The researcher was attracted to training as a guidance counsellor because of her years of experience in working with students in a pastoral care role as class tutor. She identified the essential need for guidance counselling for young people due to the ever-increasing changes in society, family dynamics and job market. She also noticed how the world that young people live in today is consistently informed by technology and how ICT can aid young people's development in their education.

Nonetheless, the researcher noticed an imbalance in the classroom delivery of guidance counselling at Junior Cycle level in her own workplace, which attracted her to investigate the topic further. During her placement as a trainee guidance counsellor she identified a gap in the provision of guidance counselling hours and this further confirmed the topic chosen for the research. The researcher anticipates the findings of her research will act as a basis for her own professional knowledge going forward in the field of guidance counselling. During the research process the researcher opted for the data collection to be carried out in a different school to where she is employed and where both she and the participants of the study were both anonymous to each other. This approach to the research enhanced the credibility of this study, as being both credible and trustworthy are essential parts of research (Hearne, 2012).

During the research process, the researcher was aware at all times of the importance of reflexivity in the study, being in tune with her own biases and assumptions addressed through a journaling process (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). The researcher kept a personal journal during her research in the field, which proved to be very beneficial when reflecting on the day to day aspect of the research. It also proved to be beneficial to keep the researcher focused on the aims of the research. Essentially the journaling aided the researcher to focus

on her research of classroom delivery of guidance which at times can be vague in its interpretation. Critical self-reflection aided the researcher in avoiding personal bias and this activity strengthened the reflexivity of the study.

1.3 Aims and Objectives of the Research Study

The overall aim of this research study is to explore the topic of classroom guidance counselling within a whole school approach context.

The objectives are:

1. To critically review the relevant literature in the context of a whole school approach to guidance counselling with relevance to classroom delivery in second-level education.
2. To gather primary qualitative data from key personnel and students in a case study school.
3. To analyse the overall findings and identify themes from the data analysis.
4. To propose recommendations for future policy and practice in the area of classroom delivery.

1.4 Research Methodology

Rooted in an epistemological philosophy, this research was carried out through an interpretivist approach to gather in-depth information (Basit, 2010; Thomas, 2013). A case study was chosen using qualitative methods (Willis, 2007). The qualitative aspect of the focus group and semi-structured interviews provides an insight into the delivery of guidance counselling in a typical second-level school. Additionally, ethical considerations related to conducting this research are addressed in line with the IGC Code of Ethics (IGC, 2012) and Child Welfare Protection (DES, 2011).

1.5 Structure of the Dissertation

The following outlines the structure of this dissertation.

Chapter One: Introduction

Chapter one outlines the background, justification and context of the research study. The positionality of the researcher, the aim and objectives of the research, methodology used, and an outline of the dissertation are also addressed.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter provides a critique of the literature relating to theory, policy and practice with regard to the topic under investigation.

Chapter Three: Methodology

The methodology chapter describes the research questions and underlying paradigm used in the research design. It includes details on the population involved, data collection and analysis methods, validity, reliability, reflexivity and the ethical considerations involved.

Chapter Four: Data Analysis and Findings

This chapter presents the data analysis strategy utilised and the findings from the primary data outlining the overarching themes that emerged from the investigation in the case school.

Chapter Five: Discussion

The discussion chapter offers a critical analysis of the primary data in the context of the literature discussed in Chapter Two. It presents insights and implications on the topic of classroom guidance delivery in the case school.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

This chapter concludes this research study presenting conclusions within the context of the aim and objectives of this study. An overview of the findings and the strengths and limitations of the case study are presented. Recommendations are outlined for further policy, practice and research. The researcher's reflexivity concludes Chapter Six.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Chapter Two Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

This literature review aims to provide an overview and analysis on the research topic critiquing literature relating to theory, policy and research. Merriam (1998) describes a literature review as “an interpretation and syntheses of published research” (p.6). While Thomas (2013) highlights that a literature review assesses and synthesises published literature, journals and policies on the chosen research topic. This literature review is presented in two thematic sections. The opening section explores the policy and practice of guidance counselling in second level education. The second section discusses how guidance counselling is delivered in the classroom in second level education.

2.1 Policy and Practice of Guidance Counselling in Second Level Education

In its contemporary forms, guidance counselling is embedded in many areas: psychology; education; sociology; government policies and practice (DES, 2012b; Hearne and Galvin, 2014). This section will address how policy and practice in the area of guidance counselling is implemented in Second Level Education. A discussion on the definition of guidance counselling, International Policy in the area of guidance counselling and a whole school approach to guidance counselling in second-level schools are in this section.

At times guidance and counselling are divided and defined separately, but there is a common thread which links all definitions and that is the process of helping or aiding the users of guidance counselling services.

2.1.1 Defining Guidance Counselling

In Irish policy Guidance is defined as ‘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’ (NCGE, 2004, p.12). Counselling is defined as ‘helping students to explore their thoughts and feelings, and the choices open to them, giving care and support to students learning to cope with the many aspects of growing up’ (NCGE, 2004, p.12). These definitions portray the holistic approach to guidance counselling in aiding users of the service to develop personally, socially, educationally and vocationally.

The National Guidance Forum (NGF) states that guidance:

refers to the process of facilitating individuals or groups at any point throughout their lives to develop their capacity for the self-management of their personal, social, educational, training, occupational and life choices in order to grow towards their potential and thereby to contribute to the development of a better society. (NGF, 2007, p.4)

Currently, the provision of guidance counselling in Irish second level schools is promoted as a whole-school activity (DES, 2012a; NCGE, 2017). This is mirrored in the Framework for Junior Cycle (DES, 2012b) which emphasises the importance of guidance counselling in supporting students. Recent literature has highlighted the implementation of the Wellbeing programme (DES, 2015) and the focus on pastoral care in the role of guidance counselling (Hearne and Galvin, 2014). Concurring with Ali and Graham's (1996) focus on students becoming more autonomous in acquiring self-management skills to aid them in making life choices and decisions that will benefit their personal, social and vocational development. These recent developments reflect the ethos of the definition of guidance counselling proposed by the Department of Education and Science (DES, 2005) which defines guidance counselling as:

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)

In addition, the aim of guidance counselling with students is to:

develop an awareness and acceptance of their talents and abilities; to explore possibilities and opportunities; to grow in independence and to take responsibility for themselves.

(DES, 2005, p.5)

According to Tambuwal (2010), guidance means to direct, pilot, manage, steer, aid, assist, lead and interact and it is a process that aids a person in developing their character over a period and it is not a one stop event. Similarly, Hohenshil et al., (2013) argue that students' access to guidance counselling helps them to enhance their academic performance.

The provision of guidance counselling in Irish secondary schools is to help students to make choices in the personal, educational and vocational aspects of their lives (DES, 2013). According to DES (2011) schools have an obligation to promote each student's personal development. The DES (2005) states that the purpose of guidance counselling is to provide:

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.

(DES, 2005, p.4)

This has been further developed in DES policy which argues that:

it is important for schools to be aware of available services and supports in their communities and to make meaningful links with the services in working with at risk young people.

(DES, 2013, p.33).

This is supported further in literature by Gybers (2010) and Gysbers and Henderson (2012) who believe that guidance counselling is necessary for success in the academic, personal and social aspects of a young person's development in life. Gott (2003) and Truneckova and Viney (2012) equally endorse guidance counselling for the holistic development of young people.

However, despite its existence in post primary education over five decades (Hayes & Morgan 2011) there still seems to be various interpretations as to what role guidance counselling plays in young peoples' lives. Additionally, the IGC Code of Ethics (2012) states that "guidance counselling is a professional service concerning personal/social, educational and vocational development" (p.1)

Furthermore, guidance counselling aids self-understanding; and helps students to make decisions for their future by overcoming barriers (Barnes et al, 2011). Likewise, according to Watts et al., (1996) guidance counselling aids in the establishment of diverse career patterns and helps individuals to engage in lifelong learning. Similarly, encouraging more agency and autonomy in students to self-manage and take "responsibility for their future" (Ali and Graham, 1996, p.128).

2.1.2 International Policy on Guidance Counselling

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, (OECD, 2004; 2015) views career guidance as a service that aids people at any stage and at any point throughout their lives in managing their careers. It argues that "guidance in schools lays the foundations for lifelong career development" (2004, p.3). The European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network, (ELGPN) recognises that career guidance contributes to an "invaluable opportunity to ensure that all citizens are equipped with career management skills" (2012, p.25). Guidance counselling in Ireland is recognised as being a "compromise between the American model

which emphasises personal counselling and the European model which almost exclusively focuses on the narrower concept of career guidance” (Ryan, 1993, p.63). Literature offers an insight in to how guidance counselling in Ireland’s second level schools is shaped by both international and national policy.

The new focus in guidance policy on the development of Career Management Skills, (CMS), argues that guidance equips individuals to cope with career change and challenges in their life (Sultana, 2012). The ELGPN defines CMS as:

a set of competences (knowledge, skills, attitudes) that enable citizens at any age or stage of development to manage their learning and work life paths. The knowledge, skills and attitudes concern personal management, learning management, and career management.

(ELGPN, 2015, p. 13).

The development of CMS is now paramount in lifelong guidance in order to contribute to the Europe 2020 strategy (European Commission, 2011). Furthermore, the enhancement and continued focus on CMS in European policies will further augment the function of the labour market (European Commission, 2015). Evidence in research from Hooley *et al.*, (2013) suggests that guidance and the development of CMS impacts on educational, economic, employment and social outcomes. The implementation of a collaborative approach incorporating CMS into a whole school approach is the responsibility of management, staff and guidance counsellors who are responsible for planning in the guidance department and who are the providers of the service (DES, 2012a). This approach aids the classroom delivery of guidance in second-level education. However, presently there is a gap in evidence to prove the effect of a whole school approach to guidance counselling (Hearne *et al.*, 2016b).

The practice of guidance counselling is legislated in education through the Education Act 1998, Section 9(c) which states that schools must “ensure that students have access to appropriate guidance counselling to assist them in their educational and career choices”. Policy developments in education have had implications on the delivery of guidance counselling and the holistic approach to delivering guidance services in schools (DES, 2012a; NCGE, 2017). Circular 0009/2012 states that schools:

develops collaboratively a school guidance plan as a means of supporting the needs of its students.

(DES, 2013, 4.3)

This is complemented by the work of guidance counsellors and the responsibility they play in establishing a collaborative relationship with their clients. According to the IGC (2017):

Guidance counselling involves a collaborative professional relationship to facilitate clients in their unique identification of strengths, skills, possibilities, resources and options at key developmental milestones through their lifespan in areas relating to social, educational and vocational concerns.
(IGC, 2017, p.14)

To assist the guidance counselling services in schools is the implementation of school guidance plans to effectively deliver the guidance activities. The DES (2017a) clearly outlines that:

guidance plans should outline the school's approach to guidance generally and how students can be supported and assisted in making choices and successful transitions in the personal and social, educational and career areas
(DES, 2017a, p.2)

This focus on delivering guidance counselling has been also supported in the Action Plan for Education 2017 (DES, 2017a) which puts an emphasis on the enhancement of guidance services and the introduction of auditing school management in their allocation of guidance counselling hours in their respective schools.

The NCGE (2004) proposes seven guidance activities that help students in their decision making: assessment, information, advice, educational development programmes, personal and social development programmes and referral. Counselling is further described in the document as being 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' (NCGE, 2004, p.21). In addition to this there is a focus on the evaluation of provision, the DES (2016b) outline the importance of School Self Evaluation, (SSE). This is relevant to the guidance services in a school where the process of SSE can be used in evaluating the school's approach to guidance counselling and its delivery in the classroom.

More recently, career guidance for students has been emphasised as an important facet of young people's development in Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2025 (DES, 2016c), especially in relation to the provision of the most up to date careers information. The re-allocation of guidance counselling in 2012 (IGC, 2016b) has encouraged more of an emphasis on schools to maximise their resources for the delivery of guidance counselling and

provide appropriate provision to students in both vocational guidance and personal guidance and counselling (ACCS, 2012; DES, 2012a). Furthermore, in previous years the allocation of guidance counsellors in Ireland's post-primary system was ex-quota with one guidance counsellor for every 500 students (IGC, 2016b). The subsequent re-allocation of guidance counselling hours in second level in the 2012 Budget hampered the guidance counselling services because of the reduction in time for the provision of guidance in schools (DES, 2016b). According to Hearne *et al.* (2016a):

In the aftermath of the 2012 Budget re-allocation there is consistent evidence of diminished and fragmented guidance provision during a period when Governmental policies stress the need for a whole school responsibility to student wellbeing.

(Hearne *et al.*, 2016a p.46)

The impact of these changes to the allocation of guidance hours is highlighted in the report of the Institute of Guidance Counsellors (2017) which documents the changes to the allocation and the impact on guidance hours in post-primary schools. Previously Audit 4 conducted by the IGC (2016b) found:

that when classroom guidance practice hours by guidance counsellors were analysed, only 6.7% was now spent on junior cycle students, a 31% decrease since Audit 3 at 9.69%.

(IGC, 2016b)

However, in 2017 schools were allowed to audit their provision of guidance counselling and to consider "how best to align resource allocation with the objectives of the Guidance Plan" (DES, 2017a, p.2). Furthermore, there has been a positive progression in enhancing guidance counselling services in second level schools with consistent restoration of removed posts in recent budgets resulting in the reintroduction of 500 posts (DES, 2017a; 2017b). It is proposed that the development of additional posts will complement the improved staffing arrangements outlined in DES Circular 0009/2012 which states:

that schools (principals and management authorities) now have autonomy to allocate and manage staff for the provision of guidance to students.

(DES, 2012b, p.4)

Nevertheless, as positive as it seems these improved staffing arrangements are decided by the management of second level schools and this may be determined by the value school

management place on guidance counselling. The staffing arrangements for guidance counselling may therefore be quite subjective in schools (Hearne *et al.*, 2017).

2.1.3 A whole school approach to guidance counselling in second-level schools.

A whole school approach, (WSA) to guidance counselling has been promoted for some time in Irish Education policy. It has been assumed that guidance counsellors initiate the role of implementing a WSA in guidance counselling (Hearne *et al.*, 2017). According to NCGE (2017) “the whole school guidance programme aims to meet the needs of students along a continuum, from a whole school approach to group and individualised approaches” (p.12). A whole school approach to guidance assists students in their choices and future decisions. According to the DES Inspectorate “some students are not provided with adequate opportunities to make informed choices in relation to optional subjects for the Junior Certificate” (DES, 2009, p.28). The services of the guidance counsellor are “of critical importance for young people who are suffering increasing incidences of depression, self-harm, neglect and anxiety regarding their families' economic circumstances” (Reilly, 2011, p.2).

Furthermore, the National Education Welfare Board, (NEWB), promotes a whole school approach whereby the ethos, policies and practices of a school would be in harmony, a whole school approach to curriculum and the delivery of guidance counselling would involve the whole school community (DES, 2016b). This informs school management of the importance of responding to the needs of the school community and changes in educational policy and practice. However, despite the legislation and policy developments, evidence suggests that this has not always translated into effective policy or practice in schools. According to Leahy *et al.* (2017) a lack of specific policy guidelines on the provision of a whole school approach to guidance counselling has resulted in schools misinterpreting guidance service provision.

Decher *et al.* state that “we have the means by which we can prevent many youngsters from developing into frustrated, unfulfilled adults” (1999, p.22). The issues of frustration and lack of fulfilment in education for some young people that Decher *et al.* (1999) highlight could be contrasted with the views of McCoy *et al.*, (2014) who state “aspirations to higher education are evident as early as Junior Cycle” (McCoy *et al.*, 2014, p.1). These aspirations are linked to a person’s basic needs as outlined in Maslow’s (1970) hierarchy of needs. An individual’s journey towards achieving their full potential (DES, 2012a) continues to be shaped in Junior

Cycle where they have decisions around subject choices for Senior Cycle. Farrant (1997) claims that where subject choice exists, the subjects chosen can be of critical importance to the student. This highlights the importance of guidance counselling for the student and the importance of a whole school approach to guidance counselling. Also, where a school adopts a whole school approach to guidance Watts *et al.*, (1996) maintain “career learning is interwoven with all learning”, (p.103). This may enhance and possibly enrich the experience of guidance for both Junior and Senior Cycle students at school.

Furthermore, a whole school approach to guidance counselling is linked to a school ethos that lends to a positive characteristic spirit in a school. This can be understood from the Department of Education and Science, (1991):

a positive school ethos is based on the quality of relationships, both the professional relationships between teachers and the ways in which pupils and teacher treat each other. This positive ethos permeates all the activities of the school and helps in forming a strong sense of social cohesion within the school.

And similarly, the Education Act 1998 section 9(d) states that one of the functions of a school is to use its available resources to

promote the moral, spiritual, social and personal development of students and provide health education for them, in consultation with their parents, having regard to the characteristic spirit of the school.

The delivery of a whole school approach to guidance counselling involves the entire school community in Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) as well as Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) coordinators. As outlined in circular 0009/2012 Schools can ‘enable some of the curriculum elements of the planned guidance programme to be delivered through other teachers, such as SPHE staff’ (DES, 2012b). According to Gysbers (2010) the deliverance of a comprehensive guidance counselling programme will encourage all students to pursue an academic career path and develop personally and socially. An established professional relationship of cooperation amongst these personnel in the areas of both personal and social education aids the task of developing a whole school approach to guidance counselling. Nevertheless, building consensus is a slow process but it is necessary to get everybody on board before taking a decision (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012).

It has been stated by the Department of Health (2013) that one in every four people will experience mental health problems during his or her lifetime. Good role modelling in this

area will encourage more empathy among young people to be more aware of the needs of others and the development of interpersonal skills will have the opportunity to develop (Department of Health, 2013). Young adolescents will become more autonomous in their own decision making and they will be more confident in their choices (Ali & Graham, 1996). This again echoes Smyth's (2015) argument that children with elevated levels of wellbeing in the areas of emotion, behaviour and social skills had higher levels of academia in school. In addition, "a supportive school environment where high expectations and aspirations are the norm for all young people can of itself contribute significantly to lifelong health and well-being." (DES, 2013, p.8).

2.2 The Delivery of Guidance Counselling in the Classroom

The literature discussed in this section will address how guidance counselling is delivered in the classroom as part of the school guidance provision. It is argued that a student's mental health can affect all their decisions for the future and according to O' Brien (2008):

there is a widespread malaise in society that is expressed in the mental health and risk behaviour of adolescents, particularly groups who have suffered social exclusion and forms of ethnic and cultural discrimination. (O'Brien, 2008 p. 88)

The International Union for Health Promotion and Education (IUHPE, 2009) contends that for schools to have effective school health programmes they must, be integrated, holistic and strategic in their approach. It has been found that 'children with higher levels of emotional, behavioural, social and school wellbeing had higher levels of academic achievement subsequently at ages 11, 14, and 16' (Smyth, 2015, p. 3). This promotes the idea of wellbeing and learning being inextricably linked (NCCA, 2017). It is proposed that the development of positive mental health across all education programmes can complement the work of guidance counsellors as well as raise the profile of guidance counselling in schools (DES, 2013, 2016b). A greater emphasis on individual goals and strengths will aid the promotion of wellbeing (Slade, 2010).

Meldrum (2009) and Dooley and Fitzgerald (2012) argue that the number one health problem for young people and teenagers is related to poor mental health. In their research, Dooley and Fitzgerald (2012) claim that good mental health is a necessity for optimal psychological development, the growth and maintenance of social relationships, effective learning, an

awareness and ability to care for oneself and good physical health. According to Meldrum *et al.*:

although it is often overlooked, mental health is as important to a person's wellbeing as their physical health, particularly during the turbulent years of adolescence.

(2009, p.3)

Life changes occur as young people progress through adolescence onto adulthood (Erikson and Cole, 2000). Furthermore, Dooley and Fitzgerald (2012) revealed that almost 75% of all serious mental health difficulties will manifest between the ages of 15 and 25 years. With regard to this age group the mid-teenage years need support when they are within a school setting. According to Weist & Murray (2008):

providing a full continuum of mental health promotion programmes and services in schools, including enhancing environments, training and promoting social and emotional learning and life skills, preventing emotional and behavioural problems, identifying and intervening in these problems early on, and providing intervention for established problems.

(Weist & Murray, 2008, p. 31)

Findings from the Department of Health (2013) indicate that schools are currently struggling with mental health issues due to a combination of factors ranging from increased prevalence, lack of training, to resource constraints. Young Irish people are living in a world which offers them more choice and opportunity than any previous generation (NCGE, 2017). However, these prospects bring challenges and occasionally unfulfilled hopes for students, which may have an impact on their sense of well-being and mental health (O'Brien, 2008).

In Irish policy, it is stated that mental health and wellbeing are essential for all young people to achieve their full potential in the Irish education system in both Junior and Senior Cycle (DES, 2016a). Guidance counselling is viewed as an essential part of young people's good mental health and wellbeing in our schools (NCCA, 2017). This is reflected in the Framework for Junior Cycle which states:

In recognition of the unique contribution that guidance can make to the promotion of students' wellbeing, guidance provision may also be included in the hours available for Wellbeing.

(DES, 2015, p.22)

Attempts are being made to address the personal and social needs of students through the curriculum and classroom delivery. An example of this is the new framework for Junior Cycle (DES, 2015). This is providing a new area of learning for Junior Cycle students called

Wellbeing, it compliments the SPHE (DES, 2000) and RSE (DES, 1998) programmes delivered at Junior Cycle level providing the personal and social aspects of guidance counselling delivery in the classroom. However, these programmes do not address the vocational guidance at this level. In the Senior Cycle (DES, 2009; 2016b; 2016b) the timetabling of career guidance classes offers students the opportunity to explore the vocational aspects of career guidance with opportunities to discover the enterprise modules which incorporates preparation for the world of work and enterprise education. These programmes are incorporated into the guidance plan in a school (DES, 2017a). However, it still remains to be seen if the imbalance in the delivery of guidance will be addressed as highlighted by the DES (2009) stating ‘there is a lack of balance in guidance provision between the Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle’ (p.11).

These recent changes will help young people in second level education because today there are many challenges in young peoples’ lives and their mental health can be challenged at times of uncertainty when making life decisions, forming relationships, preparing for exams and dealing with adolescence (Mc Coy *et al.*, 2014; Smyth *et al.*, 2015).

Finally, the blended approach to guidance counselling via classroom and one to one counselling is advocated which includes the use of ICT. The DES (2015) promotes ICT in classroom delivery to provide a better and more effective education for young people. The use of ICT enhances the classroom delivery of educational and career guidance to students through access to websites and online resources (Bimrose *et al.*, 2010; Reid, 2016). This approach to classroom delivery allows students to become up to date regarding careers information as proposed by Ireland’s National Skills Strategy 2025 (DES, 2016a). However, Hearne *et al.*, (2016a) argue that Junior Cycle students remain marginalised by the DES cutbacks to guidance in 2012 in terms of the level of guidance counselling provision both in the classroom and in one to one sessions.

2.3 Conclusion

The aim of this research is to examine the classroom delivery of guidance counselling in a second level education and provide insights from some of the main stakeholders on the issue.

The key issues evident in this literature relate to the recent changes in government policy and how they may be impacting on the delivery of guidance counselling in the classroom. The

essential role a school plays in building the guidance plan and how the guidance counselling services are delivered through the classroom in second level education are researched in this study. Also, this study looks at whether there is a gap in the interpretation of guidance counselling and the wellbeing programme in the Junior Cycle. Furthermore, the effect of the reallocation of guidance provision in schools from September 2017 remains to be seen and if this will enhance the whole school approach and delivery of guidance counselling in the classroom.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.0 Introduction

The overall aim of this research was to gain insights into a whole school approach to guidance counselling in a second level school with a focus on the classroom aspect of guidance delivery. This chapter presents the research questions and underlying paradigm used in the study design. It addresses the population involved, data collection and analysis, validity, reliability, reflexivity and the ethical considerations involved.

3.1 Research Questions

This research project's overarching aim was to get an interpretation of the school's approach to whole school guidance counselling with a focus on the classroom aspect through the primary research question which was:

“How is guidance counselling delivered in a classroom setting?”

This question was posed to gain insights on the topic from the perspectives of both students and key personnel in the same post-primary school. The secondary research questions included:

- 1. What types of guidance activities are provided to students in the classroom to ensure guidance counselling delivery?*
- 2. In what way is a whole school approach to guidance counselling enacted amongst the key stakeholders?*
- 3. What are the challenges and opportunities in providing the guidance counselling service?*

Careful consideration was given to choosing a research design and a suitable research paradigm was selected to answer these research questions. (Blaikie, 2010)

3.2 Research Paradigm

This section discusses the research paradigm underpinning the study.

3.2.1 Interpretivist (Qualitative) Paradigm

There are primarily two paradigms of research used in guidance counselling, positivist (quantitative) and interpretivist (qualitative). An interpretive paradigm (qualitative) was used

in this research to gather in-depth information on the structural approach to the delivery of whole school guidance counselling especially classroom guidance in a post-primary school (Thomas, 2013). The interpretive paradigm involves studying the subjective meanings of the experiences people interpret and attach to themselves and their experiences (Hennick *et al.*, 2011).

A paradigm consists of the following components: ontology, epistemology, methodology, and, methods. Ontology is the study of being and reality (Crotty, 1998). Epistemology is concerned with the nature and forms of knowledge (Cohen *et al.*, 2011). Epistemological assumptions look at how knowledge is created, acquired and communicated (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). A paradigm is based upon its own ontological and epistemological assumptions (Guba and Lincoln 1994; Creswell, 1998). Different paradigms outline differing ontological and epistemological views, and these can be found in the methodology and methods employed in the research. Methodology is the approach or strategy which lies behind the use of particular methods which are the specific procedures employed to gather and analyse data (Crotty, 1998).

3.2.2 Strengths and Limitations of the Qualitative Approach

When adopting qualitative research, Smith (2003) had a similar understanding of qualitative approaches in believing that participants' perceptions are grounded in their own personal and social experiences. This approach is also identified as an interpretivist research method which seeks lengthy informed descriptions from its participants through interviews and focus groups.

According to Willis (2007) the qualitative approach gives the researcher the opportunity to access rich reports from the participants in a study. Concurring with Willis's idea Thomas (2013) claims that the qualitative approach is supported by interpretivists due to the interpretive paradigm "portraying a world in which reality is socially constructed, complex, and ever changing." (p.6). Furthermore McQueen (2002) states that:

Interpretivist researchers seek methods that enable them to understand in depth the relationship of human beings to their environment and the part those people play in creating the social fabric of which they are a part.

(p.17)

He also believes that interpretivists observe the world through a “series of individual eyes” and they choose participants who “have their own interpretations of reality” in order to “encompass the worldview” (Mc Queen, 2002, p.16). With these strengths highlighted in the qualitative approach it would seem therefore that this approach to research encourages an exploration and comprehension of what participants report on an individual basis or in a group about a social or human issue (Creswell, 2009). In relation to this study, in an educational setting, the researcher sought to understand the experiences of students and key personnel and the qualitative method suited the researcher to gain an insight and in-depth analysis of the delivery of guidance counselling in a classroom setting as well as a whole school approach to guidance counselling.

Firstly, Silverman (2001) highlights that qualitative research approaches can often omit contextual sensitivities and focus more on interpretations and experiences. Secondly, in terms of the population and random sampling, a small sample of the participants can raise the issue of generalizability to the entire population of the research (Thompson, 2011). Therefore, resulting in the data interpretation and analysis being more complex (Richards & Richards, 1994). Finally, the analyses of the primary data demand a lot of time, and the researcher may risk generalising the results to the larger population in a very limited way (Flick, 2011). Additionally, the thematic analysis of the data collected from research is a complicated and time-consuming process which requires the researcher to wade through transcription data to identify many themes and their meaning (Ryan *et al*, 2009).

In conclusion the research method the researcher used in a qualitative paradigm focused on the findings in a real school setting where the “phenomenon of interest will unfold naturally” (Patton, 2001, p.39). In this study the researcher worked within the interpretivist paradigm and adopted a qualitative approach to the study. This approach was chosen to gain a clear understanding of the world of the participants (Cohen and Mannion, 1994) and an insight was gained to their experiences and perceptions (Creswell, 2009).

The next section will address the methods used to carry out the qualitative case study.

3.2.3 Research Design: Case Study

A case-study design was used in this research to get a three-dimensional view of the participants responses. This is defined by Thomas (2013) as offering “a more rounded, richer

more balanced picture” (p.4) of the views of key personnel and students in one school. Furthermore, to gain a more concise understanding the use of some ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions (Yin, 2009) was adopted in the primary data collection. This approach to questioning encouraged the participants to engage in dialogue explaining how guidance counselling was delivered in the school (Cohen *et al.*, 2011; McLeod, 2001).

Yin (2009) proposes five components in a comprehensive case study research design; research questions, purpose of study, unit analysis, logic that links data to propositions and criteria for the interpretation of findings. In this case study the research centred around two fundamental areas; firstly, the whole school approach to guidance counselling and the delivery of guidance counselling in a classroom setting. Secondly, the purpose of this study was to hear the viewpoints of both the key personnel and the student population in the case study school. The third component in the case study design was the unit of analysis which was the area of focus that a case study analyses (Yin, 2009, 2014). The unit of analysis in this case study was the case study school. The fourth component of the case study design relates to data propositions. This connection was established following the data phase, where the data was analysed, and themes emerged from the analysis. Patterns appeared in the data and the themes that emerged answered the research questions posed by the researcher. The final component of the case study design is interpreting the findings. In good practice, the case study researcher applies codes the data prior to developing themes (Yin, 2009, 2014). This was applied in this research. Concurrent to this was the extraction of material which is discussed in the findings and discussion chapters of this research.

3.3 Methods

This section discusses how the data was collected and analysed by the researcher.

3.3.1 Access and Sampling

Upon receiving Ethical Approval from the University of Limerick in Spring 2017, for this research project, permission was sought from the Principal (gate keeper) of one second level school to undertake the case study. (See Appendix 1 for Subject Information Letter for the Principal and Appendix 2 for Consent Form for the Principal). Two data sources were involved in the study, students and school personnel. Firstly, a small population of student participants across the classes from Junior to Senior cycle were invited to volunteer to take part in a focus group. Random sampling was used for the selection of the participants. This method was chosen because the researcher believed the sample population chosen was a

veritable representation of the population and each willing participant had a fair and independent chance of being selected (Patton, 2001). Furthermore, Gravetter *et al.* (2012) states “the logic behind random sampling is that it removes bias from the selection procedure and should result in representative samples” (p.146)

The student participants were selected through random sampling and informed consent was given by each participant and their parent/legal guardian (Hearne, 2013) following the dissemination of subject information sheet about this research project (Osborne, 1990). (See Appendix 4 for Consent Form from a Parent/Guardian). Secondly, voluntary participation was sought from a number of key personnel employed in the school to take part in semi-structured interviews. (See Appendix 3 for Volunteer Consent Form for Student & Key Personnel).

3.3.2 Fieldwork Timeline and Participant Profile

The timeline for the primary data collection is outlined in the table *fig 3.1*. All interviews and the focus group were conducted in a private room organised by school management.

Fig 3.1 Timeline for Primary Data Collection

Stage 1	Entering the Field	26 October 2017	Initial Meeting with the Principal
Stage 2	In the Field	10–28 November 2017	Focus Group with Students Interview with the Principal Interview with the Deputy Principal Interview with the Guidance Counsellor Interview with the Year Head Interview with the Class Teacher
Stage 3	Exiting the Field	28 November 2017	Exiting the school, data analysis, interpretation of findings and completion of dissertation.

The participants involved in the case study school were six students and five key personnel (see *fig. 3.2, fig. 3.3*). The six students who participated in the focus group on November 20 2017 ranged in age from 13-17 years of age. They included students from second year, transition year and fifth year. The five key personnel were drawn from management, middle

management, the Guidance Department and subject teachers. The focus group took place on 20 November 2017 with the student participants.

Figure 3.2 Profile of Participants in Focus Group

Participant Pseudonym	Gender	Year Group
John	M	Senior Cycle (SC)
Jane	F	Senior Cycle (SC)
Tom	M	Transition Year (TY)
Teresa	F	Transition Year (TY)
Shane	M	Junior Cycle (JC)
Sandra	F	Junior Cycle (JC)

Figure 3.3 Profile of Participants in Semi-Structured Interviews

Participant Pseudonym	Date of Interview	Gender	Position
David	10 November 2017	M	Principal
Tara	13 November 2017	F	Deputy Principal
Maureen	13 November 2017	F	Year Head
Jack	28 November 2017	M	Class Teacher
Helen	28 November 2017	F	Guidance Counsellor

The next section will explain how the research methods were conducted.

3.3.3 Focus Group Method

In this study the focus group method was used. The overall intention was to gather data through multi-sensory observation of the participants, incorporating verbal communication, body language eye contact and facial expression (Thomas, 2013). According to Morgan (1996) focus groups are used as a method of qualitative data collection where a chosen topic is discussed through group interaction.

This method aided the researcher to extract several types of communication from the participants and the focus group approach can often result in participants divulging information that may not be expressed through other data collection approaches (Kreuger,

1998). By using a student focus group, the students in the case study were “individually and collectively able to speak up about their education.” (Thomson, 2013, p.24). This resulted in the students engaging in a learning exercise by being given an opportunity to voice their opinions which empowered them to participate. This approach is reinforced by Sebba and Robinson (2010) and a recent study by Flynn *et al.*, (2013) which discovered that where students’ voices and opinions were listened to led to a remarkable improvement in the quality of the teacher and student rapport and it encouraged a stronger sense of belonging to the school community for the students involved in that process. Thus, highlighting a strength of this approach.

3.3.4 Semi-structured Interview

The second method used in this research study was semi-structured interviews with key personnel which allowed access to individual’s first-hand experience and perceptions of the delivery of classroom guidance. The approach involved open-ended interview framework questions with a view to receive depth, clarity and quality in the data. According to Landridge employing open-ended questions can aid the researcher to “produce unexpected insights about human nature, through an open-ended approach” (2004, p.15). For consistency, the same guiding framework was used for each interview which provided “a blueprint for conducting research” interviews (Babbie and Mouton, 2008, p.74).

The strengths attached to conducting semi-structured interviews in research include the researcher being in a position to find information from the participants that is “probably not accessible using techniques such as questionnaires and observations” (Blaxter et al., 2006, p.172). Furthermore, they suggest that semi-structured interviews are not merely a method to gather data, but they are conducted through human interaction that naturally progress in various situations. Additionally, the accuracy of reporting on the interviews through the findings can be aided by the researcher’s accessibility to the recorded data and reviewing of the transcripts several times to enhance accuracy (Berg, 2009). Also, the economical aspect plays a part in the strengths of this method compared to other research methods, Neuman (2007) claims the costs for the researcher “using it for research purposes are reduced” (p.11).

Moreover, according to Boyce and Neale (2006), conducting semi structured interviews as a qualitative research technique leads to in-depth interviews which involves “conducting

intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program or situation. (p.3).

The use of semi structured interviews is quite common (Holloway and Wheeler 2010) with the use of a guiding framework. The open-ended interview questions allow for a more flexible approach, which encourages the participants to explore issues that occur spontaneously (Berg 2009, Ryan *et al.*, 2009). The researcher has the liberty to vary the order of the questions (Bell, 2010), once the pace and direction of the interview is established. The strength in this approach can be identified by the researcher when the participants invest their personal responses and interpretations to the questions asked and in doing this the researcher gains a deeper insight and understanding of the research topic. This approach fosters a “genuine space within which people are able to reveal what is real to them” (Smyth and Hattam 2001, p.407).

The involvement of the researcher in the process of interviews and focus groups can result in the researcher’s personal bias influencing the results of this qualitative approach (King 2004). If the view of King is to be taken into consideration, then the argument could be proposed that the result gathered in the data output to be subjective. Similarly, researchers can be inclined to see what they choose to see (Denscombe, 2014). However, the interview framework aids this process (Bell, 2010). While conducting this research project the researcher had to be mindful of these limitations and proceeded with an unbiased and objective view. This was working within the ethical boundaries and being conscious of fairness to all participants involved in the process (Mertens, 2010).

However, there are limitations to this method and it has been criticised by Robson (2002) who proposes that semi-structured interviews are time consuming with the process of gathering data and analysing the transcriptions. This is concurred by Brown (2014) who sees the value of this method being relatively flexible, but he also highlights the time-consuming aspect.

3.3.5 Data Analysis Strategy

In the data analysis strategy, the researcher combined the themes from both the focus groups and the semi structured interviews and unified them for better understanding (Wertz, 2005).

Braun and Clarke (2006) six step thematic analysis was applied and this is highlighted in more detail in the Findings chapter. the six-step approach is as follows:

Braun and Clarke’s six steps are:

1. *Familiarisation with the data*
2. *Initial coding generation*
3. *Search for themes based on the initial coding*
4. *Review of the themes*
5. *Theme definition and labelling*
6. *Report writing*

(Howitt and Cramer, 2008)

The recording of the interviews and focus group responses was conducted by using a digital voice recorder. These recordings were then transcribed by the researcher, and any identifying information in the transcription was removed. This was done to protect the confidentiality of the participants in the data research.

Thematic analysis is used to identify themes and patterns (Thomas, 2014). The analysis of the themes aided the researcher in identifying patterns and themes within the data and an insight of the participants perspectives was gained on the approach to whole school guidance in the school.

3.4 Validity, Reliability and Reflexivity

The validity, reliability and reflexivity of research is discussed in this section.

3.4.1 Validity and Reliability in Research Study

In qualitative research Patton (2001, p.14) states “the researcher is the instrument” therefore, it is the ability and effort that the researcher invests in the research that deems the result credible. Concerning the congruence of reliability and validity Lincoln and Guba (1985) state “since there can be no validity without reliability, a demonstration of the former is sufficient to establish the latter” (p.316).

3.4.2 Validity

Essentially the interpretation of validity is to measure what needs to be measured in a piece of research (Sharf, 2010). In this research the researcher wanted to measure the classroom delivery of guidance counselling in a second level school and this was achieved through the

interpretation of the findings. However, further clarification was needed in relation to the research and according to Denzin and Lincoln (1994) the researcher needs to look at how closely the findings in the primary data reflect what is being researched. Therefore, to enhance the validity, the researcher piloted the first semi structured interview. Merriam (2009) believes pilot interviews are necessary for the interviewer to test the effectiveness of the questions and adjust if necessary. As each interview proceeded a process of reflection and feedback was established which in turn developed to a richer understanding of what was being communicated in the data. To enhance the process of validity the researcher recorded the events, in diary format, as they occurred before and after each interview and focus group. This was beneficial to the researcher in this interpretative research because it aided the accuracy in the field. Also, the validity was further enhanced with the process of respondent validity where the interviewees checked their responses for accuracy when the transcripts were sent to them for an accuracy check in December 2017. The researcher then documented the information in the findings chapter of this dissertation, providing accurate information to allow the reader of the results to make their own judgement (Morrow, 2005).

3.4.3 Reliability

According to Matthews & Ross (2010), the art of active listening does not involve listening alone it also includes observations and note taking. By taking field notes and maintaining a diary during the gathering of the primary data the researcher was able to interpret the non-verbal communication unified with verbal communication. Silverman (2001) criticises qualitative research involving audio recordings, where he questions the reliability of the transcripts claiming they may be weakened by a failure to notice crucial pauses, overlaps and body movements. Being mindful of this the researcher opted for the Matthews and Ross' approach. Therefore, creating a more robust interpretation of the data. The interpretive framework adopted in this research provided important narratives to facilitate the interpretation of the delivery of guidance counselling in a classroom setting and how it is perceived by the main stakeholders in the case school.

3.4.4 Reflexivity in Research Study

Reflexivity was used in this practitioner-research study. Reflexivity according to (Jonker and Penning, 2010, p.156) "is the process through which a researcher recognises, examines and understands how his or her own social background and assumptions can intervene in the research process." The researcher needs to be aware and sensitive to the situational dynamics

of the researcher and the participants engaged in the project that can impact the creation of knowledge.

It is essential that the researcher has a clear understanding of their role while conducting the research (Berger, 2013). During the research process the recording of events in a research diary aided the researcher to remain objective. A record of each stage of the data collection, meetings with the researcher's supervisor, chapter research, questions and reflections were documented to maintain rigour in the process. Additionally, because the researcher is a teacher she opted for the data collection to be sought in a second-level school where both she and the participants of the study were both anonymous to each other. This lends to the credibility of this study and being both credible and trustworthy are essential parts of research (Hearne, 2012).

3.5 Ethics

Any research that involves the participation of human beings requires consideration of the potential impact of the research on all those involved (Cohen et al., 2011). Mertens (2010) states, regardless of the paradigm, "ethics in research should be an integral part of the research planning and implementation process" (2010, p.12). Cohen *et al.*, (2011) proposes the idea that the journey of research is endless, but it is necessary for researchers to discover truth. Cohen *et al.* (2011) and Mertens (2010) share the same opinion of working ethically where children or young adults are involved in research. Where personal information is shared, confidentiality is valued and expected (Cohen *et al.*, 2007).

This study was guided by my professional code of practice. The Institute of Guidance Counsellors, IGC (2012) Code of Ethics proposes four ethical principles in the area of guidance: respect for the rights and dignity of the client, competence, responsibility and integrity. The three statements by the IGC which apply specifically to this research are:

1.1.4 When engaging in research, protect the dignity and wellbeing of research participants.

3.4.5 When engaging in research, take all reasonable steps to ensure that any collaborators treat participants in an ethical manner.

4.1.4 Conduct research in a way that is consistent with a commitment to honest, open inquiry, and communicate clearly any personal values or financial interests that may affect the research. (IGC, 2012, p.2-p.4)

The three areas of concern for the researcher were duty of care and avoiding harm, informed consent and confidentiality (IGC, 2012). Firstly, the researcher sought ethical approval from the University of Limerick which was granted in May 2017 (Ethics Research Number: 2017_05_09 EHS). Informed Consent was gained from the participants and parental consent was granted for student participants under 18 years of age (Hearne, 2013). Secondly the conducting of interviews was in a secure, sound proofed location in the school. Thirdly, the storage of materials related to the research was kept secure (Coaley, 2010). Furthermore, for this research and for all dealings with participants under 18 years of age, Child Welfare Protection (DES, 2011) guidelines and a Garda Vetting process was adhered to before any research was conducted. Importantly the ethical consideration of protecting anonymity and confidentiality was adhered to through the use of pseudonyms in the reporting of the findings. Furthermore, the participants were advised if any issue arose for them during the focus group with the student participants, their guidance counsellor would be available if needed (Hearne, 2013).

3.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, the underlying methodology employed in this research project was addressed in this chapter. Access and sampling were explained along with a critique of the chosen method of semi-structured interviews and focus groups. The topics of validity, reliability, reflexivity and ethical considerations were discussed. The next chapter will present the findings from the focus group and semi-structured interviews.

Chapter 4

Findings and Data Analysis Strategy

Chapter Four Findings and Data Analysis Strategy

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the data analysis strategy utilised and the findings from the primary data outlining the overarching themes. Four themes emerged from the analysis of the data from one student focus group and five semi structured interviews with key personnel in the school. Anonymity and confidentiality is adhered to by using pseudonyms and the second level school where the research took place will not be disclosed.

4.1 Data Analysis Strategy

The data analysis in this qualitative research was inductive rather than deductive (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to Somekh and Lewin (2005) inductive analysis refers to the practice of forming theories from empirical data by searching for themes and interpreting meanings from the data. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six step thematic analysis framework was used to analyse the data from both data sources. This method of analysis suited the researcher as it is guided by specific objectives. (Thomas, 2013).

Firstly, I listened to the interviews which were audio-recorded and then transcribed them orthographically. I immersed myself in the data from the interviews, then I read and reread the transcripts while listening to the audio recordings. I then began to highlight potential items of interest through note taking, this encouraged both analytical and critical thinking surrounding the meaning of the data. (Braun and Clarke, 2013).

Secondly, initial codes were generated which helped to capture patterns within the data and they aided the identification of themes. According to Braun and Clarke (2006) a theme "captures something important about the data in relation to the research question" (p.82). The third stage brought the linking of common themes from the coded data and the establishment of the overarching themes. The fourth stage involved the process of reviewing the themes identified which then led to the penultimate stage where the predominant themes previously identified were further defined. To finish the six-stage process the writing of the report was conducted which outlined the researcher's primary findings in the compiling of this dissertation. The next section will present the research findings.

4.2 Research Findings

The themes that emerged from the data sources overlapped and four overarching themes were identified in the data, (*see figure 4.1*). To aid the identification of themes the researcher employed a visual technique of colour coding and a map of themes was established (*Appendix 5*) in the interview transcripts this was valuable for a richer interpretation of the data.

Figure 4.1 Overarching Themes

1. Classroom Delivery of Guidance Counselling	2. Collaborative Approach to Guidance Counselling Provision
3. Emotional Needs of Students	4. Time restraints on the Guidance Service.

4.2.1 Theme One: Classroom Delivery of Guidance Counselling

The first theme relates to the delivery of classroom guidance counselling. The findings were that as being in place in Senior Cycle (SC) and through the subject of SPHE in Junior Cycle (JC). The delivery of blended guidance counselling, a combination of classroom and one-to-one guidance counselling, is in place in the Senior Cycle with career guidance classes timetabled for three Year groups; Transition Year, Fifth Year and Sixth Year. The option of one to one guidance counselling is available on appointment to all students in the school. The Transition Year programme includes an emphasis on the vocational aspect with classes structured to include career investigations, subject choice and work experience.

Fifth Year and Sixth Year students study the LCVP Programme which complements the vocational aspect of guidance counselling. Psychometric testing is conducted in Transition Year with all students and in Fifth Year with students who do not opt for the Transition Year Programme. However, the timetabling of guidance counselling is not in place in the Junior Cycle. This is being addressed through the SPHE subject which is taught once a week to each Junior Cycle Year group.

The types of classroom guidance activities include a work experience module in the LCVP and Transition Year classes, career investigations, interview techniques and exploration of online websites in all three Senior Cycle year groups as well as visits to Higher Education Institutions, (HEI) on Open Days. In addition, to further enhance the delivery of classroom

guidance subject teachers offer information to students in their subject areas. Furthermore, the school invites in guest speakers to deliver information relating to aspects of career guidance and future decision-making. For example, Jane (SC) said “*we got people in from UL last week and he talked about the college, the careers and there’s another person coming in from UCC and CIT*”. However, the interest from the Junior Cycle students was highlighted by Sandra (JC) when she suggested “*If Miss X could get people from that profession or job that you’re interested in, to come in and talk about it.*” This highlights how the guidance activities for the vocational aspect are provided in the Senior Cycle classes, but it is clear from the Sandra’s (JC) statement that the Junior Cycle classes are curious about future careers also. This informed the researcher that there is a gap in the Junior Cycle programme where students preparing for Junior Cycle are curious about careers and have expressed an interest in listening to guest speakers in the school, but this service is provided for Senior Cycle students only. Such activities need to be provided for all students regardless of the level they are at in school. With regard to the guidance activities in Junior Cycle, the SPHE classes in 1st and 2nd Year particularly concentrate on the personal and social aspects of guidance counselling with an extra strand added in third year addressing the vocational part of guidance with topics of subject choice and career prospects discussed. Tom (TY) reported “*we don’t get guidance class in Junior Cert. we get a SPHE class ...we work on ourselves and our personal health*” Teresa (TY) added “*I think the Junior Cert should have a guidance class*”. These responses informed the research that there seemed to be confusion among the Junior Cycle students as to what ‘guidance class’ is. When asked why a guidance counselling class would be important, the students proposed that career advice from third year would be beneficial for the Leaving Certificate years and their subject choice and career options. Moreover, the issue of stress and anxiety emerged in the context of exam preparations and learning coping skills in the Junior Certificate Year. However, one student, Jane (SC), disagreed “*...I think there’s too much pressure already put on junior certs*”. Interestingly Shane (JC) reacted by responding “*...I think there are some aspects of the guidance class that would be beneficial...*”. A fellow JC student Sandra concurred proposing “*...it would be nice to have some idea of what career you’re going into in the back of your mind.*”. Overall most of the students agreed to the need for career guidance class at Junior Cycle level. The inclusion of ICT in classroom guidance counselling emerged in the findings, for example the senior students also expressed their familiarity with ICT and career guidance learning and their knowledge of various websites that they can access on their iPad in the classroom. The

Junior Students were not as adept in the knowledge of career websites as the senior students. However, they were all familiar with websites to aid their personal and mental health.

At the time of the data collection two new classroom initiatives were being introduced in the Junior Cycle in the research school; the Junior Cycle Apple technology class, and the Peace Advocacy programme which is initiated by Rotary Ireland, in SPHE class. The management believed both programmes will benefit the students from a guidance counselling perspective. Firstly, according to the Principal, with greater access to technology the *“students are investigating various career paths, various courses to get into those careers...again they are informing themselves”*. Secondly, according to the Guidance Counsellor the Peace Advocacy programme will equip students to become more resilient *“to deal with any issue, they look at what type of learner I am? Why am I different to the person beside me?”*.

Finally, all the five personnel were asked *Why is guidance counselling important in a classroom setting?* There was consensus amongst all interviewees that it is ‘vital’ to have guidance counselling in the classroom. For example, the Year Head replied, *“I think it’s vital...anxiety is a problem...its huge and it’s getting bigger”*. Other suggestions included structuring classroom lesson programmes to include the three aspects of personal, social and vocational guidance, delivering guidance to all classes is the fairest way for all students. Jack, the class teacher highlighted the importance of students having access to their peers in discussing an issue in a classroom situation may be more comfortable for the student as opposed to a one to one guidance counselling session. He claimed, *“if they’re in a classroom situation and they are a bit upset, then they have access to their friends.”* However, the Deputy Principal highlighted the lack of access to the Guidance Counsellor for all Junior Cycle classes due to allocation restrictions. He also admitted that if the allocation was granted then her time would be limited for meeting students in one to one sessions. It was obvious from the responses that there is a situation involving a balancing act for the Guidance Counsellor between meeting students during her allocated time and then the challenge she has in getting access to all the students, which she does outside of her timetabled hours.

In conclusion, there was a consensus in positivity on delivering guidance counselling in a classroom setting yet all interviewees were aware of the allocation restrictions and understood the problem.

4.2.2 Theme Two: Collaborative Approach to Guidance Counselling Provision.

The theme of whole school collaboration emerged in the semi-structured interviews and the student focus group. The development of the school's guidance plan is informed by the Guidance Department, School Management, Year Heads, the Discipline Committee, the Student Council and the Pastoral Care Team. All five key personnel were familiar with and knowledgeable of the ethos behind the guidance plan. The school also has access to an external Guidance Counsellor when needed, "*we would be dealing with external agencies, an external Counsellor, HSE and various different agencies relating to student needs as well*" (Principal). The collaboration of the staff in the guidance plan involves the Care Team which includes the Pastoral Care Team, Learning Support Coordinator, Guidance Counsellor, Home School Liaison Officer, Senior Management and Year Head. According to Helen (Guidance Counsellor), "*there are a number of key figures who collaborate on a weekly basis to implement our guidance plan*". These personnel discuss the work that needs to be done each week according to the Principal to "*build the overall culture where we're working together*". Additionally, Helen claimed, "*everybody takes concerns to the table from parents, from students, from teachers; a decision is made as to what is the next plan of action, who is responsible for that and off we go*". The Deputy Principal highlighted her supportive role in this team, "*I have to ensure that all of the teams are working and functioning and supported and effective.*"

The adoption of a whole school approach to guidance counselling was transparent also where personnel referred to working on the same approach towards guidance and knowing the procedure to be followed if they needed to refer a student to the guidance counselling department. The Deputy Principal supported the collaborative view when she stated, "*the guidance plan is very much informed by all the systems in the school*". This was echoed by the Jack, the class teacher when he expressed his confidence in knowing the procedures to follow "*if any issues have arisen... refer them onto the guidance counsellor; be aware of the guidelines in place, for example child welfare protection.*". This filtered through to the student focus group where the students reinforced the theme of whole school collaboration in responding "yes" unanimously to approaching the Guidance Counsellor and school personnel if they needed support in anything. Jane (SC) claimed "*we all have Year Heads, they are always there for us as well if we need to talk to them.*" Tom (TY) stated specifically "*the Guidance Counsellor is all you need. You go to her, she's always there and she spends her lunch in there just talking to people*". John (SC) added "*it's not a bad thing to go talk about*

your problems. It's mainly beneficial" portraying the positive effect of a well-structured whole school approach to Guidance Counselling for students.

All stakeholders are working together to deliver personal, social, educational and vocational guidance in the school. The findings suggest that the Guidance Counsellor, although extremely busy in her role, was not alienated and had a strong network of support in the school. Some of the school staff support the delivery of guidance counselling through a number of different methods, examples of such include subject teachers' attendance at information evenings to inform parents and students of subject content, suitability and career prospects. The delivery of SPHE in the Junior Cycle programme and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme, LCVP, in the Senior Cycle, also creates an environment that encourages students to communicate with staff members in a respectful and comfortable way. The Principal reinforces the significance of open communication "because I think that type of environment must be in place where students are going to thrive", deems this approach important. He articulated it enhances the personal counselling needs of the student population who are aware of the services available to them in the school. The student body and the Student Council are involved in a "Buddy System" for first year students who are linked with TY students for support in the early weeks of their first school term. This is favoured by students who feel supported by their peers, "*they're actually very helpful...helpful really to show us what was going on*" (Teresa, TY).

4.2.3 Theme Three: Emotional Needs of Students

Throughout the semi-structured interviews, the third key theme of the emotional needs of the students was prominent. Each interviewee felt that the challenges faced by young people today have a significant impact on the delivery of the guidance plan in the case school. Terms such as 'mental health', 'resilience', 'emotional wellbeing' and 'anxiety' were mentioned many times.

The Principal, Deputy Principal and Year Head were very aware of the changing needs of their student population and claimed that many of their students required emotional support. The Principal acknowledged "where there's an emotional need or a personal need, the Guidance Counsellor plays a vital role there," Similarly, the Year Head, admitted "*emotional support is what we'd spend a lot of our time on*" as "*anxiety is a big problem, it's a massive issue so having as much support for the students as possible is very important.*" The

Principal also highlighted the importance of communication and the need for a whole school approach to guidance counselling in the school to acknowledge the students' emotional needs:

“That the relationship between teacher and student is vital for their wellbeing – not only talking about SPHE or Guidance Counsellors or Chaplains but I’m talking about their general subject teachers – there’s that bond there, classrooms are enjoyable, atmosphere is good – somewhere that the students want to go, somewhere that they are appreciated, that they feel their point of view is put forward and that they are taken on board. That lends to a happier ethos across the school and therefore happier children coming in and going home. Even in a scenario where the student mightn’t have the support at home, they certainly feel that they do have it in the school here.”

The Principal is supportive of an ‘open door’ policy and ethos in the school, and open communication between students, parents and staff aiding the support of the emotional needs of the students. A part of this process is the weekly meeting of the Care Team.

The Deputy Principal (DP), Tara, believes that students lack resilience for their development as young adults. She spoke about the importance of good mental health and how schools are now expected to provide more support for students' emotional needs. She noted *“the amount of time that the Guidance Teacher, (interesting how the word teacher is used here!), now spends with students on their mental, social and personal help outside school is huge. It’s a huge area”*. She appreciated the excellent work that was being done in the guidance department and she acknowledged how demanding the role of Guidance Counsellor is, but she was adamant that all students needed to *“be in a good place emotionally”* before they could learn in a school environment. This opinion was echoed by both the Principal and Guidance Counsellor also.

Notably the Guidance Counsellor, Helen, admitted that a lot of her time outside of her timetabled hours involved dealing with referrals from staff members, i.e. student with emotional difficulties. When asked about the issue of resources in her work she replied *“resources for me would be time. Time to get out of teaching other subjects. It’s very handy to be in SPHE but I don’t have enough time in the day”*. Her time is further taken up with *“my Leaving Cert students, I meet them before 4 and 6 in the evening because they don’t want to be out of class.”* The Principal claimed that a support structure is in place whereby an

external Guidance Counsellor is employed by the school *“during periods of time when the workloads get very heavy”*.

The student focus group indicated that if they had a problem they could approach the Guidance Counsellor or a staff member. They also referred to student emotional needs being centred mostly around pressure related to exams, family problems and breakdown of friendships. They acknowledged the work the Guidance Counsellor did, and each knew they could approach her for any aspect of guidance. Some of them were also aware of the external Guidance Counsellor *“I think it’s important to say that a counsellor comes in from outside the school to meet with students one to one, if they feel they really need it as well”* Jane (SC). Another student John (SC) supported this point stating:

“It can give a different opinion other than just the Guidance Counsellor in our school. Miss X could have one opinion and the other counsellor could have another. You could see both points of view and you could choose for yourself.”

The student views corroborate the point made by the Principal with regard to the importance of counselling for students who need it whether it be with the school’s Guidance Counsellor or from the external Guidance Counsellor.

4.2.4 Theme Four: Time restraints on the Guidance Service.

The final theme relates to the issue of the identification of time restraints. This issue arose in all the interviews and the student focus group. The students recognised and appreciated the time offered to them for guidance counselling, but they were also aware of the time constraints within the guidance department. Shane (JC), referred to his own time limitations and proposed having more time for themselves in a classroom situation comparing it to Transition Year saying, *“maybe like in TY when we would have more time in our hands, could be much easier to sit down and talk.”* This raises the question of the importance of classroom guidance counselling being provided across the education spectrum and not just in Senior Cycle. The principal referred to the importance of more time being allocated for guidance counselling on the timetable in Junior Cycle stating, *“I think it’s vital in third year”*. He added that the availability of the guidance counselling services is essential in the school because *“it’s in all our best interest because if our Guidance Counsellor is not there to support the students...well it kicks off somewhere else”*. The Year Head, Maureen, concurred with the necessity for the Guidance Counsellor to be available to the students. One solution

put forward by Jack the class teacher, regarding the enhancement of the guidance services and the issue of time constraints was the allocation of another Guidance Counsellor to half the workload and possibly divide the responsibility of the students in two parts “*one Guidance Counsellor taking sole responsibility for Junior Cycle groups and the other for the Senior Cycle groups*” (Jack). Similarly, the Deputy Principal highlighted her awareness for Guidance Counselling services in the Junior Cycle “*if she could be timetabled with 1st, 2nd and 3rd years under the whole new wellbeing system – that would be ideal*”. However, she was aware of the fallout from this due to the restrictions on guidance counselling resources by adding “*but then she’s in the classroom, then she has less time to meet with them on a one-to-one basis*”

4.3 Summary of Findings

To summarise, the key findings are that the emotional needs of the student body can only be met if a well-structured whole school approach to guidance is established with all stakeholders. Noting that students spend most of their day in a classroom which points to the importance of the classroom aspect in the delivery of the guidance counselling programme in a second level school. However, the jigsaw-like approach is only possible if the correct resources are put in place which permits a school to provide a guidance counselling service to meet the personal, social and vocational needs of the stakeholders involved.

Additionally, the perceptions of the key personnel around the delivery of the guidance programme suggests that the role of the guidance counsellor is very overloaded with the current allocation of guidance counselling hours. The access to all students is proving very time consuming and although the guidance counsellor is willing to give her personal time outside of classroom hours this could result in burn out for her.

Conclusively, the need for a more structured approach to guidance counselling for the Junior Cycle programme is apparent for the Junior Cycle students with some confusing the SPHE programme for guidance counselling and others not clear as to what a guidance counselling class is. This answers the overarching question in this research for the need for guidance counselling to be timetabled for classroom delivery at Junior Cycle level as well as in Senior Cycle.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the data analysis strategy employed to extract the overarching themes in the primary data from the focus groups and semi structured interviews. The next chapter will provide a synthesised critical discussion of these findings with the literature reviewed in Chapter Two.

Chapter 5

Discussion

Chapter 5 Discussion

5.0 Introduction

This chapter provides a critical analysis of the primary findings with the literature discussed in chapter two.

5.1 Overview of Research Findings

This study was carried out in one case school and the findings may be typical of other second-level schools. The main research question underpinning this study asked: How is guidance counselling delivered in a classroom setting? The subsidiary questions in this study looked at the types of guidance activities provided to students in the classroom; how a whole school approach to guidance counselling is enacted in secondary education amongst the key stakeholders; and what are the opportunities and challenges in providing a whole school guidance counselling service. Using a qualitative approach to capture the perspectives of the participants insights and thoughts (Oakley, 2000) of both the student participants and the key stakeholders in the school.

The overall findings highlight a number of key issues regarding the delivery of guidance counselling in the classroom. The findings also highlight the challenges for the guidance counsellor in the case school with regard to the delivery of the guidance counselling service through a whole school approach. Literature has uncovered the need for specific and accurate information, in the area of guidance counselling, to be delivered to young people to help their development socially, personally and vocationally (King, 1999). However, the findings in this study uncovered some obstacles in relation to how guidance is delivered in the classroom.

The three overarching themes that emerged in the overall findings will be discussed in more detail in the upcoming sections are:

- The delivery of guidance counselling in the classroom.
- A collaborative approach to whole school guidance counselling and the challenges involved.
- Supporting the wellbeing needs of students in second-level education

5.2 The Delivery of Guidance Counselling in the Classroom

This first theme will address the findings on the delivery of classroom guidance activities in the Junior and Senior Cycle programmes in post primary. The findings indicate that various areas of guidance counselling are being addressed in the case school, which concurs with literature in the field on the issue, such as Hearne and Galvin (2014) and DES (2013). However, the findings of this study were that there was more of an emphasis on the delivery of classroom guidance at Senior Cycle in the particular case school. In the Junior Cycle the SPHE programme, in line with DES requirements (DES, 2015), is delivered by the guidance counsellor to some year groups. Topics such as student wellbeing, social skills and the challenges of adolescence are addressed in these classes and appear to be incorporated through the SPHE curriculum and not as a stand-alone subject. The students in this study also interpreted guidance in the classroom as being a part of their SPHE programme, which runs the risk of both subjects losing their individual identity and respective importance.

The findings indicate that school management in the case school has a whole school guidance programme in place to meet the needs of the students, which is in line with the new module proposed by the NCGE (2017). However, according to the student perspective there is a need for more classroom guidance delivery in the Junior Cycle programme. The students suggested this could aid them with the task of preparing for State examinations and knowing how to manage stressful situations in their lives. This reiterates Reilly's (2011) point that focuses on the critical importance of the services of the guidance counsellor being available to young adolescents. There is an essential need for all young people to have access to mental health and wellbeing resources in both Junior and Senior Cycle (NCCA, 2017). This concurs with the views of the key stakeholders who were interviewed in this research study who believe that students in their school need to be more resilient, as articulated by NEPS (2013). In the case school, a key issue appears to be the prevalence of anxiety amongst the student population concurring with the literature (NCCA, 2017, DES, 2016a).

The DES (2009) suggests that some students are not being adequately accommodated to make informed choices about personal and social decisions. This has been recently acknowledged with the new Junior Cycle Wellbeing programme introduced in second-level schools from September 2017 (DES, 2015). However, there was a lack of awareness of this new programme amongst the students and some interviewees in this study. Whilst, there was a general awareness of the importance of student wellbeing, no specific reference was made

to the actual school's Wellbeing programme. The NCCA (2017) have developed guidelines and short courses in the area of wellbeing which could be considered in the case school's guidance plan. Various activities including guidance related learning, pastoral care, short courses in CSPE, PE and SPHE addressing Wellbeing, school-based initiatives involving all the student population e.g. sports days, health awareness days, guest speakers, school retreats etc are advocated. Furthermore, national and international literature has shown that the classroom teacher and guidance counselling services are in an ideal professional position to work sensitively and steadily with students to effect positive educational outcomes and personal wellbeing (Clarke and Barry, 2010; WHO, 2012).

The issue of the inequitable delivery of guidance counselling across the curriculum is not helped by the fact that there is no set curriculum for the guidance counselling programme in second-level schools (Hearne et al., 2016). Although there have been some progressive steps in the provision of guidance counselling there is still disparity in the delivery of guidance between Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle programmes. This disparity has been reported in literature in recent years along with the acknowledgement of the need for classroom delivery of guidance for Junior Cycle students (McCoy et al., 2014; Smyth et al., 2015). According to the findings in this study the Senior Cycle students in the case school are better facilitated regarding classroom guidance delivery as there is one weekly guidance class timetabled for each senior year group; Transition Year, Fifth Year and Sixth Year. This is very much in line with the guidelines published for schools by the DES (DES, 2016b).

A blended approach to guidance counselling helps students to overcome barriers (Barnes et al., 2011) and establish career paths (Watts et al., 1996). The findings of this study indicate that there is a blended approach to guidance counselling (classroom and one-to-one guidance counselling) in the case school. The one-to-one aspect involves personal counselling, educational and career guidance. In the school the one-to-one aspect is utilised by the Senior Cycle students more so for career guidance which is identified in literature (Hearne *et al.*, (2016). In the classroom Senior Cycle students are introduced to the work experience and interview skills in both Transition Year and Fifth Year through guidance counselling and LCVP. This is further enhanced in Sixth Year with the students' exploration of career and preparation for the CAO route. Supporting student autonomy (Ali and Graham, 1996) through guidance activities with the senior students was identified in the findings.

According to the DES (2015), ICT is imperative to provide a better and more effective education for young people. Young people prefer more access to ICT in guidance classes with an increase in the use of social media for communication of information now occurring (Bimrose *et al.*, 2010). The importance of ICT in guidance counselling is further reiterated by Dyson (2012) who argues that a blended approach to delivering guidance services to young people is essential in careers services for the future, and practitioners need to embrace the recent wave of technology and ICT in delivering a blended approach. The findings in this study are that the use of ICT as part of the guidance activities in the classroom is an important aspect of the guidance counsellor's practice. This concurs with Reid's (2016) proposition that there is a wealth of information readily available online in the area of guidance counselling. Communication amongst the school personnel is conducted through ICT and email, making it easier for the guidance service to engage with the school staff in a growing school. However, the use of iPads, in the case school, is on a phased in basis and the benefits will not be known until all students can access guidance counselling resources online.

In Senior Cycle the use of ICT in the delivery of guidance is conducted with student access to computers in a computer lab. Senior students have greater access to online resources in their career guidance classes where they access information from career-oriented websites such as Careers Portal, Qualifax and the CAO. This practice is in line with the propositions of the OECD (2015) on the integration of technology and ICT in the classroom as a form of support for pedagogies and learning environments. It is also relevant to the issue of labour market information (LMI) being part of the classroom guidance activities with students as proposed in Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2025 (DES, 2016a). However, the Junior Cycle students were not as acquainted with this method of guidance. Once again, this highlights how Junior Cycle students are being disenfranchised due to the lack of provision for classroom guidance at Junior Cycle level.

In conclusion, with regard to guidance counselling delivery in the classroom, the findings indicate that Senior Cycle students are being prioritised more over the Junior Cycle students in the case school, with SPHE being the sole subject at Junior Cycle level which has some aspects of guidance. The new Wellbeing Programme with extra timetabled hours (300 with an increase to 400 by 2020) is being allocated at present. This suggests that the availability of guidance counselling could be increased through the Wellbeing programme which is being rolled out in SPHE, PE, CSPE and Guidance Education (NCCA, 2017). However, the

allocation of these hours is at the discretion of the school management. Furthermore, the area of ICT and its rapid advancement in secondary education could further aid the delivery of guidance counselling in second level education across both Junior and Senior Cycles.

5.3 A Collaborative Approach to Whole School Guidance Counselling and the Challenges Involved

This theme addresses the findings regarding a collaborative approach to guidance counselling in the case school, and the challenges of embedding this approach. The findings concur with the procedures outlined for whole school guidance counselling delivery (DES, 2012) in that it is initiated by the Guidance Counsellor in the case school (Hearne et al. 2016). From a wellbeing perspective, even though the whole school approach to guidance is initiated by the Guidance Counsellor in the case school, this collaborative practice ensures that the students' welfare is being addressed by a range of school staff. For example, there is the presence of a school Care Team, i.e. Student Support Team, (SST) (DES, 2014), which involves senior management, middle management including Year Heads, SST and the Guidance Counsellor. This work is a model of support which is the ethos of the National Educational Psychological Services (NEPS, 2010). The SST of the case school is working in line with the procedures outlined in the document 'Looking at Guidance' (DES, 2009) where the case school conducts a SST meeting weekly to identifying students who may be experiencing personal difficulties. The guidelines are adhered to with the personnel of the school where they are aware of the necessary steps to be taken in referral of students to the Guidance Counsellor. The Guidance Counsellor has an integral role in the school's SST.

One of the key collaborative activities of whole school guidance in the case school is the development of the school guidance plan (ACCS *et al.*, 2017). Through collaborative engagement in the case school the guidance plan is developed by representatives from management, staff and students and its implementation is monitored by the Principal and the Guidance Counsellor. However, the Deputy Principal appeared to have strong involvement in supporting the work carried out under the guidance plan and monitoring its effectiveness. The collaborative work in this context is recognised in Irish policy as necessary for a successful approach to WSA in guidance counselling in Irish schools (DES, 2012a, 2016b). The guidance plan also has input from the SST which addresses issues regarding support structures that are needed for the student population. The collaborative approach also involves input from students which concurs with Hearne (2009) who supports the idea of

giving a voice to the users of guidance counselling services to develop policy further. With regards to staff involvement they are more inclined to get involved in policies that affect them and may not see being involved in guidance planning as part of their role, therefore, highlighting the fact whether or not all staff consider the Guidance Plan as a policy that affects them (Hearne *et al.*, 2016).

The wellbeing curriculum (DES, 2015) was not incorporated into the guidance plan in the case school, this was evident in the responses in the semi-structured interviews. Best practice would be to link the Wellbeing programme into the Guidance Plan and this would work in liaison with the guidelines outlined by the NCCA (2017).

The collaborative practice amongst school staff in the case school is relevant with regards to referrals and also entails ensuring an appropriate referral system of students is followed. The students were aware of the referral procedures in place if they need support from the guidance counselling services. The class teacher interviewed was also familiar with the protocol of referral if a student with personal needs comes to their attention. This correlates with Weist and Murray (2008) who promote the proactive approach of intervention at an early stage to aid adolescents with emotional and behavioural problems. This referral procedure within the case school is working for those who need the guidance service. However, the situation of referral to external agencies for support is not always as straight forward, this is consistent with the Inspectorate's (DES, 2009). The findings in this research study found that there is priority given to students who need guidance with a personal issue or an issue which is deemed a crisis. The student is referred to the guidance counsellor who then decides whether or not to contact external agencies to assist the student. This decision is made with school management, demonstrating a collaborative approach to the needs of the student. Referral is often made from a class teacher which again promotes good practice in a whole school approach to guidance. However, there was frustration expressed about the difficulty in securing appointments, for young people in crisis, with external agencies and the issue of waiting to secure appointments externally. The researcher identified the challenge the guidance counsellor had in the case school of establishing links with external agencies to build a stronger support structure for students in crisis situations. This highlights how the role of the guidance counsellor is multifaceted with responsibility for personal, social educational and vocational guidance for students.

It has been found that students who are supported in career decisions are more inclined to value learning in their career development (Bimrose, 2010). Another aspect of staff collaboration regarding guidance delivery in the case school is the contribution of school personnel to the provision of subject information at both Junior and Senior Cycle (DES, 2012). This is in place to support the whole school approach to guidance counselling where each subject teacher imparts knowledge to students based on their personal expertise.

Prior to the re-allocation of guidance counselling hours in 2012 (DES, 2012), Reilly (2011) claimed there was an increase in the number of students requiring guidance counselling in second level schools. In the case school there is one Guidance Counsellor on the staff whose timetable is implemented in accordance with the Action Plan for Education (DES, 2017a). The guidance counsellor is allocated seven hours of classroom contact for the teaching of SPHE in Junior Cycle and Guidance in Senior Cycle. In addition, fifteen hours of one-to-one guidance counselling is timetabled on the Guidance Counsellor's timetable. However, the Guidance Counsellor appears to have a heavy workload and does not have sufficient time to meet the demands for personal one-to-one counselling sessions with students. This results in the practitioner working outside their timetabled hours by offering personal counselling sessions due to the demand for the service. This concurs with Hayes and Morgan (2011) who reported on the lack of a shared understanding amongst key personnel and school management of the demands of the guidance counsellor's role, and the restraints put on the guidance services in a school. Even though the case school supports a whole school approach to guidance there is still a lack of understanding of the demands and time constraints on the Guidance Counsellor as identified previously (Hearne *et al.*, 2016). The implications of Budget 2012 have been identified in reports on the effects of the cutbacks which have had a detrimental effect on the guidance services and the demanding role of the Guidance Counsellor (IGC, 2016; NCGE, 2013).

However, the importance of the guidance service and the need for it was unanimous with all the participants in this research. This concurs with Cooper (2013) who views the guidance service as a professional and confidential activity that is vital for young people. Other research studies have focused on the need for young people to have access to guidance services. Gott (2003) recognises how accessible guidance services need to be to support vulnerable young adolescents. Fox and Butler (2007) argue guidance services in a school aid the scaffolding of a support structure for young people in their own school. Truneckova and

Viney's (2012) argue for counselling to be delivered in 'a real world' school setting. However, these writers do not appear to acknowledge that the provider of the guidance service can be overburdened with the expectations in their role.

Nevertheless, in the case school there was an acknowledgement by management that even with the reallocation of guidance hours (DES, 2017c) there is still a shortfall in the allocation. The Principal appreciates the autonomous role that management have in the provision but expressed a need for the recruitment of another Guidance Counsellor in the school. While it appears that all participants in the case school appreciate the necessity for guidance counselling in the classroom there is a lot of work expected from the Guidance Counsellor. This work includes implementing the guidance plan (DES, 2017c) within the school, delivering guidance counselling topics in the classroom and being available to offer one-to-one counselling to all students in the school, on request, in the areas of personal, social, educational and career guidance counselling (DES, 2009). However, due to the school enrolment numbers, the possibility of recruitment was unlikely at the time the research was conducted.

Overall there appears to be a professional commitment to the whole school approach to guidance counselling within the case school by all of the key stakeholders involved in the study. The obvious challenges highlighted in the findings are the need for more guidance counselling hours at Junior Cycle level and for another Guidance Counsellor to share the work load and aid with the delivery of classroom guidance. These findings correspond with previous literature on the continuous imbalance of classroom guidance counselling in the Junior and Senior Cycles in secondary schools (Hearne *et al.*, 2016; McCoy *et al.*, 2014).

5.4 Supporting the wellbeing needs of students in second-level education

There is an obligation on schools to promote students' personal development, growth and well-being (DES, 2011; 2013), and to pursue success academically, personally and socially (Gysbers, 2010; Gysbers & Henderson, 2012). Flynn *et al.*, (2013) stress the importance of addressing young people's emotional needs, and the findings of this research study highlight the concerns of the key personnel in the case school concerning students' wellbeing. There was a consensus on the need for appropriate wellbeing and mental health programmes and strategies in the case school. This corresponds with Irish government policy which informs school management of the importance of responding to the needs of the school community

(DES 2016a). The case school adopts an 'open door' policy as recommended by the DES (DES, 2016a). This communication protocol promotes the pastoral care and student well-being in a professional capacity (Hearne and Galvin, 2014). However, the findings from the semi-structured interviews with the key personnel highlighted their views on a lack of autonomy amongst adolescents. They also thought there was a need for the students in the case school to be more resilient. These findings may suggest why the Guidance Counsellor is working beyond the hours she is timetabled to do. Although the key personnel are working in collaboration with the school guidance service, there still seems to be a gap in the delivery of a comprehensive guidance programme in the case school to address the wellbeing needs of the students with regard to resilience.

Gott (2003) argues that the education setting is key to providing a supportive network for young people who need emotional, social and educational support. In this study, this finding emerged as students articulated it was vital to have the Guidance Counsellor available to vulnerable students. The key personnel, although very much aware of the need for support for their students, did not identify the gap in availability of guidance services as an immediate concern. The mental health needs of students were addressed in the student focus group and the semi-structured interviews and this is also evident in literature where schools are identified as important locations for identifying the emotional and personal needs of students (Truneckova & Viney, 2012; Hayes & Morgan, 2011). Both students and staff in the case school expressed the importance for support for students in the area of mental health. They felt this was a priority over any other aspect of guidance.

The recent introduction of the Wellbeing Programme (DES, 2015) into the Junior Cycle puts emphasis on the importance of physical, mental and social wellbeing. It was interesting to note that the key personnel involved in the semi-structured interviews made reference to the issue of a lack of resilience in young people and yet there was no reference made to the Wellbeing Programme in both the semi structured interviews and the student focus group. However, the responses were similar from all participants that good mental health is essential for academic achievement concurring with Dooley and Fitzgerald (2012).

The guidelines of the Wellbeing programme focus on the wellbeing of students in a school environment with emphasis on the importance of resilience in school life and in the community. All second level schools are now obliged to work within the guidelines of the

wellbeing programme (DES, 2015). Evidence from literature offers an insight to the importance of wellbeing for young people in educational settings (NCCA, 2017) and how it can be incorporated holistically in a school to work under a whole school approach.

Finally, the findings also indicate that students choose different trusted individuals to approach when they have a personal issue (Dooley & Fitzgerald, 2012). Some of the students in the case school articulated that they would approach a Year Head or the Guidance Counsellor if they needed advice or to discuss an issue. They are advised to make an appointment with the school's Guidance Counsellor by staff. This has also been found by Hayes and Morgan (2011) who demonstrate that young people are often referred to the school Guidance Counsellor by a friend or family member.

In summary, the findings conclude that a blended approach to the delivery of guidance counselling is desirable in the case school incorporating both classroom and one-to-one activities. The findings offer an insight to how recent changes in government policy (DES, 2012a) have impacted both the whole school approach and the delivery of classroom guidance in the case school. However, even with the new Wellbeing Programme being implemented in secondary schools there still appears to be gaps in provision in the delivery of guidance counselling in the school system which impacts both the students and the guidance counselling services schools.

The issue of time constraints on the Guidance Counsellor, the lack of resilience amongst the student population and the dissatisfaction of Junior Cycle students with the lack of classroom delivery of Guidance Counselling are three pressing concerns that emerged in this study. Although these issues are evident it must be acknowledged that the school management in this research study follow government policy regarding a whole school approach to Guidance Counselling in the case school. Although the re-allocation of guidance provision in second level schools since September 2017 has aided the Guidance Counsellor in the case school, the guidance provision still needs to be enhanced, within the Junior Cycle in particular, which will in time aid the delivery of guidance counselling in the classroom.

5.5 Conclusion

This discussion has offered a synthesis of the overall findings of the study. Chapter 6 offers a conclusion to this study.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

Chapter Six Conclusion

6.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the overall conclusions within the context of the aim and objectives of this study. An overview of the findings as well as the strengths and limitations of the case study are presented. Recommendations for further policy, practice and research are proposed and the reflexivity of the case study concludes this chapter.

6.1 Overview of findings

The overarching aim of this research study was to explore the delivery of classroom guidance in the context of a whole school approach to guidance counselling in second level education. This was achieved through a case study methodology in one Irish secondary school. The methodology examined the perspectives of some of the main stakeholders involved; key personnel and a sample focus group of students from both the Junior and Senior Cycle programmes in the case school. The objectives as outlined were achieved:

- To critically review the relevant literature in the context of a whole school approach to guidance counselling with relevance to classroom delivery in second-level education.
- To gather primary qualitative data with key personnel and students in a case study school.
- To analyse the overall findings and identify themes from the data analysis.
- To propose recommendations for future policy and practice in the area of classroom delivery.

The whole school approach to guidance counselling has been strongly promoted in second-level schools, especially during the period after the Budget 2012 re-allocation of guidance counselling (DES, 2012a, 2012b, 2013, 2017a, 2018). With the re-allocation of guidance counselling hours being slowly re-instated into schools on a gradual basis (IGC, 2017; DES, 2018) there continues to be an emphasis on a whole school approach to guidance counselling. However, with the allocation of resources for the delivery of guidance counselling is still discretion of school management, its successful delivery may in fact hinge on the management's attitude towards guidance counselling (Hearne *et al.*, 2016a). There is still a

need for further clarification as to how a balance can be found for the guidance delivery in the classroom at both Junior and Senior Cycles. Additionally, the definition of guidance counselling by the IGC Code of Ethics (2012) informs schools that guidance counselling includes “personal/social, educational and vocational development” (p.1) and this is aimed at all students regardless of the educational programme they are in.

Nevertheless, the question remains as to whether appropriate guidance counselling is being delivered to students in all areas of guidance counselling across the curriculum (DES, 2012a). Presently in second-level education there has been the roll out of the Wellbeing Programme in Junior Cycle (DES, 2014) which includes the area of guidance counselling, but does not yet identify guidance counselling as a mainstream subject in its own right in the Junior Cycle curriculum. This is resulting in a group of students in our education system possibly being disenfranchised (Hearne et al., 2016a). Essentially, this research highlighted how guidance counselling was under resourced in terms of classroom delivery at Junior Cycle level in one school which concurs with the DES inspectorate (2009). In contrast, Senior Cycle student’s needs were being met. However, interestingly the student focus group participants in the current research study did not refer to any aspect of Wellbeing delivery in the classroom. They interpreted guidance counselling as a subject in Senior Cycle to inform students of careers, and the SPHE programme in Junior Cycle dealt with the personal and social aspects of their education, not the vocational area. Therefore, the delivery of elements of personal and social guidance is achieved, but guidance towards subject choice and career paths is not part of the SPHE programme and that is where students educational and vocational guidance needs are not being met at Junior Cycle level. This corresponds with literature from McCoy *et al.*, (2014) who supports vocational guidance at Junior Cycle level.

The key personnel involved in this case study were cognisant of the pressure on the school’s guidance counsellor due to considerable time constraints in the role. There is a burden on her to deliver a guidance counselling service through the classroom and on a one to one basis. Nonetheless, the school personnel recognised the importance of their involvement in a whole school approach to guidance counselling as outlined in literature (DES, 2012a). This includes offering information and advice on subject choice for Junior and Senior Cycle students and their attendance at information evenings with parents and students. They also facilitate the delivery of classroom guidance but only if they are timetabled to teach SPHE.

Classroom guidance involves preparatory work with students regarding their educational and vocational decisions and this can be achieved through classroom delivery in all educational programmes. The use of ICT activities (DES, 2015) in the delivery of guidance incorporates the blended approach to guidance classroom delivery. Concurring with Bimrose *et al.*, (2010) and Reid (2016) who promote the value of online resources in guidance. Watts *et al.*, (1996) discusses in literature that learning about careers can be interwoven into all learning. This practice is evident in the case school with all personnel being available at information evenings. However, the only member of the case school's Care Team who delivers classroom guidance using ICT activities is the guidance counsellor through career guidance timetabled classes for Senior Cycle and SPHE classes for Junior Cycle. This does not involve all the personnel in the case study school, so it begs the question of whether a whole school approach to guidance counselling is fully in place. This aspect of the findings would suggest that even though the literature outlines the importance of a whole school approach to guidance counselling (NCGE, 2017) there is a very evident gap in the classroom delivery of guidance. The evaluation of such an approach needs consideration to strengthen the necessity for classroom delivery at Junior Cycle as well as Senior Cycle. It is important to consider how school personnel see their role in a whole school approach to guidance counselling (Hearne *et al.*, 2016b).

6.2 Strengths and Limitations of the Study

6.2.1 Strengths

One of the strengths of this research study is the methodology employed. A case study interpretivist approach was used to gain a more detailed understanding of the topic of the investigation (Thomas, 2013), i.e. the delivery of classroom guidance in one school which adopts a whole school approach to guidance counselling. Therefore, this approach to research encourages an exploration and comprehension of what participants report on an individual basis or in a group about a social or human issue (Creswell, 2009).

Another strength of this study was the researcher taking a closer look at the aspect of guidance counselling delivery in the classroom which is a neglected research area. This topic was chosen to gain a clearer understanding and insight into classroom delivery within a

curricular model (Cohen and Mannion, 1994; Creswell, 2009). It is through this type of delivery that students may be first exposed to guidance counselling activities.

Furthermore, as outlined in the Methodology chapter, the five components of a case study design proposed by Yin (2009) were applied in this case study design; research questions, purpose of study, unit analysis, logic that links data to propositions and criteria for the interpretation of findings.

6.2.2 Limitations

One of the limitations of this case study is that the findings are reflective of only one second level school; therefore, generalisations cannot be drawn from this research study (Denscombe, 2014). However, the issues identified in this case study may be typical of other schools on the topic of the whole school approach to guidance counselling and its classroom delivery. The views of the voluntary participants may be reflective of the opinions of other second -level stakeholders.

Another limitation of this study was the research method used. The limitations of semi-structured interviews and focus groups is acknowledged. The researcher chose this method instead of a survey or questionnaire. This method proved beneficial to the researcher. Observing and recording the participants' perceptions in an environment applicable to the research study resulted in rich data gathered for analysis.

Additionally, another limitation is that the population investigated for the case study did not include parents and their perspectives may have been beneficial. Notwithstanding these limitations, the research adds new data and understandings to what remains an issue for Irish educational policy and practice in guidance counselling.

6.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research the following recommendations are offered:

1. It is recommended that government policy relating to Guidance Counselling should look at measuring the effectiveness of a whole school approach to guidance counselling within Irish second-level education as there is no empirical evidence at present.

2. Government policy has neglected to focus solely on classroom delivery of guidance counselling to all students at all levels and this needs to be addressed for a more comprehensive delivery of guidance in second-level education. All students need to be recipients of the guidance counselling services and have equal access to classroom delivery of guidance in Junior and Senior Cycle.
3. Guidance counselling needs to be given a higher profile in second-level schools and this can be achieved by providing further training for second-level personnel. The focus of such training should be centred on the classroom delivery of guidance counselling which in turn would enhance a whole school approach to guidance amongst the school community.
4. Educationalists in the education system need clarity on what both a whole school approach to guidance and classroom delivery entails. This would be advisable presently especially with the recent roll out of the Wellbeing programme in schools. This would also avoid the issue of personnel being slotted into timetables to teach SPHE and Wellbeing programmes without any training or knowledge of the curriculum.
5. More specific direction is needed on the allocation of guidance provision in schools. At present the decisions about the allocation of provision is at the discretion of school management and this could be detrimental to the provision of classroom delivery, particularly at Junior Cycle.
6. Further use of ICT is recommended in the delivery of classroom guidance counselling incorporating digital activities online in the ever-evolving world of technology.
7. Further research into the delivery of classroom guidance is recommended to continually promote the profile of guidance in education, particularly amongst school personnel. Research involving the student voice regarding the delivery of guidance counselling in both Junior and Senior Cycle is recommended, because after all the students are the recipients of the guidance services in second-level schools.

6.4 Reflexivity in Relation to Personal Learning.

Reflexivity involves self-reflection to recognise and understand one's own social background and expectations, which can intercede in the process of research (Jonker and Penning, 2010). According to Hearne (2013) the researcher finds themselves in a place where he or she speaks about their experiences in the conducting of research. Personally, since I started training as a guidance counsellor I have empathy for students in Junior Cycle because of the

lack of resources provided to them in the education system. I was always intrigued to know what was delivered in the classroom in the SPHE programme. Even though vocational guidance is not part of the SPHE programme it is the opinion of the researcher that this aspect is part of personal guidance which could be incorporated into the curriculum. Before students graduate to Senior Cycle they are expected to make subject choices with a view to career decisions in the future. Which raises the critical issue of how students can make informed decisions about subject choice for Senior Cycle without an essential part of their education needs being addressed before they enter the later years of their education journey in second-level?

Admittedly, I was basing these assumptions on my own experiences but since conducting this research I have been further informed of similar practices in the case school. Furthermore, this was uncovered in the literature review. I chose this topic in order to bring more attention to the need for clarity on classroom delivery for students in both Junior and Senior cycle to meet the mantra of the 1998 Education Act, which states that guidance is to “assist students to develop self-management skills which will lead to effective choices and decisions about their lives” (Government of Ireland, 1998) concurring with “areas of personal and social development, educational guidance and career guidance” (DES, 2005, p.4). Reiterating the question of how this can be achieved holistically if classroom delivery of guidance is not incorporated in all educational programmes?

To achieve a non-biased opinion and approach to this research I recorded my own experiences throughout this journey in a personal diary. I did this to ensure a reflexive practice where I reflected on what I wrote (Berger, 2013). This practice made me more aware of the sensitivity involved in the practice of research between me as the researcher and the participants regarding situational dynamics (Mitchell and Irvine, 2008). Furthermore, the advice I received in regular discussions with my research supervisor further enhanced the reflexivity of this research project. Advice that I considered seriously from an expert in her field.

This research project has taught me how personnel in one second-level school can interpret guidance counselling differently. It has also highlighted the needs of students and how they feel about all of their needs are being met. It frustrates me to read literature which highlights what should be in place for students, yet when I listened to the voices of a small sample of

students in the case study school it came to light that guidance is not being delivered equally to all students. This concludes that government policy needs to further assess, implement and provide more resources. I started this journey with a question of how classroom guidance counselling is delivered in second-level education, and I received informed answers from stakeholders in the field. However, I am still not satisfied with how the guidance counselling services are meeting the students' needs in an era where there is such a focus on mental health, wellbeing and academic success. In conclusion, I see my role going forward as being in a position of influence as a guidance counsellor where I can encourage a more structured approach to classroom delivery in guidance counselling which will strengthen the whole school approach to guidance.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter concludes this research study. An overview of the key conclusions of the study in the context of the aim and objectives of the study has been provided. The strengths and limitations have been discussed, and the recommendations outlined. Finally, the personal learning of the researcher was discussed.

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Appendix 1



UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Subject Information Letter (Principal)

Date: 11 September 2017

EHS REC No: 2017_05_09_EHS

Research title: A case study of an approach to whole school guidance counselling in a second level school; focusing on the classroom aspect.

Dear Principal,

I am currently a student of the MA Guidance Counselling and Lifespan Development course with the School of Education, University of Limerick, under the supervision of Dr. Lucy Hearne. As part of my studies I have to complete a research dissertation on a topic related to guidance counselling.

In my research I aim to explore the topic of whole school guidance focusing on the classroom aspect. In order to gather this information, I would appreciate if you would give me consent to carry out the research study in the/your school.

This would involve me conducting individual 50 minute semi-structured interviews with a selection of the key personnel in your school; the principal or deputy principal, the guidance counsellor, a year head and a subject teacher. I also request permission to conduct a focus group of six students, comprising of two students from each of the following year groups 2nd year, Transition Year and 5th Year.

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 analysis according to UL guidelines. Participation in the study is voluntary and participants can withdraw from the research at any time. 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. It is important to note that the school's name and the name of the individual participants will not be used in the research and the school will not be identifiable to anyone other than those directly involved.

If you have any queries or require further any further information on the research study, please contact me or my supervisor.

Thanking you in advance,

Researcher: Geraldine Reidy

Tel: +353 87 4140322 Email: 15054969@studentmail.ul.ie

Supervisor:

Dr Lucy Hearne, University of Limerick

Tel: +353 61 202931 Email: lucy.hearne@ul.ie

This research has received Ethical approval from the Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee (*EHSREC no: 2017_05_09_EHS*) If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independently you may contact:

Chairman Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee
EHS Faculty Office
University of Limerick
Tel (061) 234101
ehsresearchethics@ul.ie

Appendix 2



UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

EHS REC No: 2017_05_09_EHS

11 October 2017

Consent Form

Research title: A case study of an approach to whole school guidance counselling in a second level school; focusing on the classroom aspect.

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 and the school 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:

Participation is entirely voluntary.

Participants are free to withdraw at any time prior to the data analysis stage and any contribution made will be subsequently destroyed.

The interviews and focus groups will be kept strictly confidential and will be available only to the research and the supervisor. Excerpts from the interviews and focus groups 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 Geraldine Reidy to carry out this research in the school

Signature: _____

Printed name: _____

Signature of Researcher: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 3



UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

VOLUNTEER CONSENT FORM (Student/Key Personnel)

EHS REC No: 2017_05_09_EHS

Research title: A case study of an approach to whole school guidance counselling in a second level school; focusing on the classroom aspect.

- I understand what this research project is about, and what the results will be used for.
- I am fully aware of the procedures and of the risks and the benefits of the study.
- I am fully aware that the recording of the interview and the data generated from it will be kept confidential.
- I am aware that my identity will remain anonymous.
- I know that my participation in the research study is voluntary and I can withdraw my involvement at any time prior to the data analysis stage.

I hereby agree to take part in this study:

Signature: _____

Printed name: _____

Signature of Researcher: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 4



UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

CONSENT FORM (PARENT/GUARDIAN)

Research title: A case study of an approach to whole school guidance counselling in a second level school; focusing on the classroom aspect.

EHS REC No: 2017_05_09_EHS

I have read the Subject Information Letter and understand in detail the particulars of the research project. I understand that the following conditions are designed to protect the privacy of all participants and to respect their contributions.

(i) Participation is entirely voluntary. Even if I consent to my child taking part, he/she still has the right to refuse to take part.

(ii) All participants are free to withdraw at any time in the process prior to data analysis of the focus group.

(iii) The focus group data will be kept strictly confidential and will be available only to the research team. Contributions during the focus group, however, will be heard by all other participants in that focus group.

(iv) While excerpts from the focus group data may be made part of the final research report, under no circumstances will any names of students or the school, nor any identifying characteristics be included in this report.

I hereby consent to my son/daughter taking part in this research project in the form of a focus group.

Parent/Guardian Name:

Students Name and School Year:.....

Parent/Guardian Signature:.....

Researcher's Signature.....Date:.....

Appendix 5

