"Just Go Softer."

Illuminating The Lived Experiences

of Post-Primary Teachers

Embedding Counselling Skills

Within Their Role:

An Interpretative Phenomenological

Analysis

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Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctor of Psychotherapy (D.Psych) is entirely my own work, and that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

Signed: Anna Fewer-Hamilton

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Date: 6 August 2025

In memory of

Dr. Helga Jennings

who taught me

to question and to care.

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List of Publications & Presentations

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List of Abbreviations:

APA	American Psychological Association
ASTI	Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland
BACP	British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy
BPS	British Psychological Society
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
CORU	Ireland's statutory healthcare regulator
DPU	Data Protection Unit
DCEDIY and Youth.	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration
Dept. Educ.	Department of Education
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DCU	Dublin City University
EU	European Union
GUI	Growing Up in Ireland Study
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
IAC	International Association of Counselling
IACP	Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
IQ	Intelligence Quotient
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OGA	One Good Adult ®
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
REC	Research Ethics Committee
SPHE	Social, Personal, and Health Education
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

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Abstract

"Just Go Softer." Illuminating The Lived Experiences of Post-Primary Teachers Embedding Counselling Skills Within Their Role: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Anna Fewer-Hamilton

Research of embedded counselling among Irish teachers is distinctly under-developed. Embedding counselling skills within pre-existing helping roles widens access to emotional and mental health support in brief empathic moments of connection between helpers and help-seekers. Within education, embedded counselling can enhance teacher-student relationships with positive social and academic outcomes. This study reveals new understandings of embedded counselling teachers' lived experiences and addresses a gap in current research.

The study explores lived experiences of embedding counselling skills among Irish post-primary teachers. In-depth interviews were conducted with eight post-primary teachers who use counselling skills informally within their general teaching role. An interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) of interview transcripts was performed that ensured a deep, iterative, reflexive inquiry into teachers' subjective and individual experiences. Through cross-case analysis, four group experiential themes were identified: 1.) *Privileging Relationship: "All in the relating", 2.) Working with an Additional Lens: "Reaching into my toolkit", 3.) Being a Helpful Presence: "Being properly there"* and *4.) Navigating Identity: "A ditch each side of the road".*

Teachers' accounts illustrated how they worked with heightened self- and other-awareness while embodying person-centredness and prioritising teacher-student relationships to support student welfare and learning. They valued embedded counselling as an enriching addition to their role that enhanced wellbeing self-efficacy but some experienced role conflict, structural obstacles, and demanding cognitive and emotional load. Personal development, support, supervision, and ethical sensitivity emerge as important resources for teachers embedding counselling.

As the first of its kind in Ireland, this pioneering research importantly highlights opportunities and challenges of embedding counselling within teaching and contributes to existing conceptual and practice understandings. Key recommendations include counselling skills education for pre- and in-service teachers, mandated supervision, inclusion of embedded counselling within professional counselling education, and development of embedded counselling policy.

Chapter One: Introduction

Embedded counselling is estimated to occur more frequently than professional counselling and offers significant humanising and other positive benefits within helping interactions (Browne, 2008; McLeod, 2007). However, it has received surprisingly little attention from counselling researchers to date (McLeod & McLeod, 2014). The present study proposes to examine embedded counselling among teachers with the hope of extending current understandings of a valuable but under-represented field of counselling practice.

This chapter outlines the rationale behind the current study and introduces the research aim and objectives, the methodology employed, and the layout of the ensuing dissertation. To clearly articulate the researcher's positionality and elucidate her interest and motivations for conducting this study, a researcher's reflective comment is presented to conclude this chapter and orient the subsequent research.

1.1 Background and Rationale of the Study

Embedded counselling is the use of counselling skills within pre-existing helping roles to support others with emotional and practical concerns. It can be distinguished from professional counselling in terms of its situated context, brief duration, and the primary role identity of the helper. Embedded counselling occurs when "helpers, including professionals, are willing to listen and respond constructively to the emotional pain and personal stories of people seeking their help." (Bond, 2015, p. 307). Also referred to as paraprofessional counselling, it is context dependent (British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy [BACP], 2020, p.7), and can be performed by professionals or peers whereby "the counselling role is embedded within other roles fulfilled by the

practitioner, and the counselling conversation is embedded within other professional tasks (teaching, nursing, career advice, for example)" (McLeod, 2008, p. 14).

With its roots in the 1960's helping skills movement and concurrent establishment of paraprofessional counselling, embedded counselling is growing as a distinct construct within counselling skills literature (Aldridge, 2014; Reeves & Bond, 2021). Conceptual frameworks have been advanced (e.g., BACP, 2020; Høigaard & Mathisen, 2008) and research has documented the practice globally across multiple settings. Contributions include widening access to emotional and mental health support in cost-effective and culturally sensitive interventions (e.g., Munetsi et al., 2021). However, embedded counselling requires sophisticated management of dual relations and multiple knowledges and sustaining this practice can be challenging for practitioners (Malan et al., 2015). Furthermore, existing research is "fragmented" and there is a need for additional studies to support effective practice across this field (McLeod & McLeod, 2014, p. 37). Gaps include research of outcome evaluation, systemic aspects, training and supervision, help-seeker and practitioner experiences.

Embedded counselling in education is associated with benefits including positive teacher-student relationships, better student self-image, engagement, conduct, and academic achievement (Holliday, 2015; Rogers et al., 2014). Teachers that complete counselling skills training have reported enhanced self-efficacy and confidence supporting students' wellbeing (Kit & Tang, 2018; Seema, 2021). However, there are very few studies examining the experiences of teachers that are actively practicing embedded counselling and none among Irish teachers. The present study importantly represents the first research that explores Irish teachers' experiences of embedded counselling.

Research shows that teachers are drawn to learn counselling skills to help support young people in demanding contemporary school contexts (Stoll & McLeod, 2020). In Ireland, student support is an important component of all post-primary teachers' roles and is formalised within wellbeing policy and curriculum. (Department of Education [Dept. Educ.], 2019, 2024; National Educational Psychological Service [NEPS], 2021). The Irish post-primary student population is presenting with escalating levels of emotional and mental health needs and with declining levels of positive wellbeing factors, including school belonging (Dooley et al., 2019; Government of Ireland, 2024; United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF] Innocenti, 2020). Irish teachers are reporting stress and feelings of inadequacy regarding wellbeing provision (Byrne & Carthy, 2021) in a culture that increasingly perceives their function as a frontline mental health role (McConnellogue & Storey, 2017) and they are seeking practical training to support their wellbeing work (Stenson et al., 2018). While counselling skills training is successfully utilised by teachers in other countries (Doikou & Diamandidou, 2011) it has yet to be empirically established if Irish teachers have engaged with this approach or how they might experience it. Furthermore, it is possible that Irish teachers have divergent experiences to those reported in international studies due to unique cultural and systemic factors.

This research seeks to understand the experiences of Irish post-primary teachers embedding counselling skills by asking them to share their stories. It hopes to advance current conceptual and practice understandings to positively contribute to counselling skills training provision and embedded counselling practice by teachers and others to the benefit of both help-seekers and helpers. Outcomes of this research may inform developments in Irish teaching and counselling education, policy, and research.

1.1.1 Note on terminology in Irish Counselling and Education

The term *counselling and psychotherapy* is commonly used to describe all talking therapies (Government of Ireland, 2020; Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy [IACP], 2018). For brevity, the term *counselling* is mainly used throughout this dissertation.

The term *post-primary* refers to schools for students aged around 12 to 18 years. These schools are also referred to as *second level*. (Dept. Educ., 2019a).

The term *guidance counsellor* refers to a specific qualification, job title, and role within Irish post-primary education. Guidance counsellors are required to be dual qualified as post-primary teachers and post-primary guidance counsellors. Their role includes personal, social, educational and career development, psychometric assessment, and student counselling (Dept. Educ., 2022a).

1.2 Research Question, Aim, and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to explore how post-primary teachers in Ireland experience embedded counselling. It seeks to achieve this in response to the research question, "How do teachers make sense of embedding counselling skills into their primary role?".

The specific objectives are:

- To capture teachers' lived experiences of embedding counselling skills.
- To discover the meanings that teachers attribute to embedding counselling skills.
- To explore how teachers experience the impact of embedding counselling skills.
- To illuminate teachers' perceptions of dual counselling and teaching roles.

1.3 Methodology

This research involved an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) of the transcripts of eight semi-structured interviews with post-primary teachers (Smith et al., 2022). These teachers were all employed in general teaching roles in Irish post-primary schools and, having completed counselling skills training, they were embedding counselling within their primary professional teaching role.

The chosen methodology reflects a commitment to capturing rich and illuminating descriptions of teachers' personal and individual lived experiences of the phenomenon of embedded counselling. This was developed through a deeply reflexive, systematic, and iterative exploration and interpretation of teachers' narratives by the researcher, recognising the interplay between researcher positionality and the lifeworld of each teacher. Reflexivity was fostered throughout the research using various structured activities including a research journal and is illustrated throughout the dissertation.

This approach was selected over other qualitative approaches such as thematic analysis and grounded theory due to the phenomenological depth of analysis of particular experiences in context that it offered that

aligned well with the research question and aim. This was important to the researcher who came to this project valuing and seeking to give voice to the lived experience and wisdom of embedded counselling practitioners. Additionally, the hermeneutic underpinnings of IPA afforded the opportunity to recognise the researcher's shared experiences of embedded counselling within the research.

1.4 Thesis Outline

This dissertation extends over six chapters, and each chapter concludes with a researcher's reflective comment. Diagrams and images are employed to illustrate key concepts and procedures with detailed appended materials demonstrating the rigorous audit trail that was completed during the project.

This first chapter presents the background to the present study of embedded counselling among Irish post-primary teachers and introduces the research aim, objectives, and methodology. There follows a Literature Review chapter.

This second chapter details the origins and history of embedded counselling, explaining the distinctions between professional and paraprofessional counselling. Key terminology is defined before examining relevant conceptual frameworks, empirical research, and policy central to the current study. The main emphasis of this chapter is on Irish post-primary education and teacher and student experiences relating to pastoral support, wellbeing provision, mental health, and embedded counselling teacher training and practice.

Chapter Three revisits the research aim and objectives before presenting the ontological rationale and epistemological underpinnings of the IPA methodology employed in this research. Data gathering and analytic procedures are detailed and illustrated demonstrating transparency and

reflexivity. Finally, relevant ethical principles and practices and research validity and rigour considerations are discussed.

The fourth chapter presents the findings of the analysis through an in-depth account of the experiential themes that emerged illuminating the shared and divergent experiences of the teachers. Teachers' own words are foregrounded throughout the chapter in a rich and resonant narrative with visual representations included to illustrate the research outcomes.

In Chapter Five these four themes and associated impacts regarding embedded counselling among teachers are discussed with consideration of existing literature. Central features of teachers' lived experiences of embedded counselling are highlighted and reveal important personal, professional, ethical, and educational issues.

The conclusive chapter of the dissertation examines the key contributions and implications of this research specific to practice, training, supervision, Irish post-primary education, the counselling profession, and further research. This is situated against an evaluation of the research limitations and quality against established criteria (Yardley, 2000).

1.5 Researcher's Reflective Comment: Why this Study?

This study stems from my career, over two decades, as a counselling educator and counselling psychologist. My practice therefore incorporates both pedagogy and psychotherapy and requires me to move between the therapy space and the educational space, offering diverse opportunities for learning and growth informed by counselling principles and practices.

Therefore, my counselling knowledge and skills have often been woven into and across my non-therapy activities offering me affordances, such as a capacity for relational engagement and ethical insight, but also dilemmas, such as navigating the expectations and boundaries of others regarding my professional background. These experiences stimulated my interest in the topic of embedded counselling.

Additionally, as a counselling skills trainer I was informed and guided by existing conceptual frameworks, training models, and professional standards. This material often seemed to focus solely on the development of professional counsellors with an implicit assumption that simply offering less of this content adequately prepares helpers for paraprofessional counselling. I found myself questioning this model and my own approach to counselling skills training.

I was also learning from my students who shared their learning journeys with me as they pushed through the growing pains of developing and applying their new knowledge and skills in counselling. Many of my students were teachers and I was fascinated by their thirst for counselling skills and intrigued by the diversity of school scenarios in which they applied their learning. Moreover, in recent years, professional discussions with teacher educators affirming the need for counselling skills courses for teachers, and especially post-primary teachers, had highlighted the relevance of embedded counselling within education to me.

Together, these experiences have fuelled my deep curiosity and interest in the experiences of those teachers who seek to learn and embed counselling skills into their roles leading me to develop the current study within the context of my doctoral studies in psychotherapy. My hope, in undertaking this study, was that I might learn from post-primary teachers embedding counselling in the field, and that my research might enhance

current thinking and training in this area of counselling practice. It seemed to me that the double hermeneutic of IPA aligned well with this position, where I might have the chance to make sense of teachers' sense-making of their practices.

I believe my commitment to this research topic and my lived experience of embedding counselling within my practice adds trustworthiness to this project but equally that it presents a risk of bias. To this end, I have endeavoured to engage reflexively and transparently with my preconceptions from the outset and as the project unfolded, actively seeking input from supervisory and peer review and documenting my learnings in a reflective journal. Reflective comments, such as this one, and other reflective artefacts e.g., notes and sketches, are included throughout the dissertation.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter collates and appraises existing research in the field of embedded counselling and applies this to post-primary education in Ireland. It focuses on the origins, conceptualisations, and definitions of this phenomenon and associated theoretical frameworks advanced. Empirical research establishing the scope of embedded counselling is examined with emphasis on embedded counselling by teachers, relevant education policy, and counselling skills training.

2.1 Literature Search Strategy

Searches of electronic databases across disciplines of behavioural sciences, education, humanities, medicine, mental health, nursing, psychology, and social science were conducted to identify relevant research. Databases included Academic Search Complete, British Education Index, Education Complete, ERIC International, Medline, PsycInfo, and Social Sciences Full Index. Search terms included "counselling skills", "embedded counselling", "informal counselling", "paraprofessional", "post-primary teacher", "secondary teacher", and "situated counselling". Irish education policy and reports were accessed through Government websites. Citation databases were employed to track research impact of key authors and papers.

Sources included peer-reviewed articles in reputable journals such as *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling* and *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*, academic texts, and Government documents. The review prioritised research from the last twenty years, given the subject's emergent nature. However, some older literature was included to examine historical perspectives.

2.2. Origins and History of Embedded Counselling

The profession of counselling has various historical origins including an important link with teaching practices in American classrooms over a century ago, circa 1908 (Gladding, 2018). This section presents an overview of this connection with vocational guidance. It examines the role of the helping skills movement and factors that led to the division of counselling into professional and paraprofessional branches before introducing current contexts and the emergence of embedded counselling.

2.2.1 Vocational Guidance Movement

The Vocational Guidance movement represents an important period in the history of embedded counselling. This movement began in the early 1900's and refers to work of American teachers who brought occupational and moral guidance into mainstream education to help students prepare for adult life (Gladding, 2018). By the 1930's, school guidance services were established nationally. Teachers helped students with career decisions, personal issues, and self-improvement, with the term "counseling" [sic] first describing this activity in guidance literature (Gladding, 2018).

Unlike most contemporary counselling, vocational guidance was directive, but with its social justice underpinnings is seen as an important forerunner of counselling (Leahy et al., 2015). Indeed, the initially instructional and counsellor-centred approach later evolved into a school counselling approach that was relational and client-centred following Carl Rogers' publication of *Counselling and Psychotherapy* in 1942 establishing his new theory of non-directive counselling (Gladding, 2018; Rogers, 1942).

Rogers and colleagues had empirically established that focusing on the helping relationship, using empathy, congruence, and unconditional positive regard, resulted in positive change and personal growth in both clinical and informal settings (Axline & Rogers, 1945; Rogers & Dymond, 1954; Rogers, 1957). Rogers subsequently addressed the American Personnel and Guidance Association in 1958 to demonstrate the research underpinnings and guidance applications of his model (Rogers, 1961b).

Embedded counselling as currently practiced emerged from these early movements. The connection with twentieth century teaching is important for the current study as it ascertains that a form of embedded counselling by teachers has been employed for many decades. However, there are currently few studies examining the contemporary utility of this practice.

2.2.2 Helping Skills and Counselling Skills

The establishment of person-centred counselling sparked interest in counselling techniques and training (Gladding, 2018). In the 1970's, helping skills programmes for paraprofessionals (Larson, 1984) were developed by professional counsellors (Ivey, 1971; Truax & Carkhuff, 1967). These short, evidence-based, communication skills programmes were precursors to counselling skills courses currently employed in both professional and paraprofessional training (McLeod & McLeod, 2011).

The helping skills movement reflected rapid growth in paraprofessional counselling in American schools and community services during the 1960's following professional shortages (Baldwin, 1975; Curtis & Miller, 1974; Larson, 1984; Mental Health, 1966; Meyer et al, 1972; Reding & Goldsmith, 1967). Formalisation of lay counselling, by teachers and volunteers, established that counselling across the lifespan and outside

the medical system was viable (Gladding, 2018; Leahy, 2015). With empirical evidence of paraprofessionals outperforming professional therapists (Durlak, 1979), some anticipated paraprofessionals would take on significant amounts of counselling provision in a "nonprofessional revolution" of mental healthcare (Sobey, 1970).

Precedence for embedded counselling by teachers was firmly established when paraprofessional counselling became acceptable. Research is now needed to appraise contemporary teachers' counselling skills training requirements as traditional helping skills models may be outdated for current post-primary school settings.

2.2.3 Separation of Paraprofessional and Professional Counselling

Counselling was simultaneously evolving from an adjunct paraprofessional activity into a profession over subsequent decades. This is evident in establishment of American and European professional organisations including the Society of Counselling Psychology (Division 17) of the American Psychological Association (APA) in 1947, American Personnel and Guidance Association in 1952, and Counselling Psychology Section of the British Psychological Society (BPS) in 1982, leading to public recognition, and professional training standards, research, and publications (Aldridge, 2014; Gladding, 2018; Woolfe & Dryden, 1996).

2.2.3.1 Professional Conceptualisations of Counselling

Early definitions of counselling published by professional counselling bodies state that counselling is provided by people "occupying regularly or temporarily the role of counsellor", i.e. in formal and informal circumstances (BACP, 1985; Dryden, 1985). However, twenty-first century definitions circumscribe "activities involving a practitioner, who offers a professional service as a helper, and a client, who seeks the

service" (IACP, 2018), defining formalised relationships where clients receive professional support with personal development, yielding solutions to challenges in living and greater personal satisfaction (IACP, 2018; International Association of Counselling [IAC], 2003). This reflects a departure from early conceptualisations of counselling that privileged the helping role and interaction over the professional status and identity of the helper.

Perspectives of counselling and psychotherapy continue to evolve with ongoing debate at policy and professional levels regarding what defines counselling and what distinguishes it from psychotherapy (Aldridge, 2014; Gladding, 2018; Hanrahan, 2018; Reeves & Bond, 2021).

2.2.3.2 Counselling across a Continuum

Counselling and psychotherapy are generally understood to encompass a continuum of informal support, intermediate psychological help, and deeper levels of psychotherapeutic intervention (Aldridge, 2014; Brown & Pedder, 1991). On this continuum (Figure 2.1), the everyday human act of offering friendly counsel is recognised but differentiated from the intervention of counselling practitioners with well-defined and acquired counselling skills (Brown & Pedder, 1991).

Counselling skills have been defined as:

> A specialised application of communication skills informed by therapeutic theory and practice that are considered essential to practice in the counselling professions or may be incorporated into other roles, for example, in health, social care, education and human resources (BACP, 2018b, p. 9).

Figure 2.1

Counselling Skills and Training across a Continuum
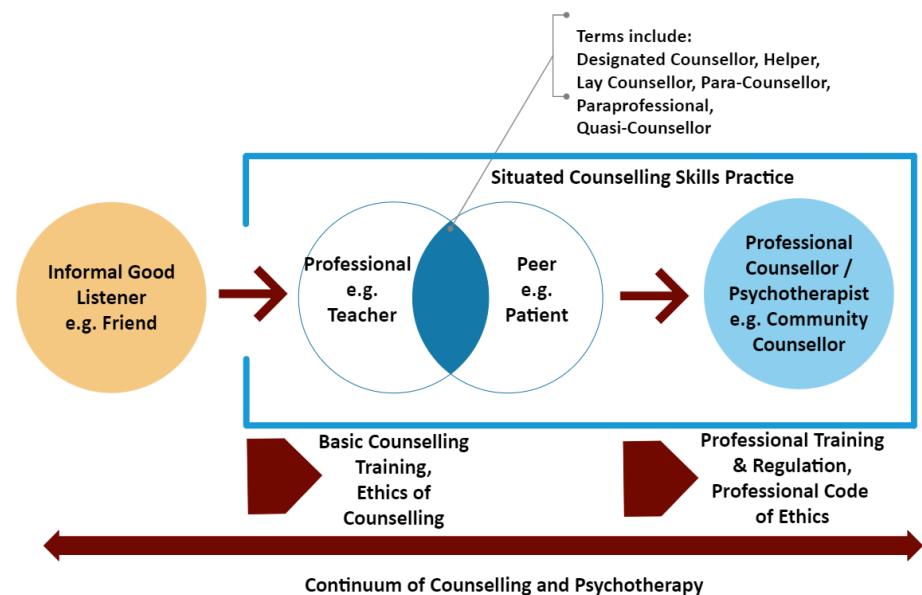
Note: The role of training across the counselling and psychotherapy continuum in relation to informal situated use of counselling skills by paraprofessional and professional counsellors is illustrated. For example, informally by a teacher, peer support, or psychotherapist (Kit & Tang, 2018; Kohls et al., 2018; Slattery-Marsh et al., 2019). Professional, formal use of counselling skills is not illustrated and is outside of this domain.

2.2.3.2.1 Counselling Skills Training

Counselling skills training distinguishes the cohort of informal counsellors and professional therapists from natural helpers and good listeners (Nelson-Jones, 2016; Reeves & Bond, 2021). Counselling skills training undertaken by paraprofessional counsellors is at a level considered insufficient for professional counselling practice (Nelson-Jones, 2016). Evidence-based counselling skills competencies applicable to situated contexts have been published highlighting the importance of ethics, personal attributes, techniques, and contextual sensitivity within informal counselling skills practice (BACP, 2020b).

2.2.3.2.2 Contracting

A second important feature separating the good listener from someone using counselling skills is how the latter intentionally and collaboratively creates "a counselling space" with the client by attending to boundaries and ethical factors (Egan, 2014; McLeod & McLeod, 2022, p. 96). This is described as contracting (Midwinter & Dickson, 2015). Nelson-Jones (2016, p. 9) notes that boundaries tend to be clearer in professional counselling relationships than paraprofessional ones into which dual relationships are often "built into the fabric".

When using counselling skills, people sometimes use discretion with regards to contracting openly with clients, confidentiality may be implicit, and the skills are employed quite spontaneously (Culley & Bond, 2004, p. 6). However, explicit contracting distinguishes a counselling role from the use of counselling skills (Reeves & Bond, 2021). Therefore, when a counselling role is embedded in another helping role, "boundaries and rules need to be negotiated in such a way as to create the best possible space given the circumstances that prevail" and appropriate discussion of contracting between counsellor and client is necessary (McLeod & McLeod, 2022, p. 97).

It is apparent from the literature that ambiguity remains within extant conceptualisations of the difference between paraprofessional and professional counselling. The separation is not always clear-cut, and it may not always be clear to embedded counselling practitioners where they fit in this domain or how to navigate the boundaries of practice. Clear guidance that is empirically informed by research into informal counsellors' lived experiences would be beneficial for practitioners.

2.2.4 Recognition of Embedded Counselling

As counselling continued to establish itself as a profession, differentiating between counselling skills and counselling remained important (Aldridge, 2014; Gladding, 2018). However, usage of the term *counselling skills* became contentious as critics argued it minimised and marginalised valuable helping practice across wider society that contributed positively to many people's lives (Aldridge, 2014; McLeod & McLeod, 2011, 2014). Furthermore, emphasis on *skills* was considered unhelpfully reductionist and risked neglecting fundamental ethical, relational, and reflexive components (McLeod, 2008).

Accordingly, explicit reference to *embedded counselling* as an alternative to *counselling skills* is growing in the literature (Bond, 2015; McLeod & McLeod, 2022; Midwinter & Dickson, 2015; Reeves & Bond, 2021; Stoll & McLeod, 2020). The construct is valuable, acknowledging and engaging with the interests of many professions and foregrounding transdisciplinary "humanizing values" [sic] (Reeves & Bond, 2021, p. 32). Browne (2008, p. 2) contends "it is time to pay some serious attention to how we [professional counsellors] can support and develop the use of embedded counselling" and it has been suggested that the counselling profession has a role to play in advancing embedded counselling practice through research, consultation, and supervision (McLeod, 2008).

The use of *embedded counselling* as the chosen terminology in this study recognises the complexity of this practice and the nuances of cross-professional integration involved. It is noteworthy that research explicitly examining *embedded counselling* in Ireland is lacking at present therefore ongoing Irish research is essential and opportune.

2.3 Irish Context

Regulation of counselling in Ireland is organised on a non-statutory basis by voluntary professional bodies including Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (IACP), Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI), and Irish Council for Psychotherapy (ICP; Batt et al., 2002; O'Carroll & O'Riordan, 1997). Higher education institutions authorised to confer awards under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 must adhere to Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) academic standards for counselling programmes, however these are not intended as professional regulatory standards (QQI, 2014). Voluntary professional organisations provide additional course accreditation and not all training providers operate within the QQI Framework (Feldstein, 2011).

The 2005 Social Care Professionals Act legislates statutory regulation of allied healthcare professionals including counsellors, psychotherapists, and psychologists (CORU, 2022). Presently, the state health and social care professionals regulator, CORU, is preparing to establish training standards and statutory registers for counselling and has published draft *Standards of Proficiency* and *Criteria for Education and Training Programmes* (CORU, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c, 2023d). When ratified, these will mandate new threshold competencies and qualifications for professional counselling programmes (QQI, 2014).

There are no current or planned standards specifically for paraprofessional counselling in Ireland, however the QQI foundation level of training (Level 6) represents an introductory standard of counselling training prescribing basic competencies in counselling knowledge and skills (QQI, 2014). In the absence of official data on counselling courses, an internet search for counselling skills courses in

Ireland was conducted by this researcher at time of writing. This evidenced current lack of standardisation, yielding over sixty available study options with an assortment of accreditations, awards, content, durations, modes of delivery, and qualification standards (Careers Portal, 2024; Courses.ie, 2024; Nightcourses.com, 2024). The potential counselling skills student must choose where to invest their time and money from this confusing array that may encompass varying levels of consistency and learning outcomes.

This picture reveals a scarcity of Irish policy, guidance, and regulation regarding embedded counselling training and practice with unknown impacts for practitioners, including teachers, and help-seekers. Additional research would address questions raised regarding how current provision is experienced by this cohort.

2.4 Terminology and Titles

2.4.1 Terminology Employed across the Literature

In a systematic review of the counselling skills literature, a BACP Expert Research Group noted that counselling skills "can have many homes: nursing, caring, teaching, psychology, care and support" leading to difficulties for the researchers with isolating counselling skills within the literature from the role and setting in which they occur (BACP, 2020c, p. 12). Similarly, this researcher identified a range of terms and titles across the literature referring to situated counselling skills across this diversity of "homes". Examples are presented in Table 2.1 and Figure 2.1. Such diversity in terminology and titles can cause confusion and may lead to underestimation of the extent of the use of counselling skills.

Table 2.1

Range of Terminology describing Counselling Skills in the Literature

Terminology	Role or setting	Citation
Designated counsellor	"Ordinary people". Includes clergy, professors, nurses.	Kennedy & Charles (2001, p. vii)
Embedded counselling	"Wide range of occupations and professionals". Includes clergy, nurses, police officers, teachers.	McLeod & McLeod (2022, p. xiv)
Helper	"Everyday helpers". Includes parents, teachers, managers, good friends.	Egan & Bailey (2021, p. 5)
Lay counsellor	Community trauma workers	Padmanabhanunni (2020)
Non-professional peer support	Pairs of friends	Bernecker et al. (2020)
Para-counsellor	Teachers and youth workers	Kit & Tang (2018)
Paraprofessional	Community mental-health workers	Jacobs et al. (2017)
Peer counsellor	Peers with lived experience of depression	Kohls et al. (2018)
Quasi-counsellor	Helping professionals, volunteers, & peer helpers	Nelson-Jones (2016)
Therapeutic involvement	Psychotherapists in a community trauma project	Slattery-Marsh et al. (2019)

2.4.2 Definition of Embedded Counselling for the Current Study

Reeves and Bond (2021, p. 32) note that "embedded counselling" is a term that has come into use as an alternative to "counselling skills" to describe "emotionally intelligent engagement with people in challenging circumstances" by various helping practitioners. This is the terminology

employed in the current study in which a particular and contemporary conceptualisation of counselling skills is accepted (McLeod & McLeod, 2014, 2022; Reeves & Bond, 2021).

Embedded counselling is defined as follows:

> When helpers, including professionals, are willing to listen and respond constructively to the emotional pain and personal stories of people seeking their help. (Reeves & Bond, 2021, p. 297)

For the current study, it is assumed that the practitioner has some formal elementary training in counselling skills and that they incorporate this into their helping role to add value to it without changing it (McLeod, 2008). The pre-existing professional activity is the primary activity (McLeod & McLeod, 2022) and any counselling conversations take place in opportunistic, time-limited, single or recurring, context dependent moments (Høigaard & Mathisen, 2008).

2.5 Theoretical Frameworks and Models

2.5.1 Counselling Skills Models

Several models of counselling exist within the counselling skills and helping skills paradigms described earlier. Relevant to professional and embedded counselling, these frameworks typically comprehend counselling skills within a staged helping, or problem-solving, sequence. E.g., Skilled Helper model, Microskills approach, and Relating-Understanding-Changing model (Egan, 2014; Ivey et al., 2015; Nelson-Jones, 2016).

Other, more specific frameworks pertain to embedded counselling. This section will outline five of the most academically influential, three of which are particular to embedded counselling by teachers.

Hornby et al. (2003, p. 10) contend counselling skills help teachers "to function more effectively in a role they are already fulfilling" and thus are essential for all teachers. This model for counselling in schools is underpinned by counselling skills research and theory (Hornby, 1990). The rationale for this school specific model is that "counselling in schools differs from other forms of counselling" due to being broader in focus, brief in nature, typically adult initiated, and conducted by teachers with little counselling training, working with young people (Hornby et al., 2003, p. 12). Three stages are delineated but not always utilised in every situation, and the model is informed by humanistic, developmental, and psychoeducational principles (Hornby et al., 2003; Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2

Hornby's (2003) Model for Counselling in Schools

Exploration Stage	Intervention Stage	Empowering Stage
•Establishing therapeutic relationship •Exploring concerns •Assessing situation	•Types of intervention strategies •Implementation methods (modelling, guiding, teaching)	•Supporting action programmes •Consolidating changes •Enabling self-actualisation

This model helpfully recognises the uniqueness of school contexts offering a flexible yet robust framework through which teachers can integrate relationship and communication skills with common teaching activities such as problem-solving. It outlines attitudes, knowledge, and skills teachers need when supporting general student problems, but more complex mental health needs are not addressed. Furthermore, systemic aspects of informal counselling within schools are not discussed.

2.5.1.2 Counselling Skills for Teachers

Kottler and Kottler (2007, p. 3) describe counselling skills for teachers as important "educational methodologies". Their framework weaves counselling microskills through a five-step helping process teachers can apply in private conversations with students when in a counselling role (Table 2.2). This is like other general counselling skills models. However, the authors maintain that teachers can extend their use of counselling skills to the wider school context to build "communities of respect and tolerance" in the classroom, to facilitate process oriented groupwork with students, and to communicate with parents (Kottler & Kottler, 2007, p.78).

Table 2.2

Kottler and Kottler's (2007) Counselling Skills for Teachers

Stage of helping process	Examples of counselling skills
Assessment	Attending Listening
Exploration	Reflecting feelings Probing, questioning
Understanding	Interpreting Challenging
Action	Goal setting Decision making
Evaluation	Questioning Supporting

Contributions of this model include the practical sequencing of microskills and recognition of nontraditional counselling skills contexts within schools. However, adherence to this staged process may not fit all embedded counselling encounters. Furthermore, the framework fails to explicate teacher reflexivity and organisational responsibilities.

2.5.1.3 Informal Situated Counselling in Schools

Høigaard and Mathisen's (2008) process model of Informal Situated Counselling is based upon research of informal counselling-type conversations in schools between teachers and colleagues or students. They contend teachers can offer effective counselling through short informal helping conversations. Such conversations have a distinct quality and "occupy a place somewhere between what we normally refer to as counselling and other remarks/forms of communication" (Høigaard & Mathisen, 2008, p. 294).

This model depicts three stages within a helping conversation during which the teacher actively responds to another person's direct or indirect help-seeking by adopting the counsellor role and implicitly or explicitly instigating a counselling interaction. A distinctly counselling component follows where they use counselling skills. Finally, they appropriately terminate the intervention (Figure 2.3).

Figure 2.3

Informal Situated Counselling Structure (Høigaard and Mathisen, 2008)

.
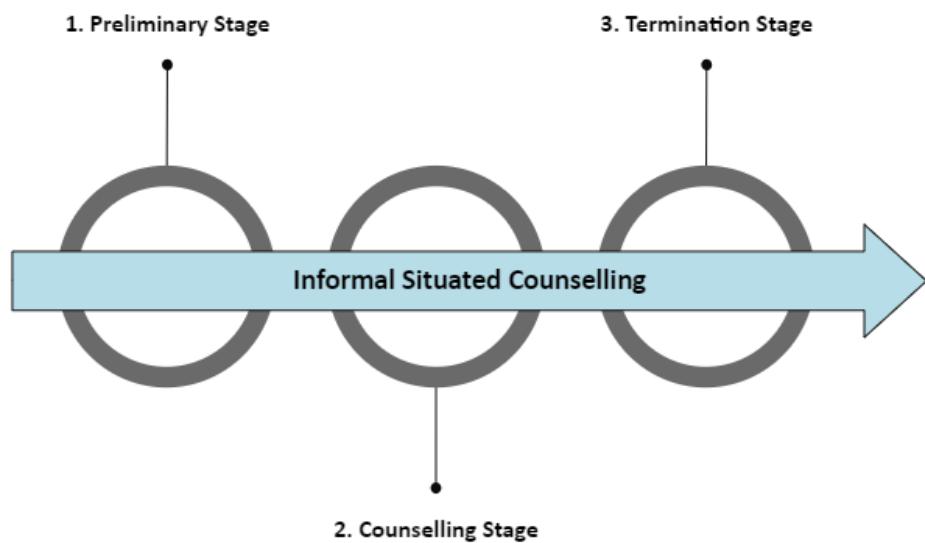
This model has merit as it provides insight into teachers' lived experiences where other models do not. However, although empirically-based, it is unclear from the published findings how the research was conducted leading to difficulty establishing validity (Høigaard & Mathisen, 2008). Additionally, this work pertains to Norwegian schools and may have limited applicability to the Irish teachers central to the current study.

2.5.1.4 Counselling Skills Competency Framework

In 2020, a BACP expert research group in counselling skills (BACP, 2020c) published a peer reviewed *Counselling Skills Competency Framework* and *User Guide* (BACP, 2020b, 2020a) delineating five areas of competence i.e., professional context, empathy, skills and techniques, working alliance, and personal qualities. This benchmarking framework was developed through comprehensive mixed methods research involving systematic review, grounded theory, and expert observations and addresses the complexity of defining counselling skills, settings, and roles (BACP, 2020c).

It usefully maps the counselling continuum, recognising the contribution of informal counselling and acknowledging boundaries with other help sources, including professional counselling. Significantly, this approach highlights responsibility for onward referral by situated counsellors when needed.

It is important to note the British counselling context of this framework however, as counselling in Ireland has developed at a slower pace than in Britain (Feldstein, 2011) and has a long tradition of voluntary and guidance counselling (O'Morain et al., 2012). Unique features of Irish counselling culture and practice may contribute to alternative conceptualisations and lived experiences among practitioners that are currently unknown.

2.5.1.5 Embedded Counselling Model

The embedded counselling model (McLeod, 2007, 2008; McLeod & McLeod, 2011, 2022) offers an extensive framework for understanding "episodes" of embedded counselling (McLeod & McLeod, 2011, p. 2) where helpers create "space to talk it through" that benefit clients (McLeod & McLeod, 2011, p. 5). The concerns clients bring are described as "problems in living" to encompass various emotional, behavioural, or relational challenges rather than clinical mental health issues (McLeod & McLeod, 2022, p. 3).

The embedded counselling model presents the customary portfolio of counselling skills but additionally, directly addresses more nuanced differences between embedded and professional counselling including creating a "counselling space", confidentiality, dual relationships, informed consent, and boundaries, all while attending to fluid, systemic, and organisational factors (McLeod & McLeod, 2011, p. 96). This model acknowledges practitioners work within dual relationships and from multiple "knowledges" (McLeod & McLeod, 2011, p. 319) when embedding counselling, e.g., knowledge of counselling, of teaching, and of one's own personal responses.

The three key themes in this framework are "being prepared and ready", "facilitating a counselling episode", and "using organisational resources" (McLeod & McLeod, 2022, pp. 40-43; Figure 2.4). Counselling skills are deployed as needed rather than following a stage model of helping, to collaboratively complete specific "tasks" using appropriate counselling "methods" (McLeod & McLeod, 2011, pp. 26, 69).

Figure 2.4

Embedded Counselling Model (McLeod & McLeod, 2022)

Being prepared and ready	Facilitating a counselling episode	Using organisational resources
•value others •helpfulness •communication •trained & prepared •context aware	•empathic opportunity •consent •space •focus •methods •strengths •feedback •risk management •look forward •close the space	•supervision •community of practice •resources •initiatives

This is the most detailed and practical model of the five and helpfully addresses skills, professional issues, and the complexity of informal counselling. Empirical studies across various professional disciplines inform this framework contributing to validity. Additional research into teachers' lived experiences could enrich this model or contribute to understandings specific to the teaching profession.

These five counselling skills frameworks provide conceptual substance for the current research by formulating the components of informal counselling. To varying degrees, they offer accounts of the explicit and implicit processes and practices available to the embedded counsellor utilising counselling skills in counselling-style conversations. Lastly and importantly, they highlight aspects of intersections of counselling skills with the practitioner's attributes, role, and wider context.

However, models that are fundamentally stage-based (Høigaard & Mathisen, 2008; Hornby, 2003; Kottler & Kottler, 2007) may be overly-

prescriptive or too simplistic in practice, particularly in the Irish post-primary setting where teachers may encounter significant student metal health needs (Dooley et al., 2019). More phenomenological descriptions of teachers' lived experiences could offer deeper understanding of this practice. Moreover, with a lack of Irish based conceptualisations, more focused consideration of the field within Ireland is crucial.

2.5.2 Models of Teacher-Student Relationships

This section presents two further frameworks that inform this study: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model (1979, 1993) and the *One Good Adult* hypothesis (Dooley et al., 2019). These offer formulations of relationships between adolescents and significant adults that are highly relevant for understanding teacher-student relationships.

2.5.2.1 Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model

Adolescence may be considered eco-systemically, recognising multiple reciprocal influences and interactions between young people and immediate and wider contexts in which they live. The ecological model proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1993; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1993) offers a comprehensive multi-dimensional view of person, process, and context "conceived as a set of nested structures, each inside the other like a set of Russian dolls" (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, p. 39). This model helps identify and understand risk and protective factors for adolescent development and wellbeing.

The adolescent is regarded as a biopsychosocial entity, living, developing, and interacting within an environment of interconnected interpersonal processes and social contexts exerting influence on their development. These influences are distributed across five systems according to their proximity to the adolescent (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1993; Figure 2.5).

Figure 2.5

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model of Human Development
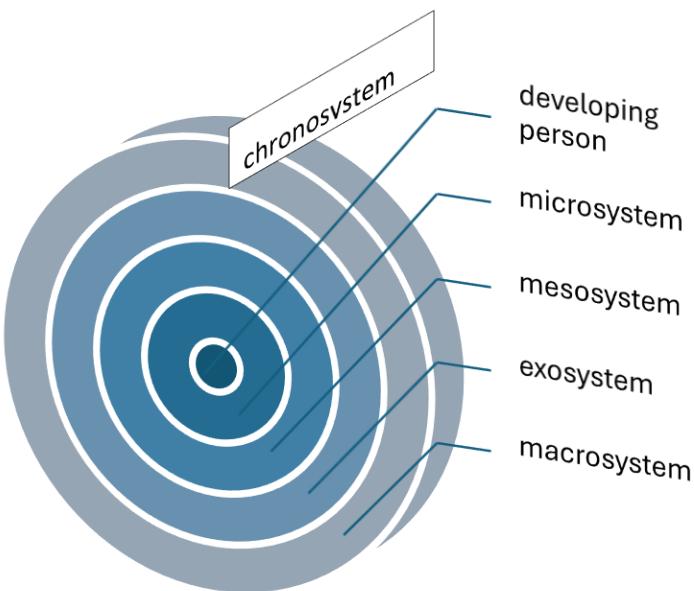
Bronfenbrenner (1993) outlines the general structure of the model as follows. The student's immediate environment, or microsystem, involves their regular interpersonal activity at home and school etc., and may comprise of positive and negative interactions with family, teachers, friends, and other students. A mesosystem operates where there is contact between two or more settings involving the student, e.g., home and school. More distant exosystem processes between settings and a member of the adolescent's microsystem, but not directly involving them, can also have indirect bearing on the adolescent. Broader societal and cultural structures represent additional macrosystemic influences on adolescent experience. Finally, a chronosystem comprises various happenings over the adolescent's lifetime.

As teachers are members of the student's microsystem, there is scope to explore teacher-student relationships within this framework. Furthermore, the model accommodates discourses advocating a whole-

community approach to mental health and wellbeing and is helpful when examining pastoral care in education holistically. Additionally, this perspective offers the current study a framework for interrogating interpersonal, interagency, and interdisciplinary components across the ecosystem as teachers embed counselling within their teaching role.

2.5.2.2 One Good Adult

The important construct of *One Good Adult (OGA)* emerged from Irish research conducted by the first My World Survey study (Dooley & Fitzgerald, 2012). Findings of the second My World Survey, five years later, further support this hypothesis (Dooley et al., 2019). Together, these surveys represent the largest and most comprehensive studies of Irish youth mental health and wellbeing conducted to date with 14,000 and 19,000 participants respectively from across Ireland   (Dooley et al., 2019; Dooley & Fitzgerald, 2012).

One Good Adult refers to the idea that adolescents feel they have access to a supportive adult when in need. Dooley and Fitzgerald (2012, 2019) demonstrate that *One Good Adult* is a protective factor for mental health and wellbeing with findings showing adolescents with higher reported levels of support from a special adult are more likely to be within normal levels of anxiety and depression. They also show significantly higher levels of positive wellbeing indicators such as life satisfaction, optimism, self-esteem, and coping, than adolescents who report lower support levels. Additionally, findings indicate that this person can be a family member, close friend, or teacher (Dooley & Fitzgerald, 2012, 2019).

As these findings are correlational not longitudinal, *One Good Adult* is best understood as a useful predictor of positive coping and wellbeing but not necessarily a causal factor. The variables may however be linked

and studies of supportive adults, such as teachers, may yield deeper understandings of this important dimension of adolescent wellbeing.

Longitudinal data is available from the Growing Up in Ireland (GUI) study however, which has followed 8,500 children from primary school to post-primary school (Smyth, 2015). Findings firstly show that relationships with teachers are consistently important to primary and post-primary students and secondly, evidence significant association between teacher relations and the protective student wellbeing variable of self-image (Smyth, 2015).

Furthermore, a comprehensive review of educational research by Bernstein-Yamashiro et al. (2013) documents many important academic and educational outcomes associated with positive teacher-student relationships, including positive student engagement, behaviour, retention, academic performance, and school connectedness.

2.6 Scope of Embedded Counselling

2.6.1 Extent

It is estimated that more counselling occurs during informal situated interactions than professional therapy sessions (Charles-Edwards, 1989; Kennedy & Charles, 2001; McLeod, 2008). In a BACP professional editorial, Browne (2008, p. 2) noted that "the majority of counselling" occurs "in encounters with nurses, teachers, priests, social workers, youthworkers and others". Empirical studies have documented this embedded form of counselling by varied helpers, e.g., clergy (Eick, 2014; Osei-Tutu et al., 2019), debt advisors (Trygged, 2012), hairdressers (Milne & Mullin, 1987), nurses and doctors (Callens et al., 2014; Malan et al., 2015), paramedics (Macnab et al., 1999), peer relationship educators (Ketring et al., 2017), public health professionals (Nor et al., 2012),

teachers (Høigaard & Mathisen, 2008), social workers (Westlake, 2013), and university peer supports (Nozawa et al., 2019).

Common features of embedded counselling detailed across existing literature include:

- Interpersonal support
- Cost-effectiveness
- Cultural sensitivity
- Accessibility
- Rewards, challenges, and supports
- Research and practice potential

It remains as yet unknown whether many of these aspects of embedded counselling identified across international literature can transfer to an Irish context generally, or the Irish post-primary setting specifically, indicating the worth of further Irish research.

2.6.2 Interpersonal Support

The relationship between informal counsellor and client can contribute to positive health and wellbeing outcomes as illustrated by a Philippines clinical trial where Carandang et al. (2020) found good working alliances were formed between trained peer counsellors and older adult clients. These were characterised by volunteers' ability to form emotional connections and work collaboratively towards client-centred goals. Evaluating weekly home visits by these peer counsellors over a three-month mental health intervention with 132 clients, the authors reported positive outcomes, including significant improvements in depression and resilience, that were associated with strong working alliances. The importance of the interpersonal support provided by paraprofessional counsellors was also emphasised by Gupta and colleagues (2019). Reporting on a randomised controlled study, these authors showed that

regular interpersonal support by counselling trained nutritionists achieved significant improvements in infant feeding practices among 300 Indian mothers.

2.6.3 Cost-effectiveness

Cost-effectiveness of informal counselling by peers is highlighted by research on higher education counselling services with oversubscribed services that train college students as peer counsellors (Lekka et al., 2015; McLennan, 1991). Additionally, a Cochrane systematic review of randomised controlled trials of paraprofessional support for anxiety and depression reports significant effects for paraprofessionals compared to no treatment and the authors contend partial substitution of professionals by paraprofessionals may be a cost-effective solution for under resourced mental health services (Boer et al., 2010).

2.6.4 Cultural Sensitivity

Both cost-effectiveness and cultural sensitivity are important benefits of the innovative Friendship Bench project, a peer facilitated, culturally adapted, brief psychological intervention extended to over 70,000 people in Zimbabwe since 2006 (Munetsi et al., 2021). Trained and supervised lay health workers known as "mbuya hutano", meaning "community grandmothers", deliver CBT-based counselling in community settings, typically outdoors using customised seating (Munetsi et al., 2021, p. 1011). Programme evaluations evidence improved mental health and wellbeing outcomes in clients, and indicate the merits of "task shifting" from professionals to paraprofessionals (Chibanda et al., 2011, p. 828, 2016, p. 2618).

Separately, Grier-Reed (2013) studied therapeutic benefits of Black students' informal groups at mainly White American colleges emphasising the cultural sensitivity of indigenous psychosocial supports.

Mills et al. (2020) found peer-delivered group counselling for sixty-three South Asian parents of children with autism in Canada was a culturally responsive approach achieving high parental approval, attendance and enhanced mental health and wellbeing. Shared lived experiences and community membership emerged as valuable assets fostering counsellors' empathy and competence delivering responsive interventions in this and similarly, in a peer-led Aboriginal parenting programme in Australia (Munns et al., 2018). These studies suggest, as a within-group interaction, peer counselling may be considered a more acceptable support by some cultures and marginalised groups.

2.6.5 Accessibility

Alternatively, people receive embedded counselling from familiar, trusted, and accessible professionals within their community, e.g., priest (van Wyk, 2018), or teacher (Behrani, 2016; Falk, 2009; Greene Burton, 2005; Holliday, 2015). A survey of sixty-five African American clergy shows that 50-80% of their time involves counselling parishioners in what researchers contend is an important, culturally acceptable, and accessible source of mental health care (Anthony et al., 2015).

2.6.6 Rewards, Challenges, and Supports

In the only example of published research into embedded counselling practice on the island of Ireland identified by this literature search, a quantitative survey of thirty-two Northern Irish priests finds participants regard counselling as an important, rewarding, but tiring component of their work (O'Kane & Millar, 2001, 2002). Similar portrayal of the rewards and challenges of embedded counselling is evident in a narrative study of perceptions of four British psychotherapy trained teachers (Holliday, 2015). These teachers perceive their training contributes to improved job satisfaction, positive teacher-student relationships, and improved

academic outcomes. They attribute this to their counselling skills, personal development, and understanding of the emotional components of student behaviour. However, accounts also illuminate conflict with organisational values regarding discipline. Dissonance with organisational culture was similarly identified among several "significant barriers" to implementation of embedded counselling in a South African qualitative investigation of primary-care practitioners (Malan et al., 2015, p. 1). Other obstacles included lack of time, training, and language barriers.

Embedded counselling may involve high levels of challenge and complexity requiring sophisticated management of dual relations, often in multifaceted situations (McLeod, 2008; Reeves & Bond, 2021). Therefore, self-care, ongoing training, supervision, and practical organisational support is considered paramount for successful embedded counselling and avoiding occupational stress and burnout (O'Kane & Millar, 2002; Peltzer et al., 2014; Scully, 2011).

2.6.7 Research and Practice Potential

Notwithstanding these potential challenges, with adequate preparation, training, and supervision, embedded counselling has much to offer as a "humanizing factor" [sic] (McLeod, 2007, p.i) and valuable helping practice (McLeod & McLeod, 2011). Identified by Dryden (1985) as an emergent research field with promising applications, embedded counselling is supported by a growing body of knowledge across many disciplines (BACP, 2020c; McLeod & McLeod, 2014).

Such diversity indicates versatility and widespread utility and as outlined, several commonalities and challenges present across the research that may transfer to the Irish post-primary educational context. However, as many studies involve diverse contexts and interventions, or provide

limited detail about specific counselling skills, detailed comparisons are difficult. Unique factors within embedded counselling in an Irish post-primary educational context have yet to be explored indicating a gap in current research.

2.7 Embedded Counselling and Irish Post-Primary Education

2.7.1 Policy and Practice

2.7.1.1 National Educational Policy

Irish education policy defines the post-primary teacher's role as educational and holistic (Dept. Educ., 2019a; Teaching Council, 2016a). Education is comprehended as a broad, young-person centred endeavour involving the individual teacher and the school collective (Dept. Educ., 2024a). Teachers contribute to a whole-school approach to wellbeing providing a continuum of support for educational, social, emotional, behavioural, and learning needs of *All, Some, and Few* students (NEPS, 2010). This is informed by Wellbeing policy and curriculum that formalises the teacher's pastoral role and acknowledges that student support may require engagement with mental wellbeing (Dept. Educ., 2019b, 2024a; NEPS, 2021). Additionally, a whole-school Guidance Plan operates (Dept. Educ., 2024b) encompassing all personal and social development, educational guidance, and career guidance as stipulated by the 1998 Education Act (Dept. Educ., 2022b).

Many schools have an official support system known as a *Care Team*, *Pastoral Care Team*, or *Student Support Team* (Dept. Educ. NEPS, 2022). Teams include pastoral staff, guidance counsellors, management, etc., and have the overarching implementation function for whole-school wellbeing (NEPS, 2021). Members' role is to reassure stressed students

and signpost them to appropriate resources. Although the guidance counsellor member is required to have a formal qualification in counselling skills (Dept. Educ., 2022a), pastoral support "operates within the normal teacher-student relationship and does not require specialist skills." (Dept. Educ. NEPS, 2022, p. 10).

A clear misalignment is apparent within Irish educational pastoral and wellbeing policy whereby teachers are expected to provide holistic student support, including some mental health care, without mandated training and supports in place. A frontline teaching role is assumed that may place extensive demands upon teachers, raising questions regarding the sustainability and efficacy of existing policy and practice. Empirical examination of teachers' lived experiences of their pastoral work would bring much needed insight into this situation.

2.7.1.2 Teachers' Pastoral and Wellbeing Role

Gleeson's (2012) analysis of Irish qualitative and quantitative teaching practice research identifies altruism as a keystone of the profession and posits Irish teachers have long been committed to student welfare. Likewise, mixed-methods research of thirty Irish post-primary teachers shows 80% of teachers regard pastoral care as core within a holistic support role and many volunteer in pastoral activities (Hearne & Galvin, 2015). Similarly, qualitative research illustrates Irish post-primary teachers support wellbeing promotion in schools believing it helpful for adolescent stress and later adulthood (Byrne & Carthy, 2021). Furthermore, altruism is evident in Irish teachers' accounts of their commitment to supporting students during the Covid-19 lockdown (O'Toole & Simovska, 2021).

Wider discourses, in Ireland and internationally, advocate for community-based approaches to promoting adolescent wellness and

mental health, and emphasise the significant and potentially impactful role of teachers in the promotion of wellbeing (Dooley et al., 2015; Government of Ireland, 2020; Silke et al., 2024; UNICEF Innocenti, 2020). Teachers themselves recognise their role involves supporting students with personal issues including trauma and bereavement (Lynam et al., 2020; O'Toole & Dobutowitsch, 2023) and with mental health issues (Mazzer & Rickwood, 2015).

Teachers consider themselves to be "first responders" because they habitually observe student behaviour and academic performance and notice something amiss early on (Gunawardena et al., 2024, p. 173). They describe feeling on the "frontline" as they are the first to identify issues, equip students with coping strategies, and make onward referrals (Beames et al., 2022, p. 133). Furthermore, suicide prevention interventions identify schools as crucial, with teachers cast as gatekeepers delivering risk assessment and psychoeducation (McConnellogue & Storey, 2017; Singer et al., 2019). Interestingly, these studies reflect a narrative where teaching is increasingly represented and understood as a frontline mental health role.

Therefore, Irish education policies contribute to a culture in which post-primary teachers are expected to routinely contribute to wellbeing and pastoral care. Although considered a general role that does not require specialised skills, teachers are conscious of having frontline responsibilities, and this discrepancy between policy and practice may indicate a lack of structural support for teachers. Additional experiential research could illuminate this further.

2.7.2 Student Wellbeing and Mental Health Needs

Irish adolescents rank twenty-sixth for mental wellbeing outcomes out of the thirty-eight affluent Organisation for Economic Co-operation and

Development (OECD) and European Union (EU) countries assessed by UNICEF in a review of major international research (UNICEF Innocenti, 2020). One report author, Chzhen (2020), states that Irish youth have one of the lowest levels of life satisfaction and emphasises that low levels of life satisfaction among Irish 15-year-olds are more closely linked to a weak sense of school belonging than in other countries (Chzhen, 2020).

School belonging refers to students' perceived levels of inclusion, respect, and support from teachers and peers and is associated with positive educational and wellbeing outcomes (Allen et al., 2021). A systematic review and meta-analyses of fifty-one studies indicates teacher support is the strongest predictor of school belonging (Allen et al., 2018).

The empirical evidence of growing Irish adolescent mental health challenges is stark. For example, a 21% incidence of mental illness was identified among 12- to 18-year-olds by the Clonmel Project in the southeast of Ireland (Martin et al., 2006). Subsequently the 2012 My World Survey reported that one in three adolescents experienced raised levels of anxiety and depression nationally (Dooley et al., 2015; Dooley & Fitzgerald, 2012). My World Survey 2 confirms Irish adolescents have average scores for protective psychosocial variables including life satisfaction, school connectedness, and optimism, and these levels represent significant decreases compared to equivalent research five years earlier (Dooley et al., 2019, p. 128., p. 133).

More recently, Planet Youth survey, a cross-sectional, biannual study of 15,000 west of Ireland adolescents evidenced a decline in adolescent wellbeing and mental health between 2018 and 2022 and an increase in depressive tendencies (Silke et al., 2024). Analysis shows 47% of participants considered self-harming, 33% engaged in self-harm, 20% reported suicidal ideation, and 4% recently attempted suicide (Silke et al., 2023). These figures from large-scale in-depth research, demonstrate

that a sizeable and escalating proportion of many Irish teachers' students are grappling with significant worries and challenges to their wellbeing, including perceived lack of support in school. This represents a considerable occupational demand and potential stressor for teachers. It is vitally important to examine how Irish teachers experience working with these students and what might impact teachers' experiences when tasked with their pastoral care.

2.7.3 Teacher Experiences of Wellbeing Work

2.7.3.1 Negative emotions and distress

A mixed-methods investigation identifies widespread feelings of inadequacy, worry, and helplessness among 117 Norwegian post-primary teachers in relation to supporting students with mental health difficulties (Ekornes, 2017). The authors report perceived competence and perceived responsibility are significant predictors for negative emotions and suggest that a discrepancy between teachers' feelings of competence and responsibility exacerbates stress.

 Similarly, fear, helplessness, sadness, shock, and worry are among the difficult emotions experienced by Irish teachers who encounter self-harm among post-primary students according to Dowling and Doyle (2017). Reporting on qualitative research, they note some teachers additionally describe negative, judgmental attitudes towards self-harming students demonstrating lack of empathy. Participants' accounts show they continue to worry about students outside of work which negatively impacts home life. This experience is echoed by Scottish teachers who report high levels of anxiety and fear about students' mental health such that their own wellbeing is affected (Stoll & McLeod, 2020).

Authors of these studies suggest mental health training may ameliorate teacher stress from wellbeing work, and results indicate this is recommended by many teachers (Dowling & Doyle, 2017; Ekornes, 2017; Stoll & McLeod, 2020).

2.7.3.2 Lack of Time

Goodwin and colleagues' (2021) systematic review identifies seven high-quality published papers examining teachers' experiences of school wellbeing and mental health intervention. Their analysis identifies time as a barrier to implementing wellbeing initiatives across most studies and this is linked to prioritising other academic subjects within schools.

Wellbeing promotion is similarly viewed as a "time-thief" by some teachers who describe being aware of struggling students but torn between academic and non-academic demands due to high workloads (Ekornes, 2017, p. 333). Other frustrated teachers describe working in reactive rather than proactive ways, responding only to small numbers of critical situations rather than reaching all students (Stoll & McLeod, 2020).

Irish post-primary teachers' views are captured in a comprehensive study by Byrne and Carthy (2021) that gathered rich data pertaining to diverse aspects of wellbeing provision through thematic analysis of interviews with eleven teachers across Ireland. Researchers found time and workload is also an issue for Irish teachers. Compared to the aforementioned findings however, these Irish teachers perceive mandated administration and reporting generated by wellbeing promotion as a burden that curtails active student support time.

2.7.3.3 Insufficient Training

Qualitative research captures perceptions of forty-eight Canadian post-primary staff, mainly teachers, exploring their contribution and potential

as student supports (Dimitropoulos et al., 2022). Findings illuminate a dilemma as teachers believe they can positively influence student wellbeing but feel uncertain about taking this responsibility, perceiving they have insufficient expertise and training.

Lack of "teacher comfortability" emerges as a similar difficulty in an inclusive qualitative study of Irish students', teachers', and parents' experiences of wellbeing and sexuality programmes (Lodge et al., 2022, p. 171). The teachers interviewed specifically cite lack of formal Social, Personal, and Health Education (SPHE) qualification and absence of mandated SPHE curriculum as contributing to low professional confidence and fear of parental criticism. Byrne and Carthy (2021) reported comparable teacher reservations about Irish wellbeing curriculum that teachers attributed to lack of training.

Additionally, Byrne and colleagues' (2021) study identifies time-related barriers to accessing wellbeing training among practicing teachers, specifically, difficulty assigning time for training due to workload, and reluctance to attend courses outside school hours. The research found that Irish teachers value wellbeing provision in principle but in practice are unfamiliar with wellbeing policy and curriculum, disinclined to access relevant Continuous Professional Development (CPD), and tend to offer student support from a personal or "atheoretical" perspective (Byrne & Carthy, 2021, p. 9). Irish teachers may currently therefore be under-equipped to engage in pastoral support effectively and may be at greater risk from pressure and burnout stemming from this role.

Research of teachers' experiences of mental health training shows that it is significantly linked to improved perceived competence in wellbeing provision (Ekornes, 2017). However, training gaps are identified across many Irish and international studies as teachers seek practical skills for working with mental health issues in school settings (Doikou &

Diamandidou, 2011; Hornby & Atkinson, 2003; Roe & Ambrose, 2022; Stenson et al., 2018).

One approach to meeting this need proposed by teachers in Scotland is provision of in-service counselling training for teachers (Stoll & McLeod, 2020). Counselling skills training for teachers is next examined in Section 2.7.4 in which historical, policy, and empirical components will be presented.

2.7.4 Counselling Skills Training for Teachers

2.7.4.1 Historical Perspectives

This section spotlights influences from the helping skills movement and Rogerian person-centred counselling upon developments in counselling skills training for teachers.

Helping skills programmes, originating around the 1970's, were based on person-centred and social learning principles and participants learned basic interpersonal techniques to enhance lay helping roles. This movement, targeted at parents, teachers, and paraprofessionals, has been described as "giving psychology away" (Larson, 1984). Teacher Effectiveness Training, for example, designed in 1974 to help teachers to democratise their classrooms, covered application of empathy, listening skills, and problem-solving strategies in schools, and was delivered to over 30,000 teachers across America, with positive outcomes including improved student attendance (Gordon, 1984).

Aspy and Roebuck created in-service teacher training programmes that applied "technologies that developed from counselling processes" and enhanced teachers' empathy, congruence, and positive regard (Aspy et al., 2014, p. 113). Their seminal work over ten years analysed 200,000 hours of teacher performance in eight countries and demonstrated a correlation between teacher person-centredness and improved student

outcomes including academic performance, attendance, confidence, and self-concept (Aspy & Roebuck, 1977). Comparable findings were achieved by Tausch and colleagues in multiple major German studies reporting on teacher training that fostered person-centred teacher qualities of "warm respect and non-direct teaching" and were significantly correlated with positive student outcomes e.g., intellectual engagement and autonomy (Tausch, 2014, p. 119).

Carl Rogers contended that significant learning takes place within relationships characterised by person-centred core conditions of empathy, congruence, and unconditional positive regard (Rogers, 1957, 1961b). His final writings, published posthumously in collaboration with therapist and education expert Harold Lyon, highlight the significant body of research affirming the value of person-centred principles, practices, and training in education (Rogers et al., 2014).

In particular, the authors emphasise the contribution of Cornelius-White's (2007) synthesis of studies from 1948 to 2004 encompassing 350,000 students and 15,000 teachers (Rogers et al., 2014, p.p. 33, 45, 164). Cornelius-White defined person-centred education as "a counseling-originated, educational psychology model … that posits that positive teacher-student relationships are associated with optimal, holistic learning.", and his analysis confirmed correlations for student verbal and mathematical achievement, Intelligence Quotient (IQ), critical thinking, engagement, motivation, satisfaction, attendance, reduced misbehaviour, self-esteem, and social belonging, among others (Cornelius-White, 2007, p. 113).

These studies represent a person-centred tradition in teacher counselling skills training with a strong empirical underpinning. It is important to question whether these approaches still have relevance in contemporary education, particularly in an Irish context. Research

examining current teacher experiences with counselling skills training and practice would valuably extend this literature.

2.7.4.2 National Teacher-Training Policy and Practice

Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in Ireland is delivered through professionally accredited higher education programmes (Teaching Council, 2021). National standards, Céim, delineate required programme standards and core elements including *Global Citizenship Education* (within which *Wellbeing* is a subsidiary component) and *Professional Relationships and working with parents* (Teaching Council, 2020). Qualified teachers meet graduate learning outcomes including professional skills, knowledge, and understanding of *Communication and Relationship-building* (Teaching Council, 2020).

In research illuminating impacts of ITE, a survey of 354 student teachers across the island of Ireland examined experiences of supporting pupils while on placement (Lynam et al., 2020). Results indicate that pre-service teachers perceive they have a wellbeing role but feel underqualified and believe their initial education fails to prepare them for this work. This finding is supported by research in which Irish and Northern Irish principals, initial teacher educators, and qualified teachers highlight a gap in skills and recommend introduction of a practical mental health module during ITE (Stenson et al., 2018). Both studies predate the revised 2020 Céim training standards and it will be important to see future critical evaluations of this framework. However the findings of Lynam et al. (2020) and Stenson et al. (2018) have relevance when considering the experiences of practicing teachers.

The Irish framework for teachers' professional learning, Cosán, endorses lifelong learning for in-service teachers, but prescribed CPD hours to maintain registration is not mandated. In Cosán, teachers have

autonomy regarding completion of learning activities from within six pre-designated learning areas, including wellbeing (Teaching Council, 2016b). Typically, teachers access CPD through regional Education Support Centres, higher education institutions, and the Department of Education resource portal, Oide (Dept. Educ., 2021).

The Educate Together Nurture Schools Project is one example of a trauma informed CPD programme for teachers that has been delivered in recent years through Blackrock Education Support Centre (Nurture Ireland, 2021). One Irish expert in trauma-informed education, O'Toole (2023, p. 125), has described the move by teachers to seek this type of mental health CPD as "organic" and "bottom-up", reflecting absence of any standardised or policy-driven programme of education for wellbeing provision. A teacher-led, ad-hoc engagement with wellbeing training seems to exist in Ireland but there is very limited research to verify this and the impacts of current CPD offerings, including counselling skills training, and experiences of teachers are unknown.

2.7.4.3 Pre-Service Counselling Skills Training

Beyond Ireland, Katsatasri (2022) evaluates an undergraduate counselling skills module for student teachers in Thailand incorporating counselling principles, theory, and practice. The thirty-two prospective teachers that participated perceived the training as beneficial and demonstrated statistically significant improvement in counselling skills post training. Furthermore, research of 178 Estonian student teachers reports improved counselling self-efficacy following pre-service counselling training (Seema, 2021).

Additionally, a qualitative study of pre-service counselling training investigated six student-teachers' experiences of mandatory personal therapy within an undergraduate counselling skills elective in Singapore

(Kit & Tang, 2018). Grounded theory analysis illustrates positive teacher outcomes including enhanced self-awareness, openness towards counselling, and confidence in supporting students with counselling skills (Kit & Tang, 2018).

2.7.4.4 In-Service Counselling Skills Training

The development of counselling skills by in-service teachers is associated with openness to adopting a counselling role with students and greater counselling self-efficacy (Seema, 2021; Sprinthall, 1982), as well as improved teacher-student relationships, and student academic outcomes (Holliday, 2015). Eastmon (1995) states British teacher confidence applying counselling skills is enhanced through participation in one-day workshops that develop existing skills and teach a five-stage helping model. Similarly, Doikou and Diamandidou's (2011) evaluation of a twelve-hour Rogerian skills teacher training in Greece evidenced improved teacher confidence in listening skills and responsiveness to students' emotional needs. However, the authors note limited long-term benefits, possibly due to the programme's brevity and non-directive emphasis.

In comparison, mixed-methods evaluation of a thirty-hour postgraduate counselling skills module reports significant changes in British teachers' counselling skills twelve months post-training with no significant changes immediately after training (Hall et al., 1996, p. 385). However, Hargie (1984) demonstrates skills acquisition at the empirically significant level by qualified Northern Irish teachers directly upon completion of a part-time counselling microskills module over fourteen weeks.

These studies offer valuable insight into the positive viability and impacts of counselling skills training for teachers. Additional research is needed

to further knowledge in this area and ensure optimal programme design and delivery is achieved. The Irish post-primary school context may additionally present unique requirements to teachers embedding counselling with consequent implications for teacher education and policy. Phenomenological research with these teachers would be highly advantageous in this regard.

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter has appraised the literature pertaining to embedded counselling with a focus on Irish post-primary education and the experiences of teachers and students in relation to pastoral care, mental health, and embedded counselling by teachers. It has traced the history of counselling skills from twentieth century vocational guidance to twenty-first century embedded counselling. The literature review has identified theories, definitions, and policy central to the current study and has examined key empirical research in this field.

The literature demonstrates the scope of embedded counselling as an effective, versatile, and cost-efficient resource in various settings including community work, education, and healthcare, where provision of emotional support contributes to wellbeing of others. Practitioners embedding counselling can provide empathic connection and care and widen access to mental health support.

Research reviewed suggests substantial numbers of post-primary students across Ireland are struggling with emotional pressures and worries. Irish adolescents are reporting extremely concerning, increasing levels of anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation with only average levels of protective wellbeing factors including school belonging.

Within current discourses, the Irish post-primary teacher is regarded as *One Good Adult* in the lives of their students. They have a pastoral remit

in the context of a whole-school approach to supporting student wellbeing that often requires a level of mental health awareness and care. However, studies evidence teacher stress and concerns in relation to wellbeing provision with many highlighting perceived lack of training.

Empirical findings support the use of counselling skills training for teachers as this has been linked to various positive emotional and academic student outcomes, including resilience, and positive teacher outcomes, including confidence providing emotional support to students. It is not known however, if Irish post-primary teachers are engaging in counselling skills training and embedding counselling within their roles, or what the impacts of such practice might be.

There are significant gaps in research pertaining to teachers embedding counselling generally, and a lack of studies of Irish post-primary teachers to date. Areas warranting further examination include embedded counselling practices, wellbeing outcomes, training, structural support, professional and policy impacts.

The objectives of the current research seek to explore Irish post-primary teachers' lived experiences embedding counselling and are strongly aligned with these gaps in knowledge. With limited qualitative studies available, deeper understanding of experiences of Irish teachers embedding counselling would clearly be valuable considering the seriousness of identified wellbeing needs and concerns among teachers and students. Furthermore, new knowledge could lay the foundation for further research and policy development within this field in Ireland and may contribute to or challenge existing understandings of embedded counselling more broadly, in what is a growing research area.

The current study, therefore, seeks to employ interpretative phenomenological analysis to illuminate lived experiences of Irish post-

primary teachers engaged in embedded counselling. This research will directly expand the minimal phenomenological insights within extant literature. The addition of a new Irish perspective to current understanding of this important field is of central importance with anticipated benefits for practitioners and help-seekers across educational, counselling, and wider communities through practical enhancements and reforms in teaching and counselling education, practice, policy, and research.

2.9 Researcher's Reflective Comment

Initially, I felt frustrated by the breadth of literature on counselling skills, with its multiple terms, and seeming inconsistencies. Over time, I found that qualitative accounts of lived experiences deepened my understandings, quantitative data added stark objective detail, and conceptual pieces brought clarity and structure. My readings of earlier work from original proponents of "giving therapy away" (Gendlin, 1984, p. 287) generated a sense of connection to a professional heritage that felt exciting and meaningful, while also stirring up many questions about contemporary possibilities. Was this approach still useful today, and within Irish post-primary schools for instance? And why might the counselling profession have given less attention to this branch of practice within research and policy?

Two areas in the literature resonated strongly with me. Firstly, as a Humanistic psychotherapist, I was attentive to my professional affinity with person-centredness and recognised this might bias my reading of the literature. Secondly, as a psychotherapist, lecturer, and mother, I found myself deeply moved by the level of adolescent distress evident in the literature. It was helpful to take a mindful position here, attempting

to let go of any attachments I had to this material, and bring balance and openness in (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998).

Discussions about the literature helped me to develop further balance, clarity, and focus. Making presentations to my undergraduate students, to peers at a research conference, and discussions with my clinical and research supervisors were vital opportunities in this regard.

Writing this chapter felt like making a jigsaw puzzle without a template, from a box of mixed-up pieces from multiple jigsaws, and as such has been arduous, absorbing, and ultimately satisfying as it gradually came together. As the final picture emerged from the literature, I had a strong sense of the significance and usefulness of this topic and felt excited about what might come from the research.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter opens with a restatement of the research aim and objectives. The rationale for selecting the present research methodology will be explicated alongside a critical commentary on the conceptual basis of the approach employed. The epistemology applied in this project will be examined together with detailed accounts of data gathering and analytic procedures. This account is supported by multiple illustrations and appendices. Evaluation of ethical considerations and research validity and rigour follows. The researcher's reflective comment concludes the chapter.

3.1 The Research Question, Aim, and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to explore lived experiences of embedded counselling among post-primary teachers in Ireland. It seeks to achieve this in response to the research question, "How do teachers make sense of embedding counselling skills into their primary role?". This experiential investigation of teachers with counselling skills represents a much-needed contribution to literature within the field of embedded counselling where this perspective is minimal. The current focus on experiences of Irish teachers is particularly opportune since there have been no empirical studies of embedded counselling among Irish teachers to date. This study has four objectives that guide the overall methodological choices described across this chapter.

The objectives are:

- To capture teachers' lived experiences of embedding counselling skills.
- To discover the meanings that teachers attribute to embedding counselling skills.
- To explore how teachers experience the impact of embedding counselling skills.
- To illuminate teachers' perceptions of dual counselling and teaching roles.

3.2 Determining the Research Design and Methodology

3.2.1 A Qualitative Approach

The phenomenological research focus of the present study required the application of an apposite research strategy. When researching "different aspects of the therapy context" that can range from attitudes to outcomes, it is important to consider the relevance of possible methodologies and methods (Timulak, 2008, p. 166). This project sought to explore and appreciate the unique experiences of teachers who had first-hand involvement with embedded counselling and aimed to bring their distinctive lived expertise to light. It was not interested in quantifying their actions in any way, but rather aimed to capture and faithfully depict what this practice is like for this specific cohort. Therefore, quantitative methodologies were not considered fitting as their "objectivist ontology" and "positivist epistemology" was not compatible with the aim of the current study which did not seek to measure variables, test hypotheses, or produce a universally applicable truth (Bryman, 2016, p. 32).

For instance, a quantitative approach to investigating this topic area could have been to conduct a quantitative survey of teachers in Ireland that are embedding counselling skills. This could have generated informative data regarding how many Irish teachers were engaged in embedded counselling for instance, or examined any statistical correlations between variables e.g., teacher gender and counselling self-efficacy. However, this nomothetic approach would have failed to capture, listen to, and illuminate the unique experiences of individual teachers embedding counselling skills in their own particular contexts as reflected in the aim and objectives of this research. Instead, an idiographic perspective, potentially yielding rich and novel teacher viewpoints, was more suitable, and notably, has been somewhat under-explored within counselling literature to date. Accordingly, the researcher ultimately selected a qualitative methodology.

A qualitative approach was more appropriate as this is concerned with the meaning that experiences and interactions have for people and produces rich and resonant descriptions of the experiences of small numbers of individuals, often drawing from words they themselves use in interviews or written narratives (McLeod, 2022) rather than numerical data (Braun & Clarke, 2013). It is a research "paradigm" (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 4) in which subjective meanings, language, and interpretation are core (Willig & Rogers, 2017) and is more closely aligned with the current research question than a quantitative approach. Furthermore, a qualitative approach adds value to the current research as it affords compelling insights into human processes and complex interpersonal contexts that may contribute to practice and policy developments, but which may be lost within statistical analyses (Smith et al., 2022, p. 123).

Qualitative research is considered a very suitable approach to undertaking research about counselling practice and can shed light on

"professional knowledge" (McLeod, 2022, p. 159), counselling processes, and the meaning of counselling experiences (McLeod, 2022, p. 93). For this study, of a distinct experience in a distinct context, a contextual qualitative research approach was chosen that rejects the realist view that an objective reality can be identified and quantified, and that comprehends people's context and their distinctive, subjective, positionalities including that of the researcher (Haslam & McGarty, 2019; Sanders & Wilkins, 2010). A contextual qualitative approach aligned with the current focus on the unique and situated experiences of Irish post-primary teachers within Irish post-primary schools where they embed counselling skills within their teaching role.

Discursive and experiential research approaches both operate within this paradigm. However, discursive qualitative approaches that examine people's use of language to construct meaning and reality (Reicher, 2000) were considered less suitable for this study that was instead concerned with unique experiences and meaning making. Discourse Analysis is an example of a discursive method that investigates linguistic, conversational and cultural dynamics of language use rather than psychological experiences (Avdi & Georgaca, 2007). It follows that Discourse Analysis would not have lent itself to this project exploring individuals' personal sense-making of their embedded counselling practice.

It was appropriate instead to choose an experiential qualitative approach that would prioritise people's meaning-making of their personal experiences (Smith & Nizza, 2022, p. 6). For instance, a Grounded Theory approach could have investigated teachers' experiences along with other sources of information to generate a theory about the research topic from, or grounded in, the data (Gill, 2020). However, creating an explanatory theory was not the focus of this study (Starks & Brown

Trinidad, 2007). Furthermore, several counselling skills models have already been advanced, including a skills competency framework developed using Grounded Theory and other methods (BACP, 2020c).

In contrast, the objectives of this study necessitated the use of a research approach that could establish a robust descriptive testimony of teachers' experiences of their practice, namely a phenomenological approach (Gill, 2020).

3.2.2 A Phenomenological Approach

Phenomenological research approaches are aligned with the European philosophical movement of Phenomenology which takes the view that "an essential perceived reality with common features" exists (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007, p. 1373). These can be accessed through the study of phenomena as they are subjectively perceived, thus arriving as close as is possible to the essential nature of life (Moustakas, 1994). Originally developed by Husserl, the phenomenological approach was extended by Heidegger who claimed that phenomenology cannot be revealed without recourse to interpretation (Shinebourne, 2011). Thus, a Heideggerian stance in research combines hermeneutics with phenomenology and recognises the role that interpretation and context play in the research process.

When determining the most apposite research methodology for the present study, this researcher held that her investigation of embedded counselling among teachers was inherently informed and shaped by her own lived experiences of embedded counselling based upon a career in higher education teaching counselling to diverse professionals. She acknowledged her position as a professional counsellor informed by paradigms and discourses within professional counselling. The hermeneutic phenomenological stance extended a way to authentically

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explore and dependably represent teachers' experiences of embedding counselling and a means to both embrace and suspend the effect of the researcher's lifeworld upon the investigation itself. Hermeneutic analysis,

> always has a circular structure: it starts out from our general sense of what things are all about, uses that background of understanding in order to interpret particular phenomena, and on the basis of these concrete interpretations revises its initial general sense of what things mean. (Guignon, 2012, p. 98)

It was therefore concluded that Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), an approach that sees "phenomenological inquiry as an interpretative process" (Shinebourne, 2011, p. 18) would be the most suitable contextual qualitative methodology for the study.

3.2.3 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2022) state that IPA is phenomenologically informed and draws on the work of key thinkers from this school of philosophy. These include Husserl and Heidegger among others (Smith et al., 2022). Secondly, and again influenced by Heidegger, there is a strong emphasis on hermeneutics that comprehends pre-existing perspectives held by the interpreter and suggests that reflexive interpretation can contribute to a deeper understanding of phenomena (Shinebourne, 2011).

Hence a hermeneutic phenomenology guides the researcher in their engagement with the data in a process described as a "double hermeneutic" (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p. 53). The researcher brings both empathic and analytic thinking to bear upon the participant's narrative during their interpretation. Accordingly IPA is an interpretative phenomenological research approach that accepts the dynamic, inseparable, researcher-phenomenon relationship (Willig, 2013).

Finally, the approach is idiographic in that it focuses on understanding the singular as opposed to the general or nomothetic (Shinebourne, 2011). It is interested in human experiences of significance to the individual and is well placed to study complex, emotional, interpersonal, existential, and value-laden occurrences in people's lives such as identity or relationships (Smith, 2004). Therefore, the analysis is directed toward appreciating in depth the meanings and descriptions offered by a single case to get to the heart of an individual's lived experience of the phenomena. At the same time, IPA accepts the interrelatedness of individuals and posits that general conceptual elements may be shared by individuals across similar contexts and can be identified through reflexive analysis of small sets of cases with common experiences (Brocki & Wearden, 2006).

In practice, an IPA study seeks to explore the subjective experience of a phenomenon through the collection and analysis of first-person accounts offered by individuals with lived experience of it and to whom this experience matters greatly. Sample sizes are small, typically between one and twelve participants, and a tentative but systematic process of analysis, deduction, and comparison is followed to firstly study each case in isolation and to then explore any variations or similarities across the whole sample. Experiential themes that emerge from the data are collated and participants' words embodying their meanings are highlighted in the findings giving voice to participants (Larkin et al., 2006).

The IPA researcher also cares greatly about the phenomenon in question and their position throughout the project will be an absorbed, engaged, reflexive, and creative one (Smith, 2004). This researcher has a long-standing involvement and strong interest in embedded counselling that motivated her to initiate the current study. The fact that IPA can comprehend the researcher's subjective relationship with the research

area resonated with this researcher and contributed further to her selection of this methodology.

A strength of this methodology is that established protocols for conducting an IPA study have been published by the originators within which there is scope for flexibility provided that the spirit of IPA is retained (Smith et al., 2022). The body of published IPA studies demonstrates this adaptability and evidences a robust, systematic qualitative methodology. Moreover, the validity and quality of IPA studies can be assessed using well established criteria (Levitt et al., 2018; Yardley, 2000).

Although some critics have challenged some aspects of this methodology (Brocki & Wearden, 2006; Willig, 2013), these critiques have been comprehensively defended by the originators of this approach (Smith et al., 2022; Smith, 2010, 2018) and the establishment of quality standards specific to this methodology additionally contribute to its trustworthiness (Larkin & Thompson, 2011; Nizza et al., 2021). Furthermore, Halling (2021) writes that it is more constructive to evaluate IPA by appraising the positive contributions of IPA research outputs instead of labouring its philosophical roots.

IPA has been successfully employed to study the experiences of teachers supporting students with mental health difficulties (Stoll & McLeod, 2020) demonstrating its suitability in the current research area. Additionally, as an approach that explores experiences in context (Shinebourne, 2011, p. 25), it is a highly suitable methodology with which to study embedded counselling, an activity that is always context dependent (BACP, 2020b). Furthermore, this chosen methodology examines both convergences and divergences in the participants' experiences and this adds coherence and validity to research findings by

ensuring that all data, including disconfirming data, is examined (Drisko, 1997; Smith et al., 2022).

In summary, the use of IPA within the current study strengthens the aims of this research as it is a well-established, rigorous research methodology that is appropriately aligned with the research subject and context and can be comprehensively evaluated.

3.3 Procedures and considerations conducting the IPA study

3.3.1 Data Gathering

3.3.1.1 Designing the Interview

In-depth one-to-one semi-structured interviews were chosen as a suitable means of gathering teachers' accounts of embedding counselling. The researcher developed an interview guide detailing open-ended questions and probes (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015) and signposting a consistent interview structure to include informed consent and debriefing (Appendix A). In keeping with the idiographic emphasis of IPA, this schedule was not intended as a script to be rigidly adhered to. The researcher anticipated responsively adapting the schedule by following the teacher's lead and empathically exploring meaningful narratives that arose.

Open-ended questions that would elicit rich and personal accounts of teacher's experiences of embedded counselling and address the objectives of the study were developed. These were shaped through discussions with supervisors and a pilot study. Additionally in an iterative process common to IPA studies, the researcher refashioned some questions across the series of interviews to personalise them, or when new learning from one interview informed the next (Smith et al., 2022).

For example, during early interviews the researcher observed that teachers sought reassurance when speaking about their counselling skills and that they did not seem aware of the concept of embedded counselling, perceiving they were alone in this practice. Responding to this tentativeness, the researcher included more positive encouragers and acknowledgements of the teacher's contribution to the research throughout subsequent interviews.

3.3.1.2 Achieving Ethical Approval

From the outset, all practical, technical, legal, and ethical aspects were considered at length by the researcher in consultation with supervisors. All fieldwork documentation was prepared in advance and submitted for approval to Dublin City University (DCU) Research Ethics Committee (REC) and DCU Data Protection Unit (DPU). REC ethical approval for the study was granted prior to commencement of participant recruitment or fieldwork (Appendix B) and was conditional upon meeting DPU approval. This was achieved following DPU review of a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) screening questionnaire and determination that the data protection approach to the project was appropriate and robust. Both review processes were initiated concurrently and took four months to conclude.

3.3.1.3 Piloting the Interview

A stepped approach was taken to piloting the interview schedule (Sanders & Wilkins, 2010). This included accessing peer and supervisor feedback before completing a pilot interview with a volunteer teacher from within the researcher's professional network. This was a valuable reflexive opportunity for the researcher to note her preconceptions of the phenomenon and gain confidence as an interviewer. Minor

amendments followed e.g., reduction in questions and substitution of more accessible language.

Finally, as recommended by Smith et al. (2022), the first interview with a research participant was conducted as a second pilot contingent to supervisor feedback on the transcript. It was decided subsequently that no further substantial changes were needed, and this interview was included within the overall study.

3.3.1.4 Participant Sampling

In concurrence with the idiographic focus of IPA, a sample size of eight was chosen. This allowed deep exploration of teachers' unique phenomenological experiences of embedding counselling, and was considered appropriate for a professional doctorate (Smith et al., 2022). Attending to the specific experiences of teachers embedding counselling required a homogenous sample whereby the cohort comprised of teachers with experiences in common (Smith et al., 2009). This sample was chosen purposively, intentionally selecting participants with relevant experience and open to sharing their insights (Smith & Nizza, 2022).

To achieve this homogenous, purposive sample, participants met the following inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Inclusion criteria:

- A qualified post-primary teacher employed in a teaching role in the Republic of Ireland who identified as using counselling skills informally within their teaching role.
- Who had completed a counselling skills course at foundation level or higher at least 1 year prior to the date of interview. i.e., qualifications at QQI level 6 or equivalent (QQI, 2014; see Section 3.3.1.4.1 and Tables 3.1 and 3.3).

- Who had fluent spoken English to facilitate the capture of rich, descriptive, first-person accounts that the researcher could understand and work with.

Exclusion criteria:

Qualified teachers employed full-time in a professional counselling or pastoral school role without any teaching component were not eligible to participate as the research focus was teachers embedding counselling skills within a primary general teaching role. Teachers with professional or personal relationship to the researcher were not eligible to participate minimising any obligation upon participants to filter their data due to social pressure.

Counselling training and practice profiles of the eight eligible and participating teachers are presented in Table 3.3. All had completed foundational, or higher, counselling skills training, half were pursuing further counselling studies, half were accredited counsellors, and two were in independent psychotherapy practice.

3.3.1.4.1 Note regarding QQI Levels for counselling training

The QQI Award Standards for Counselling and Psychotherapy are **academic** standards and apply to counselling programmes validated by those higher education institutions in Ireland authorised to confer awards under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012, for example universities (QQI, 2014). Additionally, several non-statutory **professional** accreditation training standards are implemented by various voluntary counselling professional bodies, for example IACP (Feldstein, 2011). Professional counselling programmes in Ireland generally adhere to one or both types of standards and while short paraprofessional counselling skills courses typically meet the QQI Level 6 standard or equivalent, their content/duration is not

standardised (Table 3.1; Careers Portal, 2024; Courses.ie, 2024; Nightcourses.com, 2024). A personal therapy requirement for trainees is not stipulated within the QQI standards (QQI, 2014) but is usually required for professionally accredited programmes (e.g., IACP, 2024) and may or may not be mandated within paraprofessional courses.

Table 3.1

Overview of Irish QQI Counselling Training Standards

	QQI Level 6	QQI Level 7	QQI Level 8	QQI Level 9
Qualification	Certificate	Bachelor's degree (Ordinary)	Bachelor's degree (Honours)	Master's degree
Typical duration (part-time & full-time)	10 weeks/ 30 hours to 2 years	3 years	4 years	2 to 4 years
Scope of counselling knowledge	Broad & foundational	Specialised	Specialised & detailed	Advanced & critical
Scope of counselling skills practice	Elementary simulated skills demonstration	Directly supervised clinical practice with volunteers	Supervised & independent clinical practice	Supervised & independent practice with complex cases
Supervised client-work on placement	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Eligibility for professional accreditation	No	No	Yes	Yes
Indicative ECTS	20 to 60	180	240	90 to 120

Note: ECTS = European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System whereby 60 ECTS credits are the equivalent of a full year of study or work (European Commission, 2022).

3.3.1.5 Recruiting Participants

Recruiting participants involved publicising the study nationally in a multi-pronged, staged approach and engaging with teachers that responded confirming inclusion criteria, informed consent, and interview arrangements.

In the absence of any one body representing embedded counselling teachers a broad recruitment strategy was needed to reach suitable participants among Ireland's 32,450 post-primary teachers (Government of Ireland, 2024). Snowballing was also employed (Bryman, 2016) whereby teachers referred others from their own contacts.

On advice from the Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland (ASTI) the researcher contacted various teaching organisations and education providers requesting they publicise the study through their contacts. A recruitment advertisement (Appendix C) and accompanying text (Appendix D) were provided, and organisations circulated this through email, newsletter, social media, or direct communications with school principals. Organisations included:

- Thirty Education Support Centres
- The Religion Teachers Association of Ireland
- Two Initial Teacher Education providers

Sixteen counselling skills education providers were similarly asked for their assistance in reaching potential participants among their graduates.

Recruitment was conducted over ten months until a total of eight suitable teachers was achieved. Two additional teachers volunteered that did not meet the selection criteria regarding counselling training and a third volunteered but did not proceed beyond the informed consent stage.

The researcher followed up with all organisations several times instigating repeated posting of the advertisement. Based upon the modest level of engagement through these organisations and in recognition of the profile of teachers that initially volunteered, a wider recruitment strategy was developed involving advertising through special education teachers' organisations, professional counselling organisations, and providers of professional counselling supervision and continuous professional development. REC approval was granted for these initiatives following submission of a REC amendment request. Overall, sixty organisations were contacted, approximately forty percent of whom agreed to publicise the research, and it is estimated that the advertisement was circulated to several thousand teachers and counsellors.

The limited uptake among teachers may reflect various considerations. For instance, it is possible that few teachers with the background specified in the advertisement currently work in Ireland. Alternatively, although the researcher had taken great care in the advertisement design, it may not have appealed or clearly conveyed the nature of the study to teachers. It was challenging to ensure optimal timing of advertising due to frequency and length of school holidays when teachers may not have wished to volunteer. But equally teachers may have been too busy to volunteer during term time. There may have been a reluctance among teachers to participate in research conducted outside their primary discipline, or a lack of interest among teachers in research in general (Gleeson, 2012). Nevertheless, a low response rate is not atypical for this cohort and similar patterns have been reported elsewhere in research with Irish teachers (Byrne & Carthy, 2021; O'Toole & Dobutowitsch, 2023).

The researcher engaged several times with each teacher by phone or email in advance of their interview. The purpose of these conversations was to build rapport and to fully explain the nature of the research and what volunteering would entail (Smith et al., 2022, p. 61). Teachers were furnished with a Plain Language Statement (Appendix E) and Informed Consent Form (Appendix F) and were given ample opportunity to ask questions and reach their decision. The researcher made sure that teachers were volunteering freely and without coercion from any gatekeepers. Contextual and demographic information (Tables 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, and 3.5) collected at this stage, e.g., teacher's counselling qualification, pastoral duties etc. informed the phrasing of some of the interview questions and optimised the use of time during the interview such that the lifeworld of the teacher was held centrally throughout.

Table 3.2

Participant Profiles

Participant pseudonym	Age range (years)	Gender identity	Years of teaching experience
Brigid	40-50	Female	< 25
Carol	50-60	Female	< 25
Hazel	30-40	Female	< 15
Jasmine	40-50	Female	< 20
Kevin	40-50	Cis-Male	< 30
Noah	50-60	Male	< 35
Rosetta	50-60	Female	< 10
Skyler	30-40	Female	< 15

Table 3.3

Participants' Counselling Qualifications and Accreditations

Highest counselling qualification	Number of teachers
QQI Level 6	1
QQI Level 8	1
QQI Level 9	6
Types of counselling qualification [a]	
Cognitive behaviour therapy	1
Integrative psychotherapy	6
Introductory counselling skills	3
Other counselling specialisms e.g., addiction	4
Professional accreditation	
Accredited counsellors	4 [b]
Non-accredited counsellors	4

Note: N = 8 Teachers

[a] *Most teachers held several counselling qualifications, e.g., a foundational counselling certificate plus a professional counselling qualification, or a professional counselling qualification and a specialist counselling qualification. Half the cohort were engaged in further studies in counselling at the time of interview.* [b] *Two of the teachers identified and practiced as psychotherapists in independent practice in addition to their teaching employment.*

Table 3.4

Teachers' Academic and Pastoral Allocations

Academic subjects	Pastoral responsibilities
Communication and Personal Development	Learning Support
English	School Chaplain
French	Special Education
History	Student Council Coordination
Home Economics	Student Support
Home Skills	Tutor
Irish	
Mathematics	
Psychology	
Relationship Sexuality Education (RSE)	
Religion	
Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)	
Spanish	

Note: All teachers were employed in general teaching roles. No teachers were employed as school counsellors.

Table 3.5

School Demographics

School type	Number of schools
Size	
Small (under 200 students)	2
Medium (approx. 900 students)	3
Large (approx. 1200 students)	3
Location	
Urban	3
Sub-urban	3
Rural	2
Gender mix	
All-girls	1
Co-educational	7
Religious affiliation	
Catholic	2
Multi-denominational	4
Protestant	2
Fee status	
Fee-paying	2
Non-fee-paying	6
Day / Boarding	
Day & boarding	1
Day	7
Language	
Gaelscoil (Irish Language)	1
English language	7
DEIS status	
DEIS	1
Non-DEIS	7

Note: Total number of schools = 8, DEIS = Delivering equality of opportunity in schools. A cross-section of schools is represented excepting All-boys schools.

3.3.1.6 Conducting the Interviews

An interview lasting approximately one hour was scheduled once a teacher had returned their signed Informed Consent form to the researcher. Half took place online using secure video technology and half in-person in university campus meeting rooms depending on teachers' preferences. Online and in-person interviews are appropriate mediums for qualitative research, and although online interviews may present drawbacks such as limited non-verbal cues, these can be overcome when both parties are familiar with video technology, and meeting online is often more convenient than meeting in-person (de Villiers et al., 2022).

At the start of each one, the researcher took care to revisit all legal aspects e.g., the limitations of confidentiality, Children First obligations, emphasised the voluntary nature of participating, and sought verbal consent before proceeding further. The researcher created a good rapport and relaxed environment demonstrating to the teacher that their experiences were welcome and centrally important. The researcher attempted to adopt a naïve stance towards the teacher's narrative, suspending in the moment her lifeworld of researcher, and any conceptual or assumed knowledge as she attended to the teacher's account of their lifeworld, as the Hermeneutic Circle was applied.

At the close of the interview the researcher made time for the teacher to ask questions, give feedback, or add any final thoughts. A verbal and written debriefing concluded the interview (Appendix G).

Each interview was audio recorded with participant consent and later transcribed by the researcher. The researcher documented her own impressions and responses to arranging, conducting, and transcribing each interview to identify any emergent elements relevant to

subsequent interviews and for reference during data analysis (Smith et al., 2022).

3.3.2 Being Reflexive Throughout the Research

Researcher reflexivity is an essential contributor to "a qualitative sensibility" in research along with open-mindedness, analytical thinking, and cultural sensitivity (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 9). Working from a phenomenological and hermeneutic position, the IPA researcher adopts a deeply reflexive stance becoming open to subtle spontaneous felt awareness (Smith et al., 2022, p. 134). In a two-fold reflexivity, or double hermeneutic, teachers in this study reflexively shared their perceptions of their experiences and the researcher reflexively analysed these while tuning into her own responses throughout (Smith & Nizza, 2022). This appeared especially rich as both researcher and teacher were helping professionals with counselling training and associated reflexive competencies (Johns, 2012; Schön, 1991).

A research journal was employed to assist bracketing of personal process and preconceptions (Vicary et al., 2017). Here, the researcher noted her feelings and reactions throughout, including key moments of interest, uncertainty, decision-making, or interpretation to deepen the emergent analytic process (Shinebourne, 2011, p. 20). For instance, some teachers that did not meet the inclusion criteria of holding a minimum counselling qualification offered to take part and reflexive writing helped the researcher to consider her assumptions about counselling training standards alongside the dilemma of not including these teachers.

Reflective opportunities emerged in various contexts. In clinical supervision the researcher reflected on her professional motivation for conducting this study. Prior to conducting the research fieldwork, the researcher formally presented her research topic to counselling and

teaching professionals at two events that significantly foregrounded her pre-assumptions regarding embedded counselling. The first was an experiential seminar with peer doctoral candidates exploring possible relationships between psychotherapy and embedded counselling utilising Lego bricks (Cavaliero, 2015) and other creative methods. The second was an online conference presentation on counselling skills and teaching to the Institute of Guidance Counsellors in the style of a podcast interview (Fewer-Hamilton & Delimata, 2022). Additionally, regular research supervision occurred at every stage. These critical conversations with peers, lecturers, and supervisors were important opportunities for challenge and feedback.

Transparently acknowledging researcher positionality adds value to qualitative studies helping readers to appraise the research (Drisko, 1997) and including them in the "hermeneutic dialogue" (Smith et al., 2022, p. 109). This researcher sought to recognise how her identity, beliefs, values, and contextual experiences impacted the research process through reflection. By attempting to avoid unconscious bias she found she could understanding more fully her own process and role as research "instrument" and engage in active and considered subjectivity throughout the research (McLeod, 2022, p. 95). This researcher's ongoing reflexivity throughout the current study adds validity to this research by mitigating against bias (Drisko, 1917; Levitt et al., 2018), deepening the analysis (Smith et al., 2022), and contributing to a comprehensive audit trail (Yardley, 2000).

3.3.3. Analysing the Data

The researcher approached the data analysis according to the steps of analysis developed by Smith et al. (2022). The analysis considered each teacher's recorded and transcribed narrative, i.e. the raw data, to illuminate how the teacher made sense of their experiences. Each case

was analysed on its own merits before moving onto another, and prior to any cross-case analysis. Consultation with supervisors throughout was valuable regarding the analytic process and interpretation of transcripts.

Two practical aspects of the analysis were considered at the outset. Firstly, options regarding IPA terminology were addressed. Smith et al. (2022) have introduced new terminology to identify certain analytic stages, e.g., emergent themes are now referred to as experiential statements. The researcher decided to only employ updated terminology in writing up this research for purposes of clarity.

A second decision concerned the medium in which to conduct the analysis. IPA researchers regularly employ printed transcripts that they interact with, colouring, cutting, and physically moving extracts about, as they respond to and interpret the data (Smith et al., 2022). This embodied approach appealed but presented a dilemma in relation to adequately and transparently record keeping and communicating about the analysis to research supervisors and in future disseminations. A digital medium held an advantage here over the manual. Data management software e.g., nVivo, Quirkos, to assist with storage and organisation of raw data during analysis, was considered. However, there were concerns a digital tool might create a barrier between the researcher and the data or influence the analysis through limited or prescriptive coding pathways (Vicary et al., 2017).

The two-part solution was to firstly design a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to capture the analysis that could be easily and securely shared with supervisors. Secondly, to incorporate some of the original embodied and creative IPA elements the researcher trialled several digital mind-mapping tools before selecting one that was compatible with her cognitive style, namely Microsoft's Whiteboard Affinity Diagram. A digital whiteboard template designed using this software (Figure 3.1)

allowed efficient and creative handling of transcript extracts and analytic notes that compared well with manual methods. This tool ensured the researcher could track the iterative analysis clearly, transparently, and securely. These digital tools were employed alongside paper-based methods.

Figure 3.1

Microsoft Whiteboard Affinity Diagram Template for an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
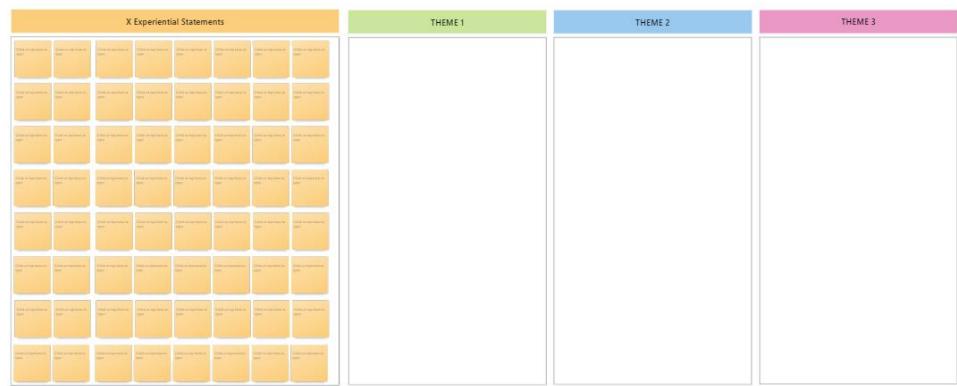
Note: The yellow tiles in this template can be populated with analytic notes (Experiential Statements) that can be digitally manoeuvred and arranged into themes by the researcher by moving them into adjacent boxes. Themes can be added or removed as needed. Software options to add notes, arrows, colour coding, symbols etc. allow creative individualisation of each analysis. A worked example is shown in Appendix J.

Step 1: Spending Time with the First Case Transcript.

The researcher initially spent many hours with the transcript, becoming familiar with the encounter's ebb and flow and the conversation's topography. This occurred while repeatedly listening to the audio, transcribing the text, reading and re-reading the transcript. Transcription was a lengthy and intense experience as the researcher committed to faithfully recording the teacher's words, carefully attending to every nuance of speech and narrative to capture this idiographic account. Identifying details were omitted from the transcript to anonymise the data.

In this phase of immersion in the data the researcher often felt as if she were inhabiting another world, and that her own world was miles away, as she suspended her own lifeworld and focused on the teacher's. The researcher created research memos throughout, recording self-observations, tentative notes, and sketches (Figure 3.2) representing her immediate responses to the text, including metaphors (Shinebourne & Smith, 2010). Memos at this point shaped a rudimentary map of the data and assisted the second analytic step.

Figure 3.2

Example of a Research Memo Sketch
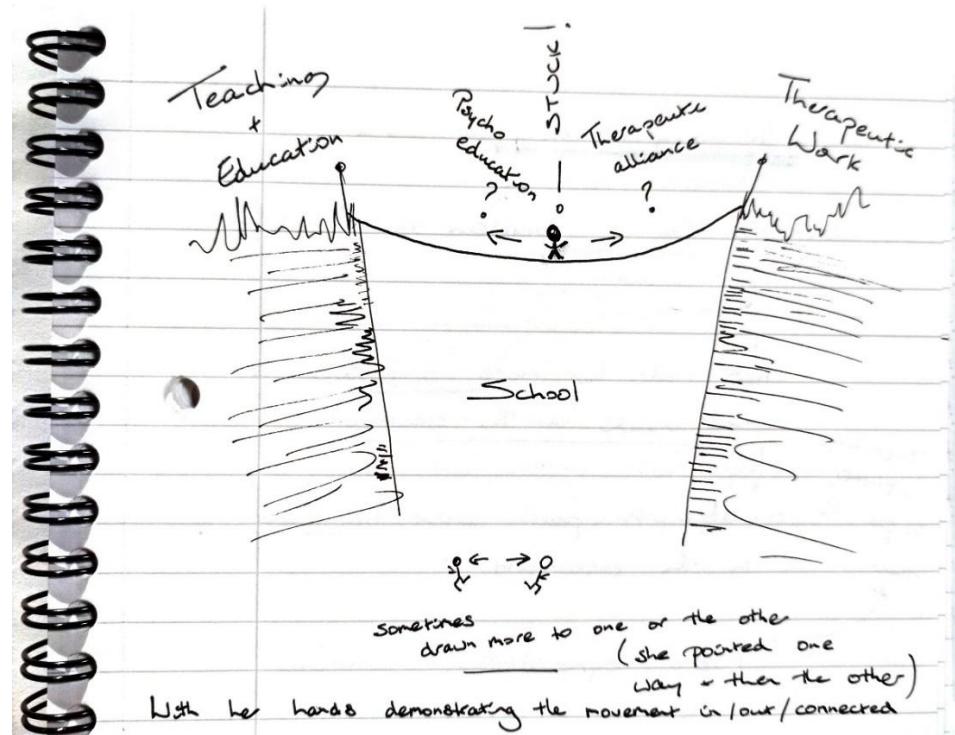
Note: The researcher created this sketch while listening to Jasmine's interview recording and recollecting the meeting. It depicts the researcher's understandings of Jasmine's words, gestures, and use of metaphor as she portrayed her lived experiences of embedding counselling. Jasmine had evoked an image of a rope bridge between two cliffs and conveyed her sense of being drawn one way or another along it or feeling stuck there between teaching and therapy roles.

Step 2: Exploratory Noting

The transcript was transferred to an Excel spreadsheet where the researcher documented resonant features, creating descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual notes in three columns employing different formatting (plain, bold, italics) to aid with legibility (Smith et al., 2009). Each column incorporated reflective prompt questions to guide the

exploration. Transcript rows were numbered to track and trace the lines of analysis as they were drawn from text to exploratory note and beyond. A fourth column offered space to note additional related reflective ideas that arose at various points throughout the individual and cross-case analyses. (Figure 3.3, Appendix H).

Figure 3.3

Excel Spreadsheet Template for an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

	Experiential Statements	Line No.	Interview Transcript	Descriptive Exploratory Notes	Linguistic Exploratory Notes	Conceptual Exploratory Notes	Related Reflective Notes
				What?	**How?**	*So?*	And?
Prompts for researcher				What's being spoken about? What's important for them here?	How're they using language? What's important for them here?	*What might this mean?* *What's my response here?* *Questions arising?* *How am I / they making sense of this?*	?

This was a deeply absorbing experience that was aided by handwriting some of the teacher's phrases that resonated evocatively for the researcher and displaying them anonymously in the researcher's private workspace so that she felt connected to the teacher regardless of access to digital software (Figure 3.4). By making repeated analytic passes through the entire transcript, audio, and the mini-narratives within, the researcher could perceive deeper, more subtle aspects and carefully considered possible phenomenological meanings held by the teacher while refraining from obvious or peripheral interpretation. The emphasis was descriptive and provisional avoiding "explanatory or formulatory focus" or effort in "understanding *why* [sic] someone is how they are" (Smith et al., 2022, p. 86).

Figure 3.4

Handwritten Post-It notes displaying teacher's words
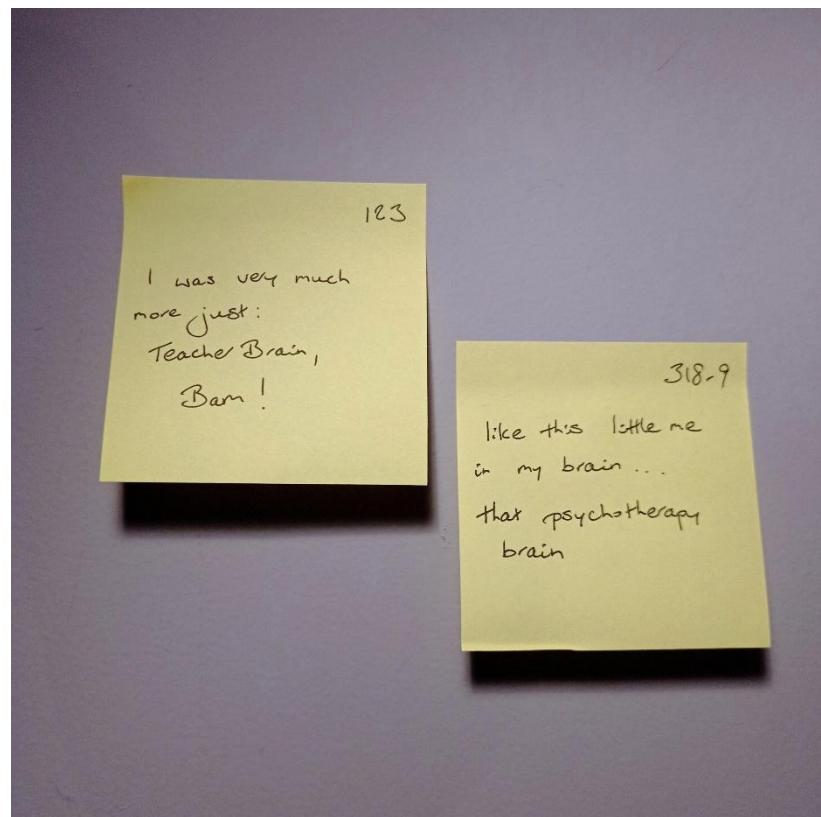
Note: This image shows Skyler's words copied from her interview transcript by the researcher. Line numbers appear in the corner of each note. In these extracts, Skyler was reflecting on her sense of self before and after counselling training evoking her reactive "teacher brain" and her reflexive "psychotherapy brain".

Step 3: Creating Experiential Statements

Next the researcher crafted a further analytical level drawing upon all data (audio, transcript, exploratory notes, memos). Concise statements synthesising description and interpretation of the teacher's phenomenology were written as Experiential Statements into the spreadsheet. A core feature of IPA is this movement "between the sum of the part and the whole of the hermeneutic circle" (Smith et al., 2022, p. 77). Here, the researcher's professional background and lived

experiences informed meaning making as the analysis circumnavigated this interpretative circle.

The researcher read and re-read the transcript many times, whole or in mini-narratives, and from the end back to the top, adopting a fresh perspective each time to "capture the psychological substance" of the narrative (Smith & Nizza, 2022, p. 39). The aim was to distil the data into a smaller set of "dense and rich" elements (Smith & Nizza, 2022, p. 39) that went beyond simplistic reconfiguration into smaller descriptive components (Smith et al., 2022, p. 90).

Step 4: Connecting Experiential Statements and Naming Personal Experiential Themes (PETs)

The next objective was to further elucidate the teacher's meanings as they became more deeply apparent to the researcher through growing understanding of the whole data set. A fourth step addressed two tasks in tandem in an iterative manner. One task involved interpreting how the experiential statements might be understood as thematic representations of the experiencing of embedded counselling by this teacher. A concurrent task involved developing appropriate thematic names that conveyed the experiential flavour and richness of the narrative and interpretation. Both tasks stemmed from the preceding layering up of analytic steps to reach even higher-order understandings. It was helpful here to consider the research question and objectives to avoid drifting outside the scope of the project (Smith et al., 2022, p. 91).

Each experiential statement was represented on a digital whiteboard as a manoeuvrable and editable tile with corresponding transcript line numbers. The researcher moved thoughtfully and repeatedly back and forth between whiteboard, spreadsheet, teacher's words, and research interpretations in an unfolding iterative process. Experiential statements

were arranged vertically helping identify sub-themes and patterns including similarity, polarisation, narrative, or sense-making (functional analysis; Smith et al., 2022, p.98) and research memos documented decision-making throughout. This dynamic and iterative process of clustering experiential statements facilitated access to highly nuanced aspects of the phenomenon not apparent in previous steps.

A comprehensive set of records documented the analysis creating an audit trail and facilitating supervision of the research. Examples include, a narrative interview summary, digital images of each iteration of the whiteboard, a PETs table that included themes, sub-themes, experiential statements, transcript line numbers, and associated transcript quotes, and a PETs diagram (Samples are presented as Appendices I, J, K and L).

Step 5: Analysing Subsequent Individual Cases

Each case was subsequently analysed by rigorously following the same procedure to ultimately generate eight sets of PETs and related documentation. The focus was idiographic while acknowledging the influence of preceding cases upon the researcher's experiences of subsequent ones. Throughout, the researcher consulted transparently and in-depth with research supervisors to ensure the analysis was plausible and coherent.

Step 6: Conducting a Cross-Case Analysis

Next, the researcher reviewed the PETs to develop a cross-case analysis with the intention of illuminating "the shared and unique features" of the experience of embedding counselling for these post-primary teachers (Smith et al., 2022, p. 100). Methods employed included generating an Excel spreadsheet of all PET tables, displaying printouts of PET tables and diagrams, and mind-mapping on a large physical flipchart. Photographs of paper-based analytic work were added to the digital

audit trail (e.g., Figure 3.5). The researcher again moved back and forth across narratives and analytic outputs to discern themes that were qualitatively and phenomenologically resonant and dominant rather than quantitatively prevalent.

Figure 3.5

Example of Cross-Case Mind-Mapping using a Paper Flipchart
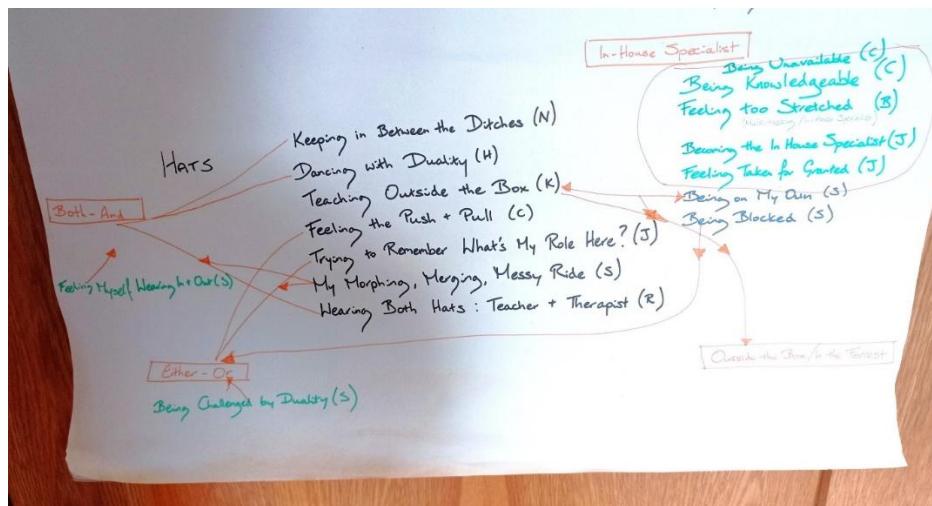
Note: This image shows the researcher's notes collating PETs (black), PET sub-themes (green), and Experiential Statements (blue) that resonated with a sense of identity or "Hats" across the eight narratives. Teachers' initials appear in parentheses. Arrows and other notes (red) capture the researcher's tentative interpretations at this early stage in the cross-case analysis e.g., "Both-And", "Either-Or", "Outside the box/ In the forest".

The researcher was struck by several common expressive experiential motifs, distributed across the eight interviews, invoked by various teachers using comparable phrases. For example, one motif seemed to arise through phrases like "teacher hat" (Rosetta, L. 259), "counsellor hat" (Brigid, L. 152), "that hat I wear" (Jasmine, L. 96). These resonances were subsequently considered in terms of four tentative group themes: **heart, heads, helping, and hats**. This reflected the sense that teachers' stories came from the heart, that they engaged with multiple perspectives

(heads), saw what they did as helping, and foregrounded identity (hats) in their accounts. The researcher held these ideas lightly while reviewing the eight cases, extending and developing the analysis to encompass convergences and divergences across teachers' lived experiences of embedding counselling until four Group Experiential Themes (GETs), with sub-themes, were identified. During this process for instance, the researcher attended to the prevalence with which individual cases supplied evidence for each theme and how each teacher uniquely experienced this aspect of the phenomenon.

This was a documented, lengthy, reflexive, and iterative process that involved critical conversations with research supervisors and the independent supervisory panel member. Detailed mapping of the emerging themes, sub-themes, and associated patterns and prevalences across the eight cases was captured on large flipchart pages and photographed. These maps subsequently supported the final writing up step detailed below. Several renderings of the GETs were deliberated until the researcher identified and tentatively named a set that succinctly and coherently reflected the teachers' experiences, the progressive analysis, and connection with the data. These were represented graphically in a diagram (See Chapter Four, Figure 4.1) and as a GETs table (Appendix M). The GETs table transparently documented group themes and sub-themes, with examples of associated experiential statements and traceable key teacher quotes.

Step 7: Writing Up

Lastly, the findings of this analysis were written up as the Findings Chapter of this dissertation. This process constituted a final interpretative step in which the final iteration of the GETs fully emerged. During this step the researcher devised GET and sub-theme names that encompassed hermeneutic and idiographic dimensions by merging the

researcher's words with teachers. The example of GET 3, **BEING A HELPFUL PRESENCE: "Being properly there"** conveys, with the first phrase, an essential experience identified by the researcher and with the second phrase, gives voice to one teacher, Rosetta. This configuration was used throughout.

3.4 Ethical Principles and Practices Employed

The design and conduct of this study were informed throughout by established ethical research standards. Required REC approval was achieved at the outset (Appendix B) and the project adhered to all relevant policies, legislation, and the researcher's professional code of ethics (PSI, 2019). The underpinning ethical principles employed are drawn from the biomedical field: respect for autonomy, nonmaleficence, beneficence, and justice (Beauchamp & Childress, 2009). The qualitative and emergent nature of the study additionally necessitated an "ethics as process" approach (Ramcharan & Cutcliffe, 2001, p. 358). Explicit attendance to maintaining ethics throughout qualitative research contributes to research quality (Drisko, 1997) and application of these ethical principles will be detailed below.

3.4.1 Respect for Autonomy

This principle required that the researcher demonstrated both respectful attitudes and actions that acknowledged teachers' "right to hold views, to make choices, and to take actions based on their personal values and beliefs" (Beauchamp & Childress, 2009, p. 103). Teachers that engaged with the project were treated as people of worth and their dignity was central to procedures undertaken and the analysis and presentation of their stories.

Ethical practices relating to this principle included:

- Teachers making informed decisions about participation and withdrawal from the research. Detailed written and verbal informed consent process provided through the recruitment information, Plain Language Statement, Consent Form, Debriefing Sheet (Appendices C, D, E, F, G).

- Teachers advised they could withdraw at any stage up to the point of publication or within the data retention period, whichever was first (McCrae & Murray, 2008; Smith et al., 2022).

- Teachers invited to indicate their gender identity and pronouns to represent them respectfully in dissemination of the research.

- Mechanisms for registering any complaints or concerns provided to teachers (Appendix E).

3.4.2 Non-maleficence

This principle required that no harm or risk of harm was inflicted on others during this research. Accordingly, exceptional care was taken to protect teachers' privacy and to secure all data gathered according to GDPR (Data Protection Act, 2018; DCU, 2021; National Office for Research Ethics Committees, 2021). Teachers were asked to discuss their work in schools, therefore steps were taken to respect confidentiality of others and to highlight mandatory child protection obligations of both researcher and teacher (Appendix E; Dept. Children & Youth Affairs, 2017). No child protection risks were identified during this research.

Researcher competence was ensured through comprehensive research training and supervision. Additionally, as a professional psychotherapist, the researcher was sensitive to any potential teacher stress throughout and could respond effectively.

The research design minimised burden upon teachers through efficient use of time and providing interview options in convenient locations, including online. During development of the project, creative data gathering methods in addition to interviews were considered but were not selected due to the burden of lengthy participant time-commitment anticipated.

Further ethical practices relating to this principle included:

- Data pseudonymisation and anonymisation by removal of identifying details.
- Informing teachers of legal limits to confidentiality and slight risk of identification due to sample size and use of participant quotes in dissemination.
- Appropriate secure storage of all records, e.g., digital encryption, separation of personal details from transcripts, locked files, within a specified two-year retention period followed by secure destruction of data.
- Verbal and written debriefing (Appendix G) including access to debriefing interview with a professional psychotherapist.

3.4.3 Beneficence

This principle requires that this research actively contributes to the welfare of others through provision of benefits and overall utility to others (Beauchamp & Childress, 2009, p. 197). Although direct benefits to participants were not expected, teachers likely experienced indirect benefits through having a reflexive experience during interviews and the opportunity to give voice to their experiences embedding counselling (Drury et al., 2007) and to learn about embedded counselling from research outputs (Haslam & McGarty, 2019). Teachers' feedback expressed appreciation for this research into a practice they valued

highly. Several teachers expressed hopes that increased counselling skills training provision for teachers might be a positive outcome of the research. Wider benefits of this research are hoped for, with planned dissemination of findings through publications and counselling training opportunities within the researcher's current academic role.

Ethical practices relating to this principle included:

- Offering teachers a summary of the research results.
- Strategies for wider dissemination of this research.

3.4.4 Justice

This principle requires this research to be conducted with integrity, honesty, and fairness (PSI, 2019, p. 4). The researcher was open about her qualifications and interests in the research topic throughout, and researcher preconceptions were explicitly acknowledged and managed with supervision and self-awareness.

Care was taken to ensure teachers volunteered freely and without coercion from gatekeepers. Not all volunteers could participate however, due to the criterion requiring minimum counselling qualifications. In this instance the researcher concluded the principle of beneficence outweighed the principle of justice as this criterion contributed to research validity and potential benefits of the study longer term. Communication with all volunteers regarding selection was respectful and transparent.

Further related ethical practices included:

- Comprehensive, nationwide, multi-modal recruitment.
- Accessible interview locations, including online.
- Fair, accurate representation of all participating teachers' experiences.

3.4.5 Process Ethics

Applying process ethics to this study recognises that within qualitative research, human relationships require ongoing care and attention and that ongoing ethical monitoring is necessary (Ramcharan & Cutcliffe, 2001).

Ethical practices relating to this principle included:

- Revisiting consent and withdrawal during interactions with teachers, e.g., seeking consent to extend interview duration.
- Creation of detailed audit trail including documented supervision that enhanced the research trustworthiness.

3.5 Evaluation of the Research Design, Validity, and Rigour.

Due care was taken in designing and implementing this study to produce rigorous and high-quality research following quality standards specific to the ontological and epistemological premises of qualitative research. Core principles underpinning quality in qualitative research were applied that include sensitivity to context, e.g., purposive sampling, commitment and rigour, e.g., extensive immersion in the data, transparency and coherence, e.g., sharing analytic notes with supervisors, impact and importance, e.g., offering a summary of findings to participating teachers (Yardley, 2000). Levitt et al. (2018, p. 29) also emphasises explicating the "situatedness" of qualitative research, including contexts of researcher, participants, and relational aspects, e.g., including reflective comments within this dissertation.

These core quality principles are evidenced in multiple practical measures that have enhanced the trustworthiness and credibility of this research (McLeod, 2022, p. 70). Extensive care was taken to coherently

record and file research notes that catalogued the researcher's actions, decision points, and reflexive moments. Rich extracts and visual examples are presented throughout this dissertation, and as appendices, supporting a transparent comprehensible account of this research process from start to finish that readers can follow easily (McLeod, 2022; Nizza et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2022, p. 109). Ample contextual participant details and clear indications of the contributions of each participant to the themes identified in the analysis is provided, e.g., teacher quotes, transcript line numbering, GETS Table (Appendix M; Smith et al., 2022, p. 54-55).

Together these records have supported the creation of a secure digital audit trail that facilitated regular (e.g., monthly) supervisory review and continuous researcher reflexivity, ensuring the analysis was "a credible one" (Levitt et al., 2018; Smith et al., 2022, p. 153). Additionally, dialogue with people external to the research, including conversations with an independent supervisory panel member (during fieldwork and writing stages) and peer researchers (across the entire project's duration), afforded the researcher useful impartial perspectives as the work progressed.

Member checking, by which participants are asked to review and feedback on the data and its interpretation following collection, was considered as an additional practical measure to ensure both accuracy and participant representation to enhance research trustworthiness (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 282). However, member checking was deemed less appropriate in this instance due to the hermeneutic and cross-case epistemology of IPA employed, whereby the researcher brings their interpretation to multiple transcripts, the ethical risk of additional burden on participants regarding time commitment, and the logistical

impact on the research whereby an extended project timeline would have been required (McGaha et al., 2019; Motulsky, 2021).

Nevertheless, participating teachers were invited to feedback to the researcher across the recruitment and interview processes and communicated they considered the research was important and worthwhile. Several indicated participating was meaningful for them and their practice, providing a reflexive space to articulate and develop their perspectives on embedded counselling. This demonstrates the study's catalytic validity, or relevance to participants, and further contributes to overall research rigour and trustworthiness (Baines, 2007, p. 76). Allied to this is the degree of knowledge translation evident through dissemination and discussion of research findings to teachers at a conference and through counselling skills training workshops where feedback again supported the validity of the study (Baines, 2007, p. 75; Haslam et al., 2019).

Other important criteria for research trustworthiness were achieved by including clarity and coherence regarding philosophy and epistemology, research objectives, ethics, and biases (Drisko, 1997). This study has addressed specific IPA validity criteria as this dissertation provides a coherent, compelling account of the work, has a rigorous experiential narrative, is strongly grounded in the words of participants, and gives attention to convergence and divergence (Nizza et al., 2021).

Limitations of this study are acknowledged in relation to recruitment, e.g., teachers self-selecting to take part. Additionally, researcher pre-conceptions may have biased the analysis.

Chapter Six presents an expanded discussion of these issues within an in-depth evaluation of the current study upon its conclusion that details the limitations and strengths of the work against research quality criteria.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated the use of IPA as an apposite approach meeting the research aim and objectives of exploring the personal lived experiences of post-primary teachers in relation to the phenomenon of embedded counselling. It has demonstrated the successful realisation of this research project that sought to illuminate this phenomenon by suspending preconceptions about the subject matter, capturing teachers' individual and everyday experiences by listening to their stories, and systematically reflecting on their experiential meanings to produce rich and resonant representations. The rigorous and ethical processes undertaken to interview eight teachers with experience of embedding counselling and the subsequent in-depth, iterative analytic techniques employed were detailed and evaluated. Throughout the chapter, the particular importance of transparency and reflexivity to support researcher self-awareness and ensure research quality has been highlighted. This rigorous methodological approach, detailed above, contributes to the high quality and validity of this study.

The chapter that follows presents the in-depth interpretation of the data and findings of this research.

3.6 Researcher's Reflective Comment

> "It is like trying to hear both the melody and the harmony lines in a piece of music — listening to more than the tune."
> (Researcher's Memo: Sept. 2023)

The subject matter of embedded counselling had been present to me in various ways across my whole career but had taken on greater significance after I led the development of an introductory counselling skills course and held the role of Chair of this programme for several years prior to undertaking this doctorate. In choosing the research methodology I felt it was important to select an approach that could encompass this professional position and experience. My involvements with counselling skills training had shown me the richness and demands within paraprofessional preparation and practice and I felt there was an important and untapped vein of knowledge and experience available among practitioners.

Giving voice to paraprofessional practitioners was therefore important to me and matched my humanistic-integrative psychotherapy approach where I hold the client's subjective experience as central. IPA resonated with me because it could focus on individuals and their stories while allowing fruitful space for interpretive exploration, with due mindfulness of various related contexts, including my own partiality and assumptions.

However, to lean into this qualitative researcher stance, I needed to let go of elements from my early training as a scientist and psychologist with quantitative research instincts for distance and objectivity. Instead, I needed to cultivate an attitude of openness to the subjective in the research space. It was helpful to draw on my professional experience as a psychotherapist here. So, although I foregrounded my position as qualitative researcher throughout this project, I was often aware of my

multiple other roles of counselling trainer, educator, psychotherapist and psychologist. In balancing my multiple professional roles and tolerating any tensions between them, I felt I could offer a useful curiosity towards teachers' stories of embedding counselling within teaching roles.

This reflected shared experience of multiple roles, and alongside personal experiences of embedding counselling within my lecturing role, contributed to a sense of being an insider researcher at times (Costley et al., 2010). Thus, I was sensitive to how this might play out, e.g., noticing feelings of collegiality during interviews and bringing curiosity to how teachers might frame their narratives, or how I might question them, as a result. I was mindful of also being an outsider-researcher with no post-primary teaching experience. Here, I recognised and attempted to suspend my professional counselling preconceptions by striving to trust teachers' experience and expertise in school contexts. For example, noticing an inner rigidity regarding boundaries, or sense of surprise as I listened to a teacher describing situated practice that was unfamiliar to me, and being reflexive about my assumptions. Moreover, the interviews were often emotionally moving as I witnessed teachers' sensitivity and dedication to their students and empathically listened to their portrayal of students' struggles and their own dilemmas in trying to be there for students.

I employed analytic strategies that incorporated the IPA emphasis on being reflexive and systematic, e.g., use of spreadsheets with exploratory and reflexive columns, reflexive writing and drawing (Figure 3.6). Thus, the methodology and methods provided spaces for the intersections between my professional roles and my encounters with teachers, while helping me to bracket my responses, and I believe this added depth to my interpretations of the data, and quality to this research.

Figure 3.6

Researcher's Reflexive Sketch of Skyler's Train and Track Metaphors
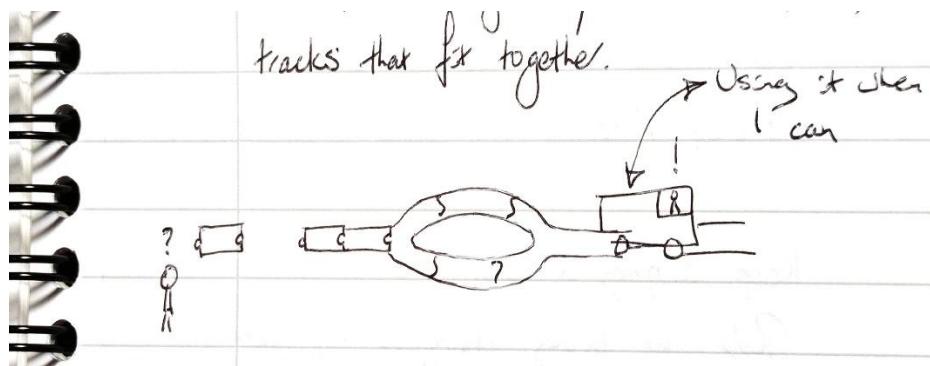
Note: I drew this sketch while listening back to Skyler's interview recording for the first time where she used detailed metaphors to paint a picture of her learning journey in relation to counselling and teaching. Sketching, as she described, "the track because it's been such a journey. And the train … all the work I've done and now kind of merging it" (L. 416), helped me to grasp her sense of piecing it all together (tracks connecting) and growing in clarity and momentum. Looking at my sketch I began to wonder about the different experiences it illuminated …

The data analysis was an absorbing and lengthy process, and I was fascinated by the deepening quality of each transcript as I explored it using IPA. For example, attending to linguistic elements helped me enter the teacher's world and open myself up to possible meanings and subtle communications. Later, as I created experiential statements to elevate the analysis to a more interpretative level, I had a sense of stepping away from the transcript but paradoxically, of reaching deeper nuanced understandings of the narrative (see research memo above). Subsequent clustering of experiential statements to identify personal and group experiential themes felt creative and satisfying and I felt a sense of shared meaning-making when rendering the teachers' understandings into thematic collections that could meaningfully articulate their lived experiences to wider audiences.

Chapter Four: Findings

4.1 Introduction to the Findings

This chapter presents the key findings from the interpretative phenomenological analysis of transcripts from eight interviews with teachers that were conducted with the aim of exploring how Irish post-primary teachers make sense of embedding counselling skills within their teaching role.

Figure 4.1

Group Experiential Themes (GETs) Diagram
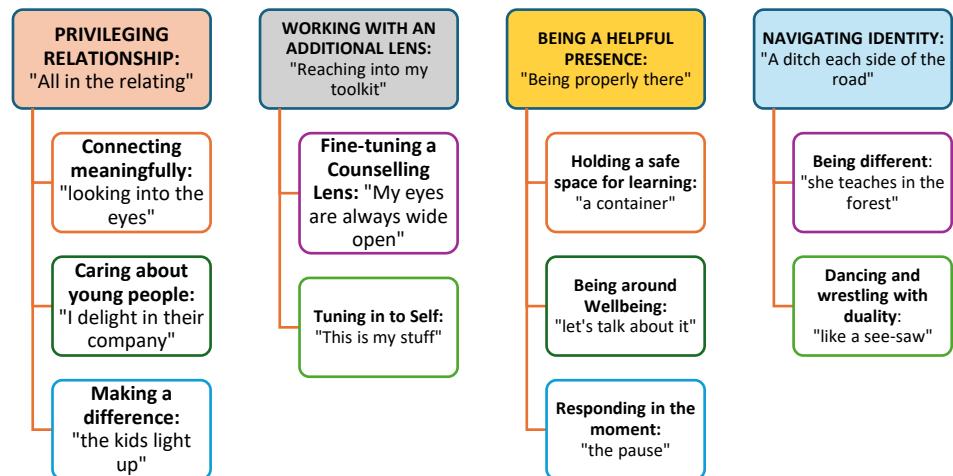
The research objectives are:

- To capture teachers' lived experiences of embedding counselling skills.

- To discover the meanings that teachers attribute to embedding counselling skills.

- To explore how teachers experience the impact of embedding counselling skills.

- To illuminate teachers' perceptions of dual counselling and teaching roles.

Four Group Experiential Themes (GETs) emerged from the cross-case analysis as illustrated in Figure 4.1 and in the appended GETs Table (Appendix M). Each was composed of several sub-themes. Taken together these themes address the research objectives of exploring teachers' lived experiences of embedding counselling skills within their role, their meaning-makings, impacts of embedding counselling, and their perceptions of dual roles.

While these themes and sub-themes represent convergent aspects of teachers' accounts, they also incorporate divergent experiences. As such, an overall picture of the "shared and unique features" of these teachers' lived experiences of embedding counselling skills is evoked (Smith et al., 2022, p. 100). Accordingly, a rich and nuanced picture of teachers' shared and differing experiences reveals embedded counselling as a complex and sometimes conflictual phenomenon. These themes will now be presented in turn.

To illustrate the findings, anonymised and pseudonymised extracts from teacher interviews are included throughout this chapter with corresponding transcript line numbers. To improve readability, repeated words, filler words, and non-lexical utterances have been removed from the excerpts while taking care to uphold the integrity of teachers' narratives. Any other shortening of quotations is indicated with an ellipse.

4.1.1 Counselling Skills Contexts and Strategies

During the interviews teachers described various informal situations in which they used counselling skills. These situations arose when in class or elsewhere in school and sometimes overlapped. Examples are outlined in Table 4.1 to provide context for the presentation of findings

that follows. Additional teacher profile detail is provided in the Methodology Chapter (Chapter Three, Tables 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5).

Table 4.1

Situations in which counselling skills were informally employed by teachers with students.

Informal situation	Examples	Key quotation
Teaching and learning moments	Using active listening and Socratic questioning to facilitate non-judgemental discussions in mainstream and learning support classes.	"They're making connections and it's all being filtered through maybe that listening and questioning and empathising." (Brigid L. 353)
Providing practical help in school	Helping students to cope with school environment. Providing resources e.g., clothing, bandage, food.	"Very subtle human interaction and the cup of tea and the biscuit and the pen." (Rosetta L. 110)
Psychoeducation	Information/ discussion of psychological, behavioural, and mental health issues across subject classes.	"I'm teaching them a language around feelings through SPHE and English." (Brigid L. 305)
Encouraging self-awareness	Informal conversations about feelings and worries. Physical exercise/ relaxation in class to support learning.	"That space to express it and actually talk around it and actually connect him with the feelings he's having." (Kevin L. 218)
Brief empathic moments of connection	Responding to disruptive student/ student with personal worry after class. Friendly exchanges along the corridor.	"Small little interactions … somebody says "hello" to you, that they acknowledge that you're there." (Noah L. 48)
Providing informal emotional support	Recognising and supporting student distress re. academic/ personal issues.	"I would just listen, and she was so activated and upset, like tears and rant." (Hazel L. 146)

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Teachers employed different strategies when using counselling skills across these situated counselling contexts. Some, like Jasmine, employed counselling skills in response to direct student requests for help while others, like Hazel, proactively sought potential opportunities by actively checking students' wellbeing. For many, including Brigid and Skyler, it was important to then pause and attend to personal process and self-regulate, if necessary, before taking further counselling-informed steps. Even when teachers like Brigid and Noah drew on counselling skills within learning activities, they often integrated their personal process into their teaching style. Some, like Carol and Jasmine, contained their counselling skills within experiential classes e.g., SPHE, while others, like Rosetta and Brigid, incorporated counselling skills holistically across curricular and extra-curricular activities. Teachers that embedded counselling skills in this rounded way, e.g., Hazel, articulated confidence in effectively pivoting from an empathic (counselling) to an academic (teaching) focus. Several teachers explicitly attended to boundaries and confidentiality at the outset of counselling-type episodes. Some, e.g., Rosetta, Skyler, autonomously helped students resolve difficulties but others, e.g., Noah, typically signposted students to further supports following brief helping intervention. Additionally, as Noah and Kevin pointed out, using counselling skills often necessitated communication and negotiation with teaching colleagues e.g., to manage boundaries or help students action strategies. A further embedded counselling strategy demonstrated by Carol and others, was sharing counselling knowledge within school to assist in student referrals or create curricular wellbeing resources. Another key component of embedding counselling skills within teaching involved attending to child protection as highlighted by Jasmine and Kevin. Finally, practices that ensured self-care, support, and being boundaried when embedding counselling were emphasised by many teachers including Carol, Noah, and Rosetta.

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4.2 GET 1. Privileging Relationship: "All in the relating"

Figure 4.2:

Privileging Relationship: GET 1 with three sub-themes.
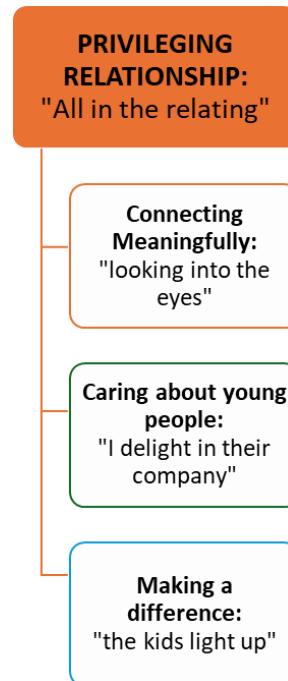
The first GET captures a sense of the meaning of human connection and relationship for these teachers (Figure 4.2). Often emphasising the relational components of counselling during their interviews, they seemed to see their use of counselling skills within teaching as an intentional and meaningful expression of their core valuing of interpersonal connection. It was as if they held an understanding that a strong supportive relationship between a teacher and a young person had potential for doing good, and they were willing to build and nurture such relationships using counselling skills.

The first sub-theme within this GET, **Connecting Meaningfully: "looking into the eyes",** evokes how relationships appeared to be a strong and enduring motivator for working with young people and engagement with counselling skills. The next sub-theme, **Caring about Young People: "I**

delight in their company", conveys how teachers appeared to value young people highly and to care deeply about them. The third sub-theme, **Making a Difference: "the kids light up"** illustrates how teachers seemed to want to be able to make a positive impact on the lives of students through teaching practices that were thoughtful and relational.

4.2.1 GET 1 Sub-theme A. Connecting meaningfully: "looking into the eyes"

This sub-theme illustrates a strong thread across teacher interviews regarding the centrality of interpersonal relationships in their teaching work. Teachers conveyed a sense that they paid a great deal of attention to the quality of their relationships with students and seemed to derive satisfaction from having a sense of connection and engagement with them. It was as if their counselling background served to highlight and enhance this view for these teachers.

Kevin foregrounded this perspective remarking that, "I suppose no more than they talk about the therapeutic relationship being the key to in therapy, I suppose the relationship as a teacher you have with your students is key." (L.67). He pointed to parallels between the teacher-student relationship and the counsellor-client relationship with both potentially offering a positive environment for learning and personal growth where relationship was the common denominator.

A similar sense was echoed by Noah who framed his commitment to relationships within teaching as "the real curriculum" (L. 120). Following counselling training, this teacher had reappraised his whole approach to teaching, becoming less focused on subject content and more focused on developing what he referred to as "respectful relationships" (L. 49) with students.

I became acutely aware of the relationships, being able to attune to students, the different needs, their perspectives on things. And just to create connections rather than … too much of a focus on the content of the curriculum, and delivering, and on the behaviours and the tick-able outcomes. (Noah, L.34-5)

In their accounts the teachers highlighted specific interpersonal qualities that they noticed they brought to bear on their relationships with students. They seemed to feel that these qualities, cultivated through counselling training or practice, enhanced these relationships. They included empathy, care, non-judgement, and congruence, and many teachers specifically described such traits as Rogerian. When asked about her use of counselling skills within her teaching role Hazel stated, "the first thing that's coming to mind is the core conditions of Rogers…I have always been quite a congruent person, but my empathy and my unconditional positive regard is enhanced." (L. 51-3). This acknowledgment of the direct influence of Rogerian counselling, a humanistic and person-centred approach, could be interpreted as a further confirmation of the value of human relationship to these teachers.

Interestingly, several teachers spoke about the place of technology in the classroom and seemed to suggest that they found it to be a barrier to the kind of human contact that they valued. Noah explained how typical it was to spend more time interacting with classroom technology than people at the outset of a class. But for him, it was important to first take time to engage with students by making eye contact, using their names, and chatting about things that they might be interested in, like a school event. He seemed to feel that this created a worthwhile validating experience for students.

so just the relational contact in the room that before getting … straight into doing attendance and straight into filling in everything and connecting up to other devices … but there's an

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actual contact and conversation started and names used and some sense of people being acknowledged in the place. (Noah L. 38-43)

Kevin and Brigid also noted the requirement to record student activity on a digital information management system and gave a sense of how this might colour their interaction with a student. Kevin described a scenario in which a student had presented unexpectedly to his room in a heightened state of distress when she was timetabled to be in another class, and as he sat with her, he was cognisant that "I have to tick on the, you know, I have to mark her out of class" (L. 142). Brigid, noting that incidents of student misbehaviour are logged, quantified, and reported to colleagues using this system, indicated that such record-keeping "brings a whole circle of judgement" (L. 155). One interpretation of these teachers' accounts of using technology could be that although they wanted to develop person-centred, responsive, and open-minded relationships with students, they experienced a certain level of distraction or dissonance when trying to achieve this in tandem with using technology.

Teachers often spoke warmly about connecting and interacting with students, whether in a pastoral situation or during a classroom discussion. They appeared to derive a sense of fulfilment and of being energised from these interpersonal experiences. Brigid highlighted how she felt when interacting with students: "I feel very excited, and I suppose empowered when that exchange happens … I feel that I am learning so much from them." (L. 332). While Jasmine also conveyed a feeling of being enriched as she described "having great conversations with the students" (L. 31) about the everyday matters that were of consequence to them.

There's something very different about being in a classroom where you're talking about those kind of real life issues. So I do find it very satisfying, it feels very worthwhile. (Jasmine, L. 74)

4.2.2 GET 1 Sub-theme B. Caring about young people: "I delight in their company"

As the teachers spoke about the students they worked with, they all communicated a sense of deep care and concern for young people and their needs. There was a sense that the teachers really valued young people. This came across in the sense of high esteem expressed by Brigid saying, "they're great. Young people are mighty!" (L. 467), and by Rosetta who affirmed "I delight in their company" (L. 155.) She described how she interacts with students around the school, communicating her sense of their value to them.

When I walk down the corridor there's a smile and a nod of the head. I smile with my eyes and it's letting them know, "You matter. You matter. I see you." (Rosetta, L. 139-40)

Teachers shared a perception that there were high levels of student overwhelm and distress in school. They seemed very conscious of students struggling with academic concerns and personal problems. Kevin described a culture of high academic achievement in his school in which he felt students of average ability struggled emotionally, "because it's a huge amount of overwhelm when you're sitting from nine to four, five days a week, where you're feeling just not good enough" (L.49).

Many teachers' narratives contained stories of supporting distressed students who were dealing with various personal issues such as academic anxiety, bereavement, bullying, family matters, peer pressure, poverty, relationships, and sexuality. The frequency with which the teachers referred to student "overwhelm" could be interpreted as a sign of their empathy and concern for young people. This may possibly account for

the feeling of protectiveness that most of the teachers seemed to express alongside a foregrounding of the importance for them of showing compassion and kindness to students.

Both Hazel and Kevin referred to having students "under my wing" (L. 130, L. 71) which seemed to convey feelings of care and protectiveness. Several teachers indicated that they had nurturing, parent-like feelings towards students that helped them to empathise with and appreciate them. Some teachers linked this with being a parent themselves but others, like Skyler, connected this sense of care with their counselling background.

> *But when I reflect on previous years versus now, there's definitely more of a care. Almost maybe like you'd feel if it was your own child … That kind of protective piece which is new since doing the training … I always cared about them, but not in this almost motherly, not going so far as, but, aw yeah. It's like "I really want to see you guys doing well.". (Skyler, L. 229-233)*

However, while there was a sense that caring was heartfelt and important to teachers, there was also a sense that it was demanding for some. Some said they felt there were limited supports available for these struggling students. Many referred to the high workloads of designated support staff such as Guidance Counsellors and Year Heads and to difficulties referring students to mental health services. This seemed to leave them with feelings of anger and frustration because they were concerned for students' welfare. Carol pointed out that, "CAMHS is absolutely inundated … it's just impossible to access the help." (L. 72). Jasmine remarked that, "Form Teachers and Year Heads at the moment certainly are … kind of firefighting. There's just so many kids who are overwhelmed … and I always have to park my frustrations on that." (L. 149-154). Furthermore, some teachers expressed feeling a pressure to be consistently caring towards students because as Rosetta explained, "they expect kindness, niceness, and then they might be hurt if they don't

get what they expect … so yeah, you have to keep up." (L. 212) and Hazel similarly pointed out, "the negative side can be that you become this crutch for students." (L. 249).

4.2.3 GET 1 Sub-theme C. Making a difference: "the kids light up"

This sub-theme illustrates teachers' sense that their attention to relationships, supported by acquired counselling skills, was impactful and evoked how it felt for them to be making a difference in this way.

Several teachers seemed to feel that when they fostered high quality teacher-student relationships, students would see them as a trustworthy adult on the staff that they could rely upon and that students would therefore have a more positive experience in school. There was a sense that this was an active choice they were making, which Brigid described as "not a Duty of Care, it's a Willingness to Care." (L. 477). This was similarly evoked by Skyler, who said, "I see an opportunity for us to connect and for you to have a nice experience of school as well." (L. 221).

One way of thinking about this is that these teachers perhaps considered that they were instigating positive changes on one-to-one and wider school levels. When Carol helped a student who was refusing to go to class to make sense of her feelings of anxiousness, she recognised the difference it made to the young person, "it just became so much clearer to her … she could see where she was in it." (L. 164). Reflecting on her use of small affirming interactions that helped a student to feel good about themselves, Rosetta remarked, "it doesn't take much to make a difference" (L. 149). Moreover, Noah, thinking about any net positive effect across the school, asserted that "the accumulation of respectful relationships has a massive impact in a school" (L. 49).

There was also a sense from some of the teachers' accounts that focusing on relationship touched them too. Rosetta seemed to experience a feeling of satisfaction from working this way as she observed, "I'm energised by them, and we have fun. So it feels good." (L. 156). Others reported receiving positive feedback about their approach from students, parents, and colleagues and they seemed to find it validating to know that they had made a difference.

> *And it felt like I was doing good. I was helping. We would have different moments throughout the year when the students write Thank You cards. So gratitude was expressed … There was the whys and what you have done for me. So that was very rewarding. (Hazel, L.161-2)*

Nevertheless, some of the teachers reflected on the power they held as counselling trained teachers, and they seemed to express a sense of responsibility around this. Rosetta touched on this several times in her interview conveying a sense of both the degree of influence and the weight of conscientiousness she felt in her role.

> *And the smallest little thing. Knowing there's a lot of power that we have. And managing that carefully, respectfully, with integrity, and child centred. There's a lot of good. (Rosetta, L. 151)*

> *Everything you say matters, and that's a burden as well as a privilege and more so as a trained therapist, it's a burden because it matters. So it has to be so considered. (Rosetta, L. 200)*

Thus, teachers' sense of connection with their students could be considered to evoke a mixture of rewarding and demanding feelings.

4.3 GET 2. Working with an Additional Lens: "Reaching into my toolkit"

Figure 4.3

Working with an Additional Lens: GET 2 with two sub-themes.
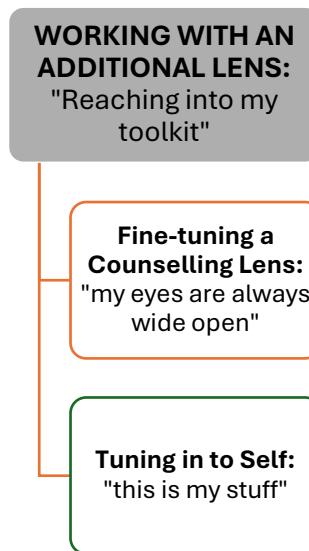
The second GET highlights teachers making sense of being a teacher drawing on a counselling skills training and background. A dominant experience across the interviews seemed to be the experience of a shifting and broadening of teachers' ways of understanding people in school. There was a sense that teachers felt differently equipped within their role post training through having an intersection of teaching approaches and counselling concepts, skills, and self-awareness to draw upon while working as a post-primary teacher. This seemed to be how Rosetta saw herself in her role when she explained,

> *I step … into the role of me as a professional … View this child in a holistic way and keep all the balls in the air at once in terms of meeting their needs as far as the teacher role goes. And not so much beyond … this set of skills is my toolkit. And I'm reaching into my toolkit to do my job.* (L. 125)

Several teachers appeared to have a feeling of being resourced by this additional lens. Kevin stated that he felt "fortunate" (L. 246) to have counselling skills as they helped him to slow down and really listen to students. Jasmine concluded that her ability to be more "sensitive" had "enhanced my teaching practice" (L. 246). For Brigid it was a "relief" (L. 152) to be able to see the bigger picture and take a measured view whereby she seemed to feel more flexible and able to adapt her teaching style to "balance how they [students] present to me with what they have to do for the subject." (L. 359).

The GET has two sub-themes that explore the experiences of teachers in school after training (Figure 4.3). **Fine-tuning a Counselling Lens: "my eyes are always wide open"** illustrates how teachers appeared to experience empathic attunement through an understanding of the application of counselling principles and practices within their teaching work post-training, and how this lens brought affordances and dilemmas. The second sub-theme, **Tuning in to Self**: **"this is my stuff"**, demonstrates how teachers seemed to make sense of the impact of self-awareness and personal growth within their work. Points of divergence within this GET capture how having a counselling perspective could be variously experienced as interesting, beneficial, labour intensive, or even exhausting.

4.3.1 GET 2 Sub-theme A. Fine-tuning a Counselling Lens: "my eyes are always wide open"

Teachers seemed to feel that they could now fully appreciate students' behaviour and emotional needs and had an additional skill set to draw upon in their dealings with them. Several of the accounts highlighted times when teachers felt that they were reading a lot more into school scenarios than they would have done before counselling training through

an attentiveness to aspects such as non-verbal behaviour, emotional process, transference, and a knowledge of psychology and trauma. For many, this helped them to appreciate the possibility that a student or colleague was acting a certain way due to some underlying reason. Teachers seemed to suggest that, even if they were not aware of all the details, they felt capable of empathising more fully with others than before as a result of having counselling skills.

Additionally, all the teachers could outline a range of counselling microskills that they used within their teaching role including active listening, reframing, Socratic questioning etc. and there was a sense that they felt competent in this regard. Carol articulated a sense of drawing from a menu of skills stating, "So I would be more mirroring kind of talk, repeating back and active listening" (L. 80).

Rosetta described how she viewed students through a counselling lens. She emphasised how "informal" (L. 63) it was and underscored how her approach was grounded in her teaching role. She seemed to feel that she had a capacity for understanding the uniqueness and complexity of students' lives that was valuable in teaching.

> *I'm not going digging to find out, but just knowing that each individual is bringing so much with them into the classroom, that if I was their therapist, I'd be exploring and interested in … But I'm not their therapist. So it's just an awareness that it's in there … then my approach to them will be … a lot of empathy and compassion. (Rosetta, L. 66-70)*

There was a sense of teachers wanting to stay open to a multiplicity of potentially relevant sources of information, and a filtering of the objective and subjective, before responding. But sometimes teachers were left feeling inundated with these impressions and feeling what Hazel jokingly referred to as "analysis paralysis" (L. 309). Skyler described what this felt like for her through the metaphor of a conveyor belt and

gave a sense of the richness of having acquired a more expansive perspective that also seemed to sometimes leave her in a quandary as to how to proceed. It was as if this additional counselling lens delivered enhanced capacity for interpreting students' behaviour while also contributing extra layers of complexity for teachers. There was a feeling of having insight and being intrigued but also feeling somewhat overwhelmed by the choices.

> *the information comes to you, and you've interpreted it completely differently … It used to be more … linear … a student says something and it just came in on the conveyor belt and I just, swallowed it …*
>
> *And now the conveyor belt, like splits out into three or four conveyor belts, and I have to go, "Which one do I step on to?" … it's tiring and it's fascinating, but it can also be a little bit like "Oh God, what do I do?". (Skyler, L. 329-334)*

Many teachers indicated that they now paid attention to people's emotional process as they worked, and they seemed to recognise this as an important channel of information. This often involved an interpretation of the student's body language. Skyler described how she observed a student who was unable to complete a learning activity and, seeing "her little face differently" (L. 343), discerned feelings of fear. Hazel recounted being concerned about a discrepancy between a student's verbal and non-verbal behaviour that suggested they were struggling emotionally. In both situations, the teachers reported subsequently responding to the student's emotional process. Skyler adopted a more patient teaching approach. Hazel showed concern for the student and checked in with her "one to one" (L. 79). There was a sense of these teachers drawing on counselling skills and comfortably tuning in to emotion and holding the students' experiences in mind while choosing to engage with how students were feeling.

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Some teachers acknowledged that being attentive and responsive takes time. Kevin appeared to welcome this and for him, this slowing down seemed to mean he was letting go of some of his own agenda and instead considering the young person's perception of a situation. He seemed to see this as key to having a counselling informed teaching approach and stated that, "having to slow down and meet the young person where they're at, has come more from my therapy work than I've ever learned in teaching." (L. 275). Rosetta similarly emphasised the consequences of becoming attuned to the "multidimensional" (L. 182) needs of a class of individuals, stating that "you can't just get on with it" (L. 168). There was a sense that while she did not see this as a negative, she was aware of an emotional effort on her part to sustain this.

Others emphasised a further sense of demand with regards to engaging with students and emotionally sensitive material. This was an issue reported by Jasmine when teaching Social, Personal, and Health Education (SPHE), and she seemed to feel some hesitancy about the appropriateness of some content because she had an appreciation of the possibility of material resonating with "vulnerable students" (L. 76) and causing upset.

> *And being conscious all the time, that actually some of the things that we maybe were talking about could have been quite triggering and that was the bit that was always in my head you know, if something is triggering something here for a young person? (Jasmine, L. 58)*

Kevin too was mindful of potentially contributing to student distress when engaging in a supportive conversation "where we're talking about the overwhelm, if it makes her feel more overwhelmed and she escalates." (L. 181). Like other teachers, he referred to feeling nervous about students opening up and disclosing risk at times, meaning that "There's always a Child Protection Head on" (L. 160).

One interpretation of these accounts could be that bringing this level of heightened emotional receptiveness, when paired with an understanding of trauma plus having mandatory reporting obligations, seems to require sensitive and ethical handling that generates an emotional load for some teachers. Most teachers described ways in which they were addressing these demands by communicating clearly with students about confidentiality and boundaries and by engaging in ongoing informed consent practices as referenced by Brigid in that "we always set out parameters…we set the boundaries always." (L. 173-4).

4.3.2 GET 2 Sub-theme B. Tuning in to Self: "this is my stuff"

During their interviews, teachers reflected on the various contributions of self-awareness and personal development to their teaching role following counselling training. There was a strong sense from their accounts of teachers attending to their own personal process as they worked and that they associated this with counselling skills.

Some teachers emphasised the value of having undertaken personal development work as a result of their counselling training. They conveyed a sense of knowing themselves, their motivations and core beliefs, and of recognising perhaps where these had come from and how they might have a bearing on their role in school. As Skyler put it, "I'm just really aware now of what I need...and the counselling and the psychotherapy's hugely helped with that." (L. 307).

Several teachers spoke about being aware of teaching work resonating with them on a personal level and the value of engaging in their own therapy to process this. One teacher reflected on their own trauma history and how they felt it had motivated them to become a teacher and psychotherapist. For them, past personal development and working through their need to rescue others seemed to support them in staying

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boundaried in their current role whereas "years ago I would have been kind of emotional myself and upset and worried about people and trying to solve problems that weren't mine to solve" (L. 237). Another teacher, Kevin, seemed to see personal therapy as an ongoing and valuable outlet for exploring difficult exchanges with others in work and discovering that "sometimes what's been triggered … is not about them at all." (L. 263) but that it can have a more personal aspect to it.

In Brigid's narrative there was a sense that she felt that cultivating self-awareness was essential to her work. She too seemed to see this as a way of identifying and making sense of how teaching situations might be impacting her emotionally and seemed to feel this helped her to stay grounded during intense situations, to suspend any personal preconceptions, and to put others' needs before her own.

> *you need to tease out your own response …*
>
> *it is good for me so that I know who I am at a particular time … I can put things in that cupboard, and still respond genuinely …*
>
> *a lot of it was getting to know myself and getting to help myself regulate. (Brigid, L. 262-266)*

This sense that self-awareness leads to open-mindedness in interpersonal interactions in school appeared to be similarly underpinning Rosetta and Kevin's shared sense of their capacity to tolerate emotionally heightened exchanges when they reported that they "don't take it personally" (L. 266, L. 260 respectively).

Noah's account of his experiences drawing on his counselling skills while teaching mainstream subjects further illuminates how self-awareness might be seen to be at play. Noah indicated that he was aware of his own emotional process as he taught. He appeared aware of an inner patience and unhurried openness to what students might contribute and of a personal capacity to integrate his empathic understanding of students'

experiences into the lesson. It was as if he was aware of an internal receptiveness and a trustworthy curiosity while in his teaching role explaining, "I feel a lot more comfortable with allowing a bit of space for the process, seeing where that goes … that sense of being comfortable with spaciousness and what might emerge" (L. 96-99).

Skyler described her awareness of having a more genuine way of being with her Tutor group than with her other classes.

> *It's almost like a different feeling I have with them. It's like I'm willing to let them see me as not a stern teacher, but as a person with personality … I think I'm probably more myself with them. But with my mainstream exam classes, I'm more of the persona, of a teacher. (Skyler, L. 215-218)*

There is a sense that authenticity might be difficult to sustain in all teaching situations in Skyler's account. Others articulated a sense that they too valued congruence and that for them, this sense of being able to "inhabit yourself a little bit more." (Noah, L. 196) had developed over time and through having a counselling background. Brigid stated,

> *And I suppose somewhere along the line I made the judgement that perfection doesn't exist. Good enough is good enough. And you can only be who you are at the time, and there's no point pretending in front of young people to be someone you're not … But that's the whole process of me learning through counselling. (Brigid, L. 441)*

These accounts of engaging authentically with students could be interpreted as illustrating feelings of being conscious of oneself in relationship, of trying to shed a stereotypical teacher persona, and of actively attempting to be congruent within the teaching role.

4.4 GET 3. Being a Helpful Presence: "Being properly there"

Figure 4.4

Being a Helpful Presence: GET 3 with three sub-themes.
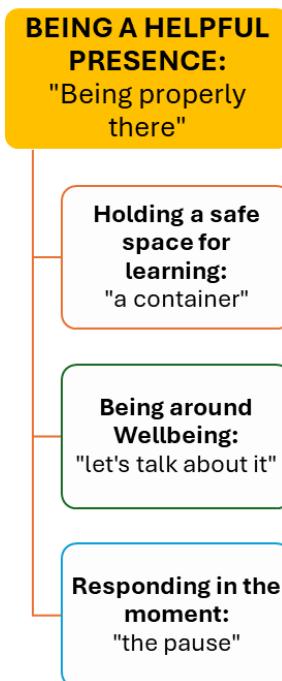
The third GET illuminates teachers' lived experiences of being a helpful presence in school as they embed counselling skills in practice, through a rendering of the relational values expressed in GET 1 together with the counselling awareness as experienced in GET 2. There is a strong sense in this GET of teachers seeing themselves as helpers whose presence potentially creates safe spaces for students in school. Teachers were mindful that any contact with students throughout the whole school day could be impactful and seemed committed to trying to be fully present in their company.

> *And it's being there in that little moment and being properly there, even if it's only for one second, being properly there … the whole time once the kids are in proximity to me. (Rosetta, L. 141-142)*

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This GET comprises of three sub-themes (Figure 4.4), demonstrating teachers making sense of their experiences of using counselling skills to create constructive opportunities for students for learning, meaningful conversations, and emotional connection in different school contexts (Table 4.1).

The first sub-theme, **Holding a safe space for learning: "a container"**, illuminates teachers' sense-making with regards to being with students in class and facilitating learning. The second sub-theme, **Being around Wellbeing: "let's talk about it"**, captures teachers' experiences of being someone who engages with students in relation to their mental health and wellbeing. The final sub-theme, **Responding in the moment: "the pause"**, evokes teachers' lived experiences during brief, empathic moments of connection and emotional support with students.

4.4.1 GET 3 Sub-theme A. Holding a safe space for learning: "a container"

This sub-theme explores how teachers spoke about and made sense of their part in facilitating student learning. Many teachers foregrounded their way of being in class as a distinct lived experience. Within this they seemed to recognise a contribution of enacted counselling skills and engaging with interpersonal, emotional, and experiential processes during subject classes.

> *whether it's looking at a poem or something from a text. That in that holding a space where ideas, and where emotional connections and different perspectives are welcome and validated. That that to me, I mean, I would see an awareness of counselling skills coming into that. (Noah, L. 64-65)*

Several teachers conveyed a sense of feeling very accepting and understanding towards student nervousness and hesitancy within the learning process and seemed to have a strong commitment to helping

students feel safe in their company so as to facilitate student learning. This could be interpreted as teachers providing a secure and containing environment utilising core counselling conditions of unconditional positive regard and empathic understanding. Kevin expressed empathy as he stated, "I've always performed much better when I feel comfortable with the person. I don't feel anxious. I feel safe to make the mistakes … So I think that piece for me is crucial." (L. 74-76.)

There are echoes of this interest in helping students to feel secure in Brigid's comment that, "the person has to be, I suppose, held and made feel safe, before they can learn a subject" (L. 22). Within these accounts, there appears to be a sense of deciding to take on this role, and of recognising the embedded counselling skills and interpersonal dimensions at play.

The idea of teachers seeing their presence in a classroom as having an active mediating influence on learning is evoked by Noah's reference to "a sort of safe base, safe place … a container, that there's a safe space where people can explore, can be themselves, where it's safe enough to learn." (L. 205-6). Although Noah seems to be describing a supportive learning environment (container as a receptacle for learning), his words could be interpreted as evoking a sense of how he might see himself as an instrumental agent in the learning process (container as a role).

The teachers' accounts illustrate many examples of classroom scenarios and give a sense of how teachers appeared to position themselves collaboratively with students in the learning space. Several teachers emphasised a sense of joining with the learner, to "meet them there" (Brigid, L. 67) with empathy and "respect" (Brigid, L. 52). Hazel gave a sense of what this felt like for her saying, "I have a lot of empathy for those weaker students who are really, really struggling and I guess I'm along on the journey with [them]." (L. 190).

Teachers seemed comfortable to sometimes relinquish authority and to say, "I'm not an expert" (Jasmine, L. 97) realising that "this doesn't necessarily have to be directive" (Noah, 62). It seemed as if they were willing to be guided by students, and to be open to the learning that might emerge through dialogical and supportive ways of being with students that applied counselling skills. Brigid's account described her use of active listening skills and seemed to evoke feelings of trust and encouragement as "you allow people to express … They're making connections and it's all being filtered through maybe that listening and questioning and empathising." (L. 353). Similarly, there was a sense of trusting the process and being open to what students might bring to the learning activity when Noah remarked, "It's maybe trusting that a valuable process can emerge through dialogue and interaction and that mightn't have been scripted beforehand" (L. 100).

Teachers' empathy, trust, and respect for students also seemed evident from those accounts that described giving students autonomy and choice in relation to their learning. Hazel explained, "I definitely try to almost put myself in their shoes to give them more autonomy over, say, workload" (L. 58) and Brigid reported "allowing them to come up with the ideas" (Brigid, L. 108) for a school event.

Nevertheless, some teachers indicated that they experienced barriers and dilemmas in the times when they might have wanted to work in this way, which could be interpreted as a sign that sustaining a safe learning space can be challenging. Several conveyed feeling under pressure to complete set curriculums and to prepare students for State Examinations. In this regard Skyler seemed to be feeling a sense of pressure, regret, and missed opportunity saying, "you have to get those students through their Leaving Cert. (sigh) There's always that pressure or the word 'limit' keeps coming back to me," (L. 129-130).

Carol described having contrasting experiences in that she found herself being different with students depending on the subject she was teaching them. This appeared to generate a sense of conflict for her.

> *If I'm teaching English, for example, there's an exam. There has to be, boundaries, that I have to keep, whether I like doing it or not, and if they don't sit well with me. But then, if I'm in an SPHE class … the approach to the students is very different … much more experiential classes, … informal. (Carol, L. 103)*

Additionally, and like some others, Carol seemed to experience a sense of dissonance in relation to classroom management and when she emphasised that "you have to be the disciplinarian" (L. 95) she gave the impression that she felt restricted and under pressure to hold a more authoritarian stance than she was comfortable with, being more naturally inclined to being "more loose." (L. 99).

The task of managing student behaviour and concurrently holding a safe space for learning with counselling skills appeared to place demands on teachers regarding how they present and respond to students. Several described an awareness of a pull to default to strictness and chastisement, as evoked in Skyler's reference to "those typical temptations to respond from whatever way you've been conditioned from years ago." (L. 174). However, there was a sense that sometimes teachers chose to lean into a gentler, empathic way of being that was less reactive and harsh. In Skyler's account there was a sense of her engagement with this choice-point as she grappled with striking a balance between her teaching styles pre- and post-counselling training as she listened to "this voice or something in my head … 'Just go easy. Just go softer on her because you don't know.'" (L. 162).

Indeed, some teachers indicated that they felt their counselling-informed, person-centred and respectful way of being with students contributed to a reduction in student behaviours that disrupted learning. From these

teachers' accounts it seemed that they had reached a comfortable balancing of student autonomy and communicating firmness and that their way of being with students demonstrated this as, what Rosetta termed, a "warm authority" (L. 117).

4.4.2 GET 3 Sub-theme B. Being around Wellbeing: "let's talk about it"

In the second sub-theme, teachers' sense of themselves as they use their counselling skills and knowledge to promote self-awareness, emotional wellbeing, and an understanding of mental health among their students is explored. As well as those who were involved in structured Wellbeing classes during SPHE and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE), others seemed to weave mental health and wellbeing material as "the real curriculum of living" (Noah, L. 207) into other subject classes, delivering the "little pep talk" (Skyler, L. 140), or informally in "the chats" (Brigid, L. 88). Their interviews conveyed their sense that such encounters with students had something worthwhile to offer in terms of promoting wellbeing, but also suggested that some teachers experienced feelings of self-doubt within this.

There was a sense that teachers saw students as developing young people grappling with learning about life in addition to learning subjects. When Rosetta described school life, she seemed to express feelings of empathy, compassion, and an appreciation of the multiple, often complex, demands and pressures of growing up.

> *it's like a jungle. Little first years with huge heavy bags getting in trouble for not having this with them. Not having that with them. And then their sexuality, their sense of self, feckin' social media, the whole world, for some of them it's such a huge struggle. (Rosetta, L. 303-304)*

Like others, she seemed to feel that as a teacher, there was scope within her role to educate and support students in these aspects of their development stating that "the job is to help." (L. 123). Similarly, Jasmine remarked that "more and more, to talk about emotional and mental health is something that we have to do." (L. 83). It was as if teachers recognised that their embedded counselling better positioned them to respond to wider and pressing systemic needs for student mental health and wellbeing support.

Brigid seemed to express a sense of employing the counselling skill of congruence, bringing her *Self* into this process, and thereby opening up opportunities for students to explore and learn about themselves.

> *I allow them the safe space to practise being an adult. Because you have to practise it, I'm still practising … That is for me what my counselling training has done. It has given me the skills to allow them to be people practising growing up. (Brigid, L. 306-308)*

Of the accounts that referenced the SPHE curriculum, Jasmine's narrative stood out in the extent to which she recounted her specific use of counselling skills and knowledge to develop Wellbeing module content and teaching methods. Within this she shared how she felt in the room with students when delivering this material describing,

> *an awareness where sometimes you feel it, you want to impart it, and you want to share, and you want to get them talking, but there's a tentativeness around that too. (Jasmine, L. 77).*

Her account seemed to encompass a deep-seated passion, and a creative commitment to advancing students' awareness of their own wellbeing. There was also a sense of her willingness to have frank and open conversations with students, feeling a confidence to say, "well, let's talk about it" (L. 38) and "we're all just doing this thing called life together" (L. 108) from a position that seemed, for her, to be underpinned by having a counselling background. However, she also described a

sensation of precariousness associated with her tendency to "oscillate" (L. 75) between self-confidence and self-doubt.

4.4.3 GET 3 Sub-theme C. Responding in the moment: "the pause"

The third sub-theme illuminates teachers' sense of using counselling skills and being present and helpful for students during very brief and informal exchanges. Accounts of such occurrences were related in almost all the interviews. Although there were divergences in the aspects that teachers spotlighted, several experiential components were shared across accounts and illustrate a series of felt responses that appear to make up these momentary empathic, self-contained, interactions. Within these exchanges, teachers appeared to apply learned counselling skills such as active listening, rapport-building, contracting, emotional containment, interpretation of behaviours and feelings, brief intervention, goal setting, problem solving, etc.

In many cases such a moment seemed to begin for teachers when they had the feeling that a student in their company needed emotional support, be that explicitly initiated by the student, or initiated by the teacher based upon their perception of an interpersonal situation. Jasmine described "the odd student who would come up and say, 'Can I talk to you?'" (L. 40), whereas Hazel related that she did not "get a sense that students are constantly coming to me, but I'm probably just doing a little check-in here and there." (L. 251).

A very important feeling for many teachers seemed to be their sense of intentionally giving the student their attention, and an understanding of how important it felt "to be present and available" (Noah, L. 116). Allied to this, several teachers emphasised experiences of pausing, perhaps taking a few breaths, and tuning in to their own thoughts and feelings, so

that they seemed to mindfully consider how they were perceiving and reacting in the moment before responding. Skyler described her experiences of taking a pause conveying her feelings of curiosity and reflexivity in the moment.

> *now I pause a little bit more. I'm a little bit slower. I'll take things in a little bit more. I'll take more time to process and figure out, because often in those knee jerk responses as well, you haven't garnered enough information to know what's going on. I just like to observe a little bit more and wonder a little bit more before I jump in with something. (Skyler L. 355-358)*

Brigid's experience of pausing appeared to bring a sense of relief, helping her to regulate her own emotions, and allowing her to access a state of being that she termed "Counselling Mode". Like Skyler, Brigid's experience appeared reflexive as "the Mode is you're keeping calm. You're in a non-judgmental state of mind. You're in a responsive rather than reactive state" (L. 153). From her description, it seemed as if Brigid felt that moderating her emotional process impacted the student's, and that she was a "calming" (L. 167) presence.

Kevin shared a very detailed account of being with a distressed student who reported she was having a panic attack, and he related his moment-to-moment sense-making and feelings as he navigated along a process of engagement, assessment, contracting, problem-solving, considering referral options, and closure with her over a short period of time. He highlighted his own feelings of anxiety, and his body's physical stress response at the outset, that he associated with having a fear that she might be suicidal or would disclose risk. There was a sense of imagining the worst, of recalling memories of previous student suicides and a pressure around Child Protection responsibility. He also conveyed a sense of his tentativeness and carefulness as he explored with the student whether his presence, and their interaction, was helpful for her. He explained, "and then I would have checked in like 'Is it okay to talk

about this this now?', or 'Is it okay to talk here?', or 'Is it okay with me?'"
(L. 184). The exchange concluded after teacher and student
collaboratively developed a coping strategy and there was a sense that
Kevin felt that it had been a meaningful experience for him and a
constructive one for the student.

> *At the end it's great because … I could see when we had finished the interaction, there was definitely a deeper link between the two of us, it meant that she, and I could see, she felt a little bit more relaxed, and we came up with alternatives that may work. So I do think it helped that relationship. (Kevin, L. 153-154)*

Teachers' narratives underscored their awareness of time and place
while engaging in these empathic encounters. Their accounts indicated
that these moments typically occurred in between classes, in classrooms
and in corridors. Some, like Jasmine, seemed to experience a challenge
and a disappointment in this, appearing concerned for student welfare,
and possibly feeling restricted in what she could do.

> *you've maybe only about five minutes, so there's a class waiting to come in or there are students outside and you're very conscious this is not a very confidential … a little bit frustrating and you can feel like you're short-changing them a bit. (Jasmine, L. 138 – 140)*

However, others seemed to focus on the importance of connection with
the student as helpful in its own right. Noah appeared to appreciate the
potential in the moment of contact, and to see it almost as a gateway to
solutions that he would signpost as follow up pathways to students
seeking help. So even though he was aware of his own busy schedule, he
felt able to give the student his time without feeling too much pressure.

> *a bit of me would be thinking I'm supposed to be over here now … But I'm realising that right now this is important, and they mightn't be able to fully address this now … but at least that initial contact has been acknowledged and made, and it hasn't been ignored. (Noah, L. 122-125)*

Within the different helping moments that teachers described, teachers appeared to factor in this sense of limited time as they engaged students in a variety of "brief interventions" (Rosetta, L. 276). As in Kevin's example, teachers conveyed a sense of quickly and collaboratively coming up with small workable solutions and strategies that ranged from practical, to academic, to psychological, to accessing further supports and services. Hazel gave a sense of her experience of offering brief help in this way referring to "This is one tiny thing I can do in this moment to try and address one part of this issue." (L. 178). So, while teachers seemed to appreciate that their moment with the student was a modest intervention, there was a sense that they felt it was important.

Even though time might be an issue, it felt important to teachers to recognise and engage with students in the in-between moments of the day. Kevin used the expression "split moments" (L. 51) to refer to these fleeting instances between young person and teacher that he seemed to feel could be easily missed in the busyness and structure of the school day.

> *There's not necessarily that space within the classroom. The teacher doesn't always have that space …*
>
> *But … the split moments that, there's times … just to be able to talk through and actually being able to allow them the space, … So I think that's where a lot of the opportunity [is] … (Kevin, L. 50-53)*

The situations he, and others, described could be considered to occupy a kind of axis point in terms of holding potential for meaningful interpersonal connection, and for drawing on elements of teaching and counselling practice. In these moments, teachers showed a capacity for emotional responsiveness and self-awareness that they clearly attributed to counselling training.

4.5 GET 4. Navigating Identity: "A ditch each side of the road"

Figure 4.5

Navigating Identity: GET 4 with two sub-themes
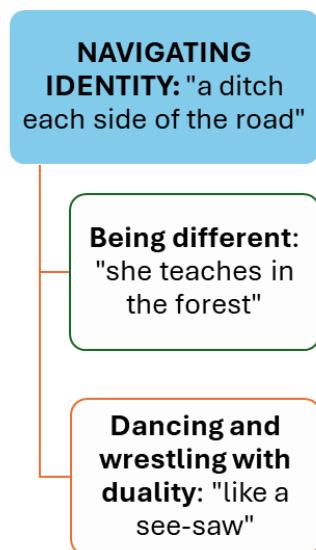
The final GET captures teachers' experiences and perceptions of role identity following completion of counselling skills training (Figure 4.5).

There are two sub-themes in this GET. The first, **Being Different: "she teaches in the forest",** illustrates how teachers seemed to feel a sense of being different or being seen as different by colleagues now that they had completed counselling training and elucidates the impacts of this sense of difference. The second sub-theme, **Dancing and Wrestling with Duality: "like a see-saw",** illuminates experiences of role while integrating counselling and teaching identities within a pre-existing teaching role. It demonstrates a spectrum of teachers' experiences from fluid and confident engagement to uncomfortable and conflictual struggle and illustrates their efforts to make sense of this.

Across this GET, teachers appeared to experience occupational fulfilment alongside tension and overload that they seemed to associate with matters of identity. Variance in the meanings attributed to using counselling skills and to experiences of organisational engagement and support plus access to professional supervision seemed important to teachers in terms of their own levels of ease and clarity around role identity.

4.5.1 GET 4 Sub-theme A. Being different: "she teaches in the forest"

All the teachers seemed to feel changed by their counselling training, often juxtaposing descriptions of their way of approaching their teaching role before and after training as they reflected on embedding counselling skills. As Skyler said, "When I look back, it looks like a different version of me, walking around the school" (L. 249). Teachers appeared to feel that this impacted on how they were perceived within their schools at a systemic level and conveyed a feeling that their role had become changed.

Skyler's narrative foregrounded a sense of feeling marginalised from and by colleagues and she wondered about the extent to which her newly acquired perspectives, values, and ways of relating to people impacted on this "chicken and egg thing" (L. 294). She relayed that her initial feelings of loneliness and isolation had dissipated as she became more settled and content in her identity as a counsellor. In her description of how she thought colleagues perceived her she portrayed herself as a benevolent and quirky outsider as she explained, "That's how I feel some of them look at me … like, 'Oh, there she goes. So, she's still a teacher. She's still in the school. But she teaches in the forest.'" (L. 143-147). Noah's account echoed something of Skyler's experience of being on the

edge in the sense that he appeared to feel he had had to work hard to authentically embody and represent his counselling informed relational values within his role and organisation where they were not always well understood.

> *a real challenge to be constantly reclaiming a focus for the human beings and the relationships at the centre of it. So that's been the challenge for me, but overall, I think it has enabled me to be more myself in work over the years. (Noah, L. 87-88)*

There was a strong feeling that this sense of being different was connected to having acquired additional counselling knowledge through counselling training. It was as if, for some teachers, they were now in a position of in-house mental health specialist within their schools. Some portrayed a sense of the contribution they made to the school. Carol appeared to feel fortunate and knowledgeable as she explained that she could now advise Management on the appropriate referral of students to external services and highlighted that "the school is very lucky that they have someone like me, there, that knows this" (L. 66). Jasmine conveyed a sense of creativity, dedication, and pride when she spoke about her work in developing mental health content for the SPHE programme, and explained, "I have been much more invested in SPHE, that my timetable has gone much more towards that … I enjoy that. So, I suppose my role in that has changed" (L. 200).

On the other hand, Jasmine's account also evoked a feeling of being taken advantage of when she described feeling "taken for granted or a little bit undervalued in terms of; you're kind of getting two for the price of one here" (L. 169). Although she seemed to feel that there was a growing understanding in her school about what she was contributing from her counselling training and background, she appeared to feel frustrated and slightly cynical about this due to a lack of any formal recognition.

Another teacher highlighted a situation in which their Principal had regularly sought their input and guidance on interpersonal matters concerning staff, "relying on me quite a bit to interpret other colleagues. What they say and their behaviour." (L. 373). This teacher seemed to find this intrusive and depleting and cited it as one of several factors in a recent experience of "burnout" (L. 367).

These accounts could be interpreted as examples of counselling skills training contributing to shifts in teachers' and colleagues' perceptions of the counselling trained teacher's function within the school potentially generating feelings of either being misunderstood or of being of use.

4.5.2 GET 4 Sub-theme B. Dancing and wrestling with duality: "like a see-saw"

All teacher accounts contained explorations of role identity through comments, metaphors, and reflections on the compatibility and integration of teaching and counselling within their current role. There was a strong sense of this matter having a dynamic and complicated quality for many teachers and a variance in how they felt about it.

Most teachers conveyed a feeling of ease and confidence when they described how they used learned counselling skills within their teaching work. Describing her approach, Rosetta depicted "the teaching role and therapist role all combined … it's the two of them together. Very seamless" (L. 112-114). Reflecting on how she experienced herself engaging with both elements, Brigid evoked a sense of trusting herself, knowing what she was doing, and being clear about her role and remit, remarking, "I trusted … that I had developed the ability to … go into Counselling Mode without having my Counsellor Hat on." (L. 152). This sense of confidence appeared underpinned by feeling fortunate to have completed counselling training with teachers invoking their sense of

being "lucky" (Skyler, L. 489) and appreciating the "purpose" (Brigid, L. 437) and "benefits" (Noah, L. 128) that they associated with having acquired counselling skills to bring into their teaching.

Nevertheless, some teachers who conveyed a level of comfort with embedding counselling skills within their teaching role also expressed uncertainty about it. Skyler's narrative demonstrated her sense that sometimes for her, both roles did "merge" easily (L. 138) but sometimes it felt "messy" (L. 467) depending on circumstances. Jasmine's account frequently highlighted her feelings of ongoing tension and questioning about possibly over-extending her remit if she employed counselling skills as a teacher.

> I think a lot of the time it's trying to remember what's my hat here? Yes, I potentially could become a therapist in this situation, but that's not what I'm meant to be doing. That's not my role here. (Jasmine, L. 141)

There was a sense that for some teachers, counselling and teaching could at times feel incompatible seeming to generate role confusion. Evoking a sense of frustration and self-doubt, Skyler concluded, "it is a weird role. You'd be better off just being a teacher or just being a counsellor. And now I'm this teacher who has some counselling skills." (L. 460). This tension was echoed by Carol who seemed to try and limit her use of counselling skills to structured pastoral work because the feeling of role conflict in the classroom was so intolerable for her and she explained, "I would separate them. I literally call it the Jekyll and Hyde." (L. 103).

Kevin, who seemed very at home embedding counselling skills at a human level, seemed to be less sure of how compatible his approach was organisationally within his school given how high achieving it was. In grappling with this and in "really trying to find where does my skill set fully fit?" (L. 292) he found himself questioning whether he could continue to work long term in this embedded way in his present context

and was considering how to pivot in his job to something that he considered more straightforward.

Many teachers shared metaphors depicting their experience of embedding counselling skills and described very evocative images. They included representations of sailing a ship (Brigid, L. 428; Figure 4.6) and driving a train (Skyler, L. 416; Figure 3.5) that evoked a sense of flow. Some portrayed the experience of feeling unsure or conflicted through representations of train tracks diverging (Skyler, L. 397; Figure 3.6) or being stuck on a bridge between two cliffs (Jasmine, L. 188; Figure 3.2). Similarly, Carol's reference to Jekyll and Hyde (L. 103) evoked contradiction and separation.

Figure 4.6

Researcher's Interpretation of Brigid's Sailing Ship Metaphor
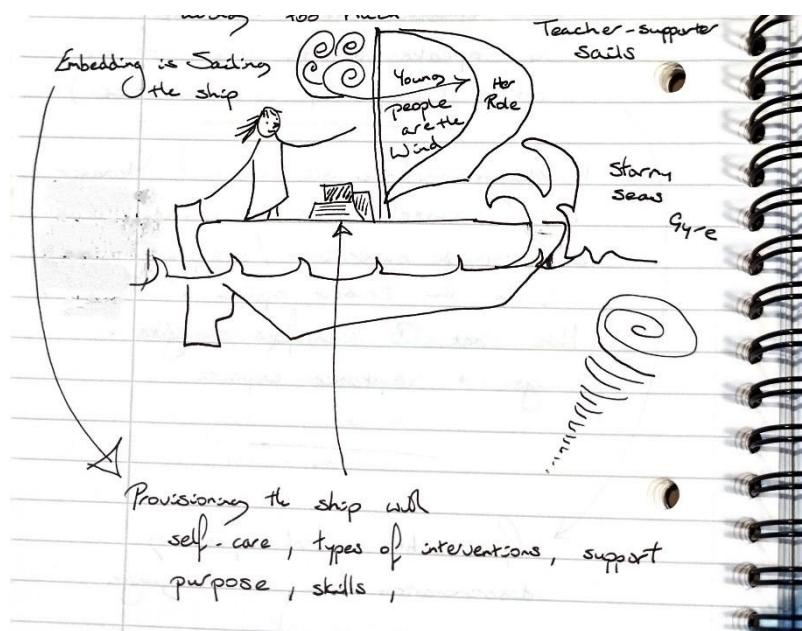
Note: This image depicts Brigid's sailing ship metaphor as interpreted in the researcher's sketched memo. Brigid explained "So the seas were quite stormy. But I think the skills allowed me to maybe keep afloat … The sails were more me in my role as teacher-supporter … the students are the wind … They are the wind beneath your wings" (L. 428).

Hazel's use of gesture and metaphor in her interview illustrated her understandings of duality within her role and conveyed a perception of flexibility and balance. Elaborating on a movement that she was making with her hand, tipping over and back, she explained that this embodied action represented her sense of how she moves back and forth between "therapist hat" and "teacher piece" in her work (L. 148). She revealed that this experience had the feeling of a "dance" or "see-saw" about it (L. 203). Expanding on this image with an example of teaching mental health as a topic through a foreign language, Hazel illustrated how the see-saw could occupy a balanced position if she led a class discussion in English

about mental health, but could tip in a counselling direction if she facilitated a relaxation exercise with the class, or could tip back in a teaching direction if they completed a comprehension exercise in the foreign language about mental health.

Noah chose a metaphor that also conveyed movement and direction when he described his experience as like being on a road bounded by two ditches (L. 130). His metaphor stood out from others in that he articulated how he felt he had achieved role clarity through the portrayal of two ditches representing important boundaries that he had navigated and negotiated over the years. The first seemed to identify the contribution of establishing clear policy and procedure regarding student support in his school. The second seemed to acknowledge his sense of being able to stay true to his person-centred values despite feeling they clashed with organisational values. A central feature of his journey for him was his engagement with professional supervision "helping me stay in the road and not fall into those ditches either side" (L. 211).

These examples from across teachers' accounts, alongside the contrasting movable and immovable imagery within their metaphors, could be interpreted as highlighting the potential satisfactions and tensions, the dancing and wrestling, within teachers' perceptions of dual counselling and teaching roles.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter presented findings of an interpretative phenomenological analysis of interviews with Irish post-primary teachers with counselling skills exploring their lived experiences using these skills within general teaching. By richly illuminating teachers' practices, the findings demonstrate how they embed counselling skills and deepen understanding of their roles.

Findings provide in-depth, compelling descriptions of teachers' everyday worlds in which they sought to foster authentic and meaningful relationships with students that embodied counselling informed values and actions. They illuminate teachers supportively engaging with students across various academic and pastoral situations with reflexive self-awareness, attention to ethical components, and provision of brief emotional and practical intervention.

These embedded counselling encounters are revealed as enriching, challenging, and complex experiences for teachers across four themes identified by the analysis. These themes and the impacts of embedded counselling for teachers will be discussed in the next chapter with consideration of extant literature.

4.7 Researcher's Reflective Comment

I had not anticipated how impactful I would find meeting these eight teachers or been prepared for the breadth and depth of insight they shared so generously. I was struck by their warmth for students and their passion for counselling skills. Realising how isolated and unsupported they often were in their embedded counselling practice, I felt compassion listening to how they grappled with embedding their skills and hearing their testimonies of student overwhelm.

Across the interviews and through the analysis, my preconceptions of teachers' pastoral work were quickly tested by teachers' stories that revealed challenging role tensions and emotionally demanding student presentations. Equally, my fore-understandings of informal counselling were expanded by teachers' stories of creative, holistic, integrated counselling skills practice in everyday school life, like how teachers wove these skills through their subject content and delivery. My chosen IPA methodology provided a useful reflective structure for capturing my

responses as I analysed the data (in memos, sketches, conceptual notes) creating the spaciousness necessary to allow the findings to surface.

It was clear how meaningful the teachers' work was to them, and that participating in the study was important to them. This generated a sense of responsibility, and it felt crucial that I represent all their accounts transparently and fully. Balancing illuminating their stories' richness while protecting privacy created a sense of dilemma for me at times. For example, choosing which details to report while avoiding jigsaw identification of teachers, I was concerned about not authentically representing their experiences.

Writing up encompassed a final iterative and interpretative phase. Oscillating between writing and analysis, the parts and whole of the hermeneutic circle, I carefully deliberated thematic names, pondered related supervision discussions, and in a lengthy reflective process, attempted to grasp and articulate the true phenomenological essence of each theme.

Chapter Five: Discussion

This chapter presents a discussion of the outcomes of the current study. This IPA study explored how Irish post-primary teachers embedding counselling skills within their primary role experienced and made sense of this phenomenon, its impacts, and their perceptions of dual counselling and teaching roles. Experiential findings illuminating teachers' lived experiences and stories are presented in a "dialogue" with existing literature (Smith et al., 2022, p. 116). This analysis highlights aspects of the findings that contribute to or challenge present understandings of embedded counselling, and specifically among post-primary teachers in Ireland.

An outline of the research aim, objectives, and findings will open the chapter. Findings will subsequently be synthesised and discussed in relation to four key themes, followed by an examination of the personal, professional, and ethical impacts of embedded counselling illuminated by the outcomes.

The concluding chapter of the dissertation follows where the research will be evaluated, implications of the findings will be presented, and recommendations arising from the findings of this study will be advanced.

5.1. Synopsis of the Research Aim, Objectives, and Findings

This study aims to explore how Irish post-primary teachers make sense of embedding counselling skills within their teaching role. Objectives include:

- To capture teachers' lived experiences of embedding counselling skills.

- To discover the meanings that teachers attribute to embedding counselling skills.

- To explore how teachers experience the impact of embedding counselling skills.

- To illuminate teachers' perceptions of dual counselling and teaching roles.

Research into the phenomenon of embedded counselling in Ireland is minimal to date, with no studies of embedded counselling among Irish teachers that this researcher has been able to source. The present study importantly addresses this gap with valuable practice applications. It lays a strong and noteworthy foundation for further research and policy developments within teaching and counselling education and professional development. This is a significant field of enquiry with potential to support known academic and wellbeing benefits of teacher-student relationships at a critical time of growing mental health need and declining school belonging among Irish youth (Dept. of Education Inspectorate, 2024; UNICEF Innocenti, 2020).

The current phenomenological exploration of embedded counselling reveals rich descriptive accounts of Irish teachers' lived experiences, meanings and insights regarding the practice. These original insights deepen current conceptual understandings of embedded counselling generally, and within teaching specifically, while contributing new knowledge to an under-researched domain of counselling. Outcomes of this research are highly relevant to teacher and counsellor education, supervision, and policy development at national and international levels.

In-depth interviews were conducted with eight teachers with counselling skills who identified as using these skills informally within their general teaching role in Irish post-primary schools. Teachers' accounts were

considered through IPA and four group experiential themes (GETs) identified. Together these themes richly capture how teachers experience embedding counselling skills as teachers: enriching, challenging, and complex. The richness of these themes is indicative of the cohesiveness of this study as they reliably align with the overall research aim and comprehensively map against the research objectives. This point is further considered in Chapter Six (Table 6.1).

Figure 5.1

Summary of the research findings.
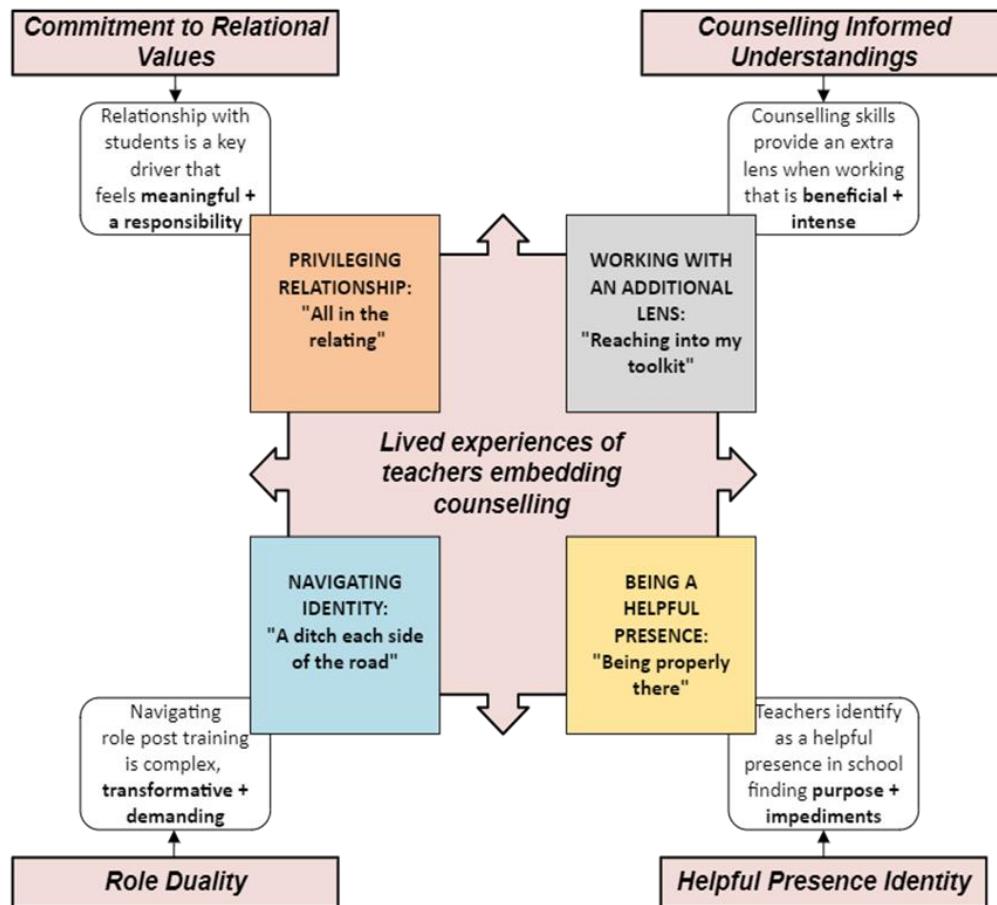
Note: This diagram shows four coloured boxes representing the four group experiential themes (GETs) identified in the study. Centrality of teachers' lived experiences to the research findings and the interplay between GETs is shown with a pink four-arrowed graphic in the background. Key features of each GET are shown in pink rectangles with a brief synopsis of each feature shown as a connecting graphic. Arrows indicate that experiences, features, and themes influence each other.

The GETs are:

1.) *Privileging Relationship: "All in the relating"*

2.) *Working with an Additional Lens: "Reaching into my toolkit"*

3.) *Being a Helpful Presence: "Being properly there"*

4.) *Navigating Identity: "A ditch each side of the road"*

Four central features of the experience of embedded counselling by teachers, arising from these themes, are discussed in subsequent sections (Figure 5.1). This is followed by discussion of positive and negative impacts of embedded counselling illuminated across these elements by teachers.

The key features are:

1.) **Commitment to relational values:** illuminating the impacts and reach of teacher-education in counselling skills and humanistic approaches for compassionate care and teacher wellbeing self-efficacy.

2.) **Counselling informed understandings:** highlighting enhanced teacher knowledge and competencies with training and personal development and focusing on specific training requirements.

3.) **Helpful Presence identity:** illustrating valuable academic and pastoral applications in Irish schools and revealing the impacts and pressures of student support with embedded counselling for teachers.

4.) **Role duality:** illuminating complex expansion of teacher role identity encompassing a counsellor dimension and raising important ethical and professional issues.

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5.2 Commitment to Relational Values

The centrality of relationship with students is a strong feature of teachers' experiences of embedded counselling and is reflected in GET 1, *Privileging Relationship: "All in the relating".* This theme evokes how embedding counselling is more than a set of skills to these teachers but rather, an expression of their core values.

Teachers' accounts convey deep faith in students' capacity for learning and development and their firm commitment to supporting holistic student development using acquired counselling skills across subject classes, wellbeing provision, and casual interactions with students.

A fundamental aspect for some teachers was how they had always valued relational connection, and how this was key to their decision to study counselling. This emphasis on relationship resonates with Holliday et al. (2018, p. 654) research suggesting that "being available for relationship" is a key motivator for undertaking counselling training. For these teachers, the counselling role seems to represent an enduring aspect of their identity that they seek to express within their teaching role.

However, some of the current teachers explained that their counselling training had, in fact, importantly precipitated this relational outlook within teaching, indicating one notable effect of counselling skills training on teacher attitude. This stimulated impactful new perspectives on work and interpersonal relationships within school.

This finding suggests counselling skills training among Irish post-primary teachers may be experienced by some as affirming and legitimising their pre-existing relational values within school contexts. On the other hand, training may be a catalyst that leads others to consider the merit and relevance of relational values within education.

Teachers' core belief in students' potential and worth identified by this research aligns distinctly with the core humanistic principle of self-actualisation: "man's tendency to actualize himself, to become his potentialities."[sic] (Rogers, 1961a, p. 351). This was evident in teachers' references to person-centred traits. Hornby's model for counselling in schools emphasises the relevance of humanistic perspectives within informal school counselling and argues this is "consistent with the aims of pastoral care and social education in schools" (Hornby, 2003, p. 15).

This finding therefore supports the suitability of such humanistic counselling models as conceptual frameworks for Irish post-primary teachers embedding counselling skills but suggests that this paradigm may initially feel unfamiliar to some teachers. Moreover, findings that sustaining a person-centred focus was not always easy for teachers, e.g., between didactic and experiential subjects, highlights potential drawbacks. Accordingly, this finding presents several potential impacts of counselling skills training were it more widely available to Irish post-primary teachers through ITE or as CPD and suggests that humanistic paradigms are broadly accessible across this cohort.

Teachers' stories conveyed empathy and deep concern for the feelings of distress and pressure they observed among students. The word "overwhelm" was used repeatedly by several teachers to describe students' experiences. Their empathic awareness, developed through counselling training, of elevated student overwhelm is in accordance with Irish data evidencing adolescent stress associated with high-stakes examinations (Smyth & Banks, 2012), negative health and wellbeing impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic (Quinn et al., 2021), discrimination of minority students (Költő et al., 2023), average levels of protective wellbeing factors (Dooley et al., 2019), high levels of adversity (Silke et al., 2024), and elevated mental distress among adolescents (Dooley et al.,

2015; Silke et al., 2024). All these components were referenced by at least one teacher, with academic pressures, adverse experiences, gender and sexuality issues, and trauma featuring more frequently across several interviews.

Teachers in the current study articulated a sense of esteeming their students highly and wanting to engage in kind and caring relationships to assist them with such concerns. This finding resonates with the Rogerian concept of "prizing" the other (Rogers, 1957, p. 98, 1961, 1980). Teachers' accounts suggest this type of person-centered relationship felt meaningful and rewarding to them as they perceived they were making a difference. Some also described feeling invigorated and empowered when engaged in such consequential relationships with students. Interestingly however, among those who emphasised how rewarding these relationships felt, some acknowledged feeling a weight of responsibility suggesting how embedding counselling could become unsustainable.

Teachers in the current study felt positive and impactful when supporting students. This finding contrasts with research on teachers' experiences of wellbeing provision that have identified teacher stress, low confidence, and feelings of inadequacy concerning student support and mental health (Dimitropoulos et al., 2022; Dowling & Doyle, 2017; Ekornes, 2017; Lodge et al., 2022; Stoll & McLeod, 2020). Furthermore, the current findings support research outcomes showing that mental health training is linked to reduced teacher stress and improved perceived wellbeing competence (Dowling & Doyle, 2017; Ekornes, 2017; Stoll & McLeod, 2020b). Similarly, the findings concur with research evaluating counselling skills training for teachers demonstrating greater teacher confidence (Kit & Tang, 2018) and counselling self-efficacy (Seema, 2021) with counselling training, as in the case where a teacher felt confident

discussing a student suicide with her students. Accordingly, the current research outcomes reinforce the merits of counselling training for developing wellbeing self-efficacy among Irish post-primary teachers.

The findings of the current study highlighting teachers' commitment to relational values align with literature indicating that Rogerian person-centred traits and skills are naturally present in some teachers and can be developed in others through person-centred and counselling informed training (Aspy & Roebuck, 1977; Rogers et al., 2014; Tausch, 2014). Additionally they resonate with Ruttledge's (2022) evaluation of psychology training to enhance Irish teachers' relational practice in one post-primary school. On completion of workshops on ecosystemic, cognitive, attribution, attachment, developmental, and relational theories, most teachers reported reduced stress and that they prioritised relationships more often at work (Ruttledge, 2022).

Results of the current study suggest that counselling skills training may offer an additional and complementary strategy to psychology training for building teacher-student relationships. Such strategies deserve serious consideration in view of the extant literature demonstrating the significance of teacher-student relationships for student wellbeing and school belonging (Allen et al., 2018, 2021; Dooley et al., 2019; Johnson, 2008). Their significance and relevance are further reinforced by current data identifying concerning levels of mental health issues among Irish youth (Silke et al., 2023, 2024; UNICEF Innocenti, 2020) and showing that a third of Irish post-primary students do not feel a sense of school belonging (Dept. of Education Inspectorate, 2024).

Teachers' relational values translated into careful attentiveness to micro-components of teacher-student contact demonstrating regular application of counselling microskills e.g., attending, active listening, and empathic skills. When describing how they embedded counselling,

teachers in the current study described small interactions like using students' names, showing interest, saying "Hello" or making eye contact with students around the school. This echoes with findings from an eight-year longitudinal study of teacher-student relationships that gave voice to 130 Australian pupils who identified the "ordinary, everyday, relational, 'little things' that teachers do to nurture and promote their students' resilience" and convey their empathy, availability, and support (Johnson, 2008, p. 385). These students recounted "the 'human touches' that promote pro-social bonding between teachers and students", such as greeting, listening, or encouraging pupils (Johnson, 2008, p. 395).

Similarly, the current finding illustrates how including simple acts of humanity within their teaching was important to teachers. This echoes with McLeod and McLeod (2022) and Reeves and Bond (2021) who argue that embedded counselling is a humanising endeavour. McLeod (2007, p. i) contends that embedded counselling is "socially and culturally important" and is necessary in the context of contemporary bureaucratic and technological pressures that de-humanise the caring professions (McLeod & McLeod, 2022, p. 8). This position is supported by teachers' accounts in the current study portraying classroom technology as intrusive and a barrier to relational actions.

This was a theme that one participant elaborated upon in some detail. They observed the tendency for teachers to prioritise digital devices, record keeping, and content delivery whereas he held that establishing a sense of connection with students should come first. Other accounts echoed this but additionally highlighted that working relationally was time-consuming suggesting perceptions that school and curricular norms allowed little time for humanising touches.

Interestingly, among other Irish post-primary teachers, the accountability and administrative demands of the Wellbeing curriculum

have been linked to perceived lack of time for actual student support (Byrne & Carthy, 2021). Furthermore, Farrell and Mahon (2022, p. 53) contend the formalised curricular system of wellbeing provision in Irish post-primary schools is problematic because it "orientates us away from humanity and towards the system". They argue instead for greater emphasis on meaningful teacher-student relationships characterised by teachers showing key components of interest, attunement, and authenticity. Findings of the current study illuminate how embedding acquired counselling skills may help address perceived need for greater humanisation in Irish post-primary schools offering a compassionate framework and practice that counters trends in Irish educational culture described as "underpinned by a neoliberal agenda supplemented with managerialism and performativity" (Skerritt, 2019, p. 155).

Overall, the first key theme in the current study identifies the embedded counselling teachers' commitment to relational values and humanistic counselling principles including self-actualisation, empathy, and positive regard. It reveals that the cultivation of strong teacher-student relationships with counselling skills mattered greatly to this cohort and was perceived by teachers as humanising and impactful, contributing to teacher wellbeing self-efficacy. These findings illustrate worthwhile potential for counselling skills training to prepare Irish post-primary teachers with core humanistic concepts and capacities for effective care and connection with students.

5.3 Counselling Informed Understandings

A second key feature arising from the current investigation is the significance, for teachers, of counselling informed understandings of self and others. This is captured in GET 2, *Working with an Additional Lens: "Reaching into my toolkit".* This theme conveys teachers' perceptions of

embedded counselling as the application of a supplementary source of acquired knowledge, understanding, and practice derived from counselling, and relevant to teaching.

This view is compatible with the BACP definition of counselling skills that highlights the "specialised application of communication skills informed by therapeutic theory and practice" (BACP, 2018b, p. 9). Additionally, it lends support to counselling skills frameworks that depict embedded counselling as a practice characterised by contextually responsive, flexible application of counselling methods and interventions such as Hornby's (2003) model for counselling in schools and McLeod and McLeod's (2022) embedded counselling model.

The current finding contributes additional depth to these conceptualisations by offering a rich illumination of the phenomenology of this type of specialised application of counselling skills and theories in an Irish post-primary context. The lived experiences of teachers in the current study reflect how teachers embedding counselling post-training feel more resourced, self-aware, and in tune with students. However, within this, teachers' perception of counselling skills evoked something of a double-edged sword, beneficial but intense, and highlight the exacting nature of the task of integrating counselling skills within a post-primary teaching role.

In their accounts, teachers in the current study articulated how these acquired understandings allowed them to experience deeper empathy and appreciation for others' lived experiences and contributed to an expanded proficiency when interacting with students. Teachers conveyed a sense of seeing people through fresh eyes and of moderating their own actions accordingly. For example, one noted she would previously have chastised a student who did not have their homework

done, but since developing counselling skills, she now empathises and gives more autonomy to students regarding heavy workloads.

A similar experience was identified by Holliday (2015) among British counselling trained teachers where they attributed changes in their responses to students post training to a shift to thinking about students' behaviour as having meaning. Irish teachers that completed in-service psychology workshops equally "valued the psychological perspectives given in order to develop their understanding and attributions for student behaviour" and also reported changes to their reactions to challenging student behaviours (Ruttledge, 2022, p. 251).

The current finding demonstrates how counselling training uniquely endows teachers with psychological insight and capacity to interpret student behaviour in a manner that was not previously available to them following general teacher education. This finding supports the view that Irish teachers are receptive to psychological perspectives of student behaviour and is compatible with international research outcomes.

The teachers interviewed in the current study additionally emphasised the role of self-knowledge within their embedded counselling. Many accounts portrayed how teachers tuned into their personal process while teaching and within these stories, teachers highlighted the contributions of self-awareness and self-regulation in helping them to be boundaried and grounded in emotional situations.

Several teachers in the current study acknowledged the significance of personal growth work during their counselling training, and some continued to resource themselves through personal therapy. This echoes with the experiences of teachers in Holliday's (2015) study who emphasised the significance of their personal development during a counselling training in terms of promoting self-awareness and relating

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calmly and reflexively to students. In-depth, experiential personal growth work is normative within counselling training but not in teacher education (Johns, 2012). These current findings suggest that the addition of counselling training for teachers comprising both psychological frameworks (Ruttledge, 2022) and personal development (Holliday, 2015) could offer Irish post-primary teachers useful extra strategies for reframing student behaviour and adapting their own reactions accordingly.

Self-awareness is considered to be an important counselling skill competency that allows a practitioner to appreciate potential effects of personal feelings and lived experiences and to understand when personal development is appropriate to support counselling practice (BACP, 2020b). Accordingly, structured opportunities to develop self-knowledge within counselling training programmes are expected (Johns, 2012).

In many cases, this involves trainees completing personal therapy during training and helpful effects on counselling practice stemming from associated personal growth and professional learning have been identified in a contemporary systematic review of international research (Willemsen et al., 2024). Nevertheless, there is ongoing debate in Ireland and globally with regards to mandating personal therapy within professional counselling programmes with concerns about unhelpful clinical impacts and the ethics of imposing this requirement (McMahon, 2018a, 2018b; Murphy et al., 2018; Willemsen et al., 2024).

These wider discussions have relevance for teacher education. Research into mandatory personal therapy during initial teacher counselling training found that trainees developed enhanced self-awareness with therapy (Kit & Tang, 2018). Kit and Tang's (2018) recommendations for

including personal therapy in counselling education for teachers are supported by the findings of the current study.

The teachers in the current study conveyed a sense that, for them, embedding counselling grants access to a breadth of knowledge across counselling theory, counselling techniques, psychology, self-awareness and self-care. Many of their accounts depicted how they brought these counselling informed understandings to bear in educational scenarios.

This finding demonstrates these teachers' engagement with multiple "knowledges" (of education, counselling, and personal process) reflecting an important element within the embedded counselling model that articulates how embedded counselling practitioners respond to various, potentially competing, professional and personal understandings as they work (McLeod & McLeod, 2011, p. 319). Furthermore, this finding captures the felt sense of this construct as encompassing feelings of openness, insight, and perhaps intensity.

It is important to recognise that the teachers in this current study had invested significant amounts of time and other resources in undertaking different counselling qualifications, ranging from certificates to post-graduate awards, and had engaged in various personal development activities, to achieve the understandings reflected here. Motivations were mixed and included seeking relational roles, self-knowledge, mental-health knowledge, and career development within both teaching and counselling.

Many took this route specifically to extend their professional competence regarding student support potentially indicating they perceived a gap in teacher education. This is highly noteworthy given that existing policy states that pastoral care does not require specialist skills (Dept. Educ., NEPS, 2022). Furthermore, this finding represents a

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commitment to professional development that sharply contradicts existing research suggesting that Irish teachers are disinclined to engage in professional development to support wellbeing provision (Byrne & Carthy, 2021). Instead, it is more closely aligned with the experiences of teachers in one Irish post-primary school where a need for all-staff, in-service psychology training was identified and organised by school management and staff (Ruttledge, 2022).

Teachers' experiences suggest that completion of a significant amount of counselling training while teacher qualified met their perceived need for wider knowledge and informed their student interactions but that processing and integrating this material with pre-existing understandings was demanding. This raises questions concerning appropriate content and duration of counselling training for teachers, the suitability of professional counselling programmes for this cohort, and the need for teacher supports as they develop an embedded counselling practice.

Teachers perceived acquired counselling skills as an impactful, meaningful resource that often supported them in challenging interpersonal work situations but sometimes felt demanding or inaccessible. Conservation of Resources theory posits that people are motivated to acquire resources such as "purpose and meaning" to help with organisational stress (Hobfoll et al., 2018, p. 104). Organisational burnout is a multidimensional conceptualisation of individual work stress in social context whereby a burnout-to-engagement continuum operates with mitigating individual and organisational variables (Maslach, 1998). Accordingly, embedded counselling may have a positive or negative bearing on teacher work stress or burnout depending upon individual and systemic components.

In summary, the second key feature of the findings comprehensively foregrounds the significance for Irish post-primary teachers of

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counselling informed understandings within embedded counselling as a rich, impactful source of knowledge of self and others within teaching. It aligns with and illuminates existing embedded counselling frameworks and expressly highlights the important role of personal development within counselling skills training for teachers. This theme demonstrates that teachers perceive counselling training as absolutely necessary to support their pastoral role. Finally, it implicates several crucial considerations regarding counselling skills curriculum, training provision, supervision, and organisational aspects. The impacts and implications of these issues are further addressed in Section 5.6 and Chapter Six.

5.4 Helpful Presence Identity

The third key feature of embedded counselling apparent within current teacher experiences is helpful presence identity. This feature is illustrated across GET 3, *Being a Helpful Presence: "Being properly there".* This GET illuminates how teachers saw themselves when embedding counselling post-training and how they expressed this sense of self while using counselling skills and creating safe spaces for students in different educational and pastoral situations. These safe spaces supported pedagogy, wellbeing provision, and empathic interpersonal moments.

Teachers described an awareness of embodying a distinct way of being with students underpinned by counselling skills that they perceived was helpful. This experience was characterised by teachers attempting to be fully present, available, and authentic when in relational contact with students. The teachers in the current study understood this way of being present as counselling-informed and fundamental to the support and encouragement they could offer their students.

This counselling-informed attention to the influence of self on educational and pastoral activity suggests that these teachers perceived

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their relationships with students as consequential and willingly accepted a role as helpful adult. This position aligns with the important construct, elucidated from findings of the My World Surveys, of the adolescent having *One Good Adult*, a special person, in times of need associated with academic and wellbeing outcomes (Dooley et al., 2019; Dooley & Fitzgerald, 2012). In the present study, counselling trained teachers identified as a helpful presence in their school and appeared open to making themselves available as the *One Good Adult* in a student's life.

This was illustrated in several accounts of students consistently seeking out an individual teacher and trusting they would receive non-judgemental help from them. It was also apparent as many teachers went out of their way to show concern for an individual student's welfare and initiate supportive actions. For example, one participant had a feeling of naturally stepping into this caring role for a student that colleagues perceived as a troublemaker. However, she would make time for this girl, ensuring she had adequate food and school supplies and helping her to engage with her schoolwork.

In their counselling-informed sense of being a helpful presence, teachers appeared cognisant of boundary issues as an ethical concern. Situations perceived by some as challenging included apprehension that wellbeing material might trigger students, managing confidentiality and risk, and feeling conflicted about overextending their remit or confusing students. However, others articulated clarity regarding boundaries that seemed to stem from clear communication and reflexivity. These professional and ethical aspects are further detailed in Section 5.6.

The import of these teachers' care towards their students is affirmed by Irish developmental research with adolescents that shows that relationships with teachers matter to students and are significantly linked to student self-image with students that receive teacher praise

and affirmation regarding themselves more positively than those who receive frequent teacher reprimands (Smyth, 2015). Furthermore, this finding is supported by international educational research that observes associations between positive teacher-student relationships and student achievement, attendance, behaviour, and school connectedness (Bernstein-Yamashiro & Noam, 2013).

The teachers' helpful presence identities were reflected in their stories of drawing on counselling skills while working with students individually, in groups, with parents, pastoral colleagues, or external support services. This suggests their helpful role extended to wider school and community circles across the adolescent's ecosystem in ways that "help support and guide human growth" (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, p. 37). Equally, this aspect resonates with national and international policy and research advocating community-wide pastoral and wellbeing provision for adolescents (Dooley et al., 2015; Government of Ireland, 2020; NEPS, 2010; Silke et al., 2024; UNICEF Innocenti, 2020).

Among Irish adolescents, talking about problems is linked to better mental health outcomes and teachers and guidance counsellors are the most common source of professional help that they access (Dooley et al., 2019; Dooley & Fitzgerald, 2012). Findings of the longitudinal Growing Up in Ireland study indicate that 85% of adolescents "felt they could talk to their teacher if they had a problem" (McNamara et al., 2020). However, among 856 Irish post-primary students surveyed by Doyle et al. (2017), 84% reported that they would not seek help from a teacher suggesting that it is not always easy for students to connect with teachers.

Furthermore, a systematic review of ninety high quality studies of adolescent help-seeking showed that having a "trusting and committed relationship" with a key adult such as a teacher is one of the most

commonly identified facilitators of help-seeking (Aguirre Velasco et al., 2020, p.307). These studies highlight the potential impacts of quality teacher-student relationships, and the importance of certain teachers for students, when it comes to seeking help with their concerns.

Counselling skills literature maintains that many people seek help with everyday challenges and mental health concerns from key professionals they already know and trust rather than professional counsellors (Browne, 2008; Egan & Bailey, 2021; Kennedy & Charles, 2001; Nelson-Jones, 2016). The current finding of helpful presence identity in teachers embedding counselling, facilitating safe spaces for students, concurs with this view. This demonstrates important advantages of embedded counselling in schools as students can access help early, can engage with a teacher they know and expect to get along with, who is familiar with the student's circumstances and viable local resources (Behrani, 2016; McLeod & McLeod, 2022).

The general teacher with counselling skills is present daily within the student's microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1993) of class, peers, extra-curricular activities etc. and as these teachers illustrate, can contribute positively to student welfare and school connectedness (Allen et al., 2021). Consideration of current findings from an ecosystemic perspective indicates the influence of systemic factors including school ethos, leadership support, mental health services, and educational policies (Allen et al., 2021; Beames et al., 2022; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Byrne & Carthy, 2021; McNamara et al., 2020). These multilayered factors appear to influence how straightforward or otherwise embedded counselling can be within teaching.

All teachers interviewed identified with a helpful presence identity and demonstrated sustained levels of holistic emotional engagement and student support that they perceived as embedded counselling. There

was a sense of these teachers wanting to always be available for students. It is important to consider how a constantly caring identity might take a toll on teachers embedding counselling.

Occupational burnout is a recognised problem among the caring professions, including teaching, when chronic emotional and interpersonal work demands exceed perceived intrapersonal and organisational resources resulting in exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficiency (Maslach, 2003). This complex interplay between school environment and teacher individual differences has been shown to predict burnout among Irish teachers (Foley & Murphy, 2015). Furthermore, teacher stress is associated with feeling responsible for helping students with mental health problems (Ekornes, 2017) and secondary trauma among teachers is associated with supporting students with trauma history (Caringi et al., 2015; O'Toole & Dobutowitsch, 2023). The current finding of teachers' helpful presence identity draws attention to the potential for occupational stress and burnout among Irish post-primary teachers embedding counselling skills, particularly if adequate teacher preparation or organisational supports and resources are not in place (Hobfoll et al., 2018; Maslach, 1998).

Furthermore, while arguments for teachers to adopt the role of *One Good Adult* (Dooley et al., 2019) and to engage with a model of whole community youth mental health support are prevalent and compelling (Dooley et al., 2015; Government of Ireland, 2020; NEPS, 2010), it is important to consider the potential emotional demands that this places upon teachers. One teacher raised this issue of becoming the "go-to person" as a downside to embedded counselling. Some teachers, particularly in smaller schools without guidance counsellors, indicated that school management also heavily relied upon them to support

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students with emotional and behavioural issues, especially when referrals to external services were slow.

Educational discourses increasingly position teachers in a frontline mental health role (Beames et al., 2022; Gunawardena et al., 2024; McConnellogue & Storey, 2017). Within Irish education all post-primary teachers are expected to extend pastoral support meeting students' social, emotional, behavioural and mental wellbeing needs (NEPS, 2010, 2021). This cultural context appears to generate a tension for some embedding counselling teachers between organisational expectations and teachers' perceptions of the limits of embedding counselling. These experiences highlight wider resourcing issues in Irish post-primary schools that may contribute to unreasonable or unintended organisational expectations regarding the capacities of teachers embedding counselling. Additionally, they point to the necessity for greater systemic support of embedded counselling teachers e.g., through provision of CPD and supervision (see Sections 6.3.2 and 6.3.3).

A discussion of teachers' experiences of the various safe spaces identified in the findings of the current study follows (Figure 5.2).

Figure 5.2

Examples of school contexts in which teachers facilitated safe spaces

Teaching &
learning moments

Practical help

Informal
emotional
support

Brief empathic
moments

Psychoeducation

Encouraging
awareness
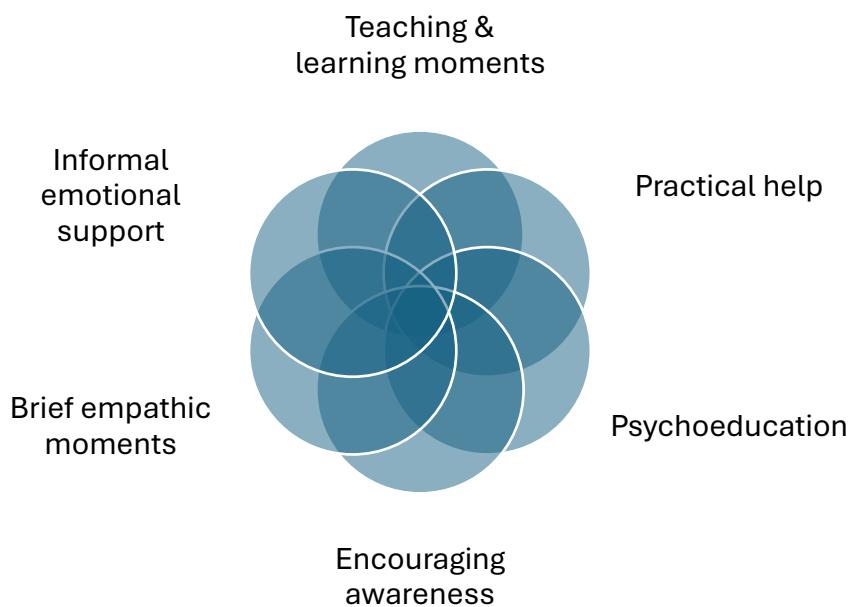
Note: This Venn diagram shows potential for overlaps in embedded counselling episodes illuminated by teachers' accounts.

5.4.1 Pedagogy

Teachers' accounts of bringing counselling skills into subject classes conveyed perceptions of counselling skills shaping and maintaining a positive, secure, social and learning classroom environment. Teachers emphasised their interpersonal attributes like empathy, non-directiveness, trust, and open-mindedness, alongside techniques like Socratic questioning, reflecting, and observing body language, as well as approaches like collaboration and giving students autonomy. These are well recognised counselling methods (Ivey et al., 2015). In the current study, teachers employed these intentionally as teaching strategies and to reassure academically challenged learners, examine subject content, foster inclusion, and encourage student engagement.

The use of counselling skills in the classroom demonstrates Kottler and Kottler's (2007, p. 77) skills model for teachers that contends "this helps to build a learning community emphasising values of curiosity, respect, tolerance, responsibility, and caring". This finding resonates with empirical evidence of the positive correlations between person-centred teaching and educational outcomes including student achievement, IQ, critical thinking, and good behaviour (Cornelius-White, 2007; Tausch, 2014). Furthermore, this finding supports the view that teachers adopting counselling "relationship strategies" bring beneficial "curiosity" and a "stance of not-knowing" to their classroom interactions that supports meaning-making among students (Kecskemeti, 2013, p. 36).

5.4.2 Wellbeing Provision

Teachers in this current study perceived that embodying a helpful presence supported them with a breadth of wellbeing provision across SPHE lessons, subject classes, practical activities, and informal conversations (Table 4.1; Figure 5.2). Their accounts showed how they strove to deliver student support with empathy, authenticity, tolerance, and compassion.

Many of the teachers' stories described teaching students about mental health issues e.g., stress, anger-management, addiction, and supporting some students with mental health issues e.g., anxiety, complex bereavement. This finding aligns with Irish research where teachers have identified with having a mental healthcare function (Lynam et al., 2020; O'Toole & Dobutowitsch, 2023).

However, the current teachers' accounts additionally mentioned supporting students with other more commonplace difficulties and allowing "safe space to practise being an adult". These included issues with friendships, school practicalities, and other general matters of

growing up. This finding supports the view that emotional support from embedded counselling can be understood as listening to and helping another to "get a handle on a life that is confusing" as they grapple with "problems in living" (McLeod & McLeod, 2022, p. 4).

Kottler and Kottler (2007, p. 11) also emphasise this level of general student support for "concerns not problems" by teachers embedding counselling in recognition of teachers' typically foundational counselling knowledge base and broad responsibilities within schools.

Interestingly, the current findings suggest that the wide breadth of wellbeing provision that some teachers described extended beyond the level of general emotional support outlined in existing models of embedded counselling. In contrast, but in line with Irish education wellbeing policy, these teachers perceived they had a role in mental health education and support that they resourced through counselling training. While this finding extends existing understandings of embedded counselling within Irish post-primary education it also raises questions around the level of recognition and support within Irish schools for the contribution of counselling skills trained teachers to mental health and wellbeing provision. For instance, participant experiences illustrate a gap between embedded counselling teacher contributions and organisational appreciation that contributed to teacher tension.

5.4.3. Empathic Interpersonal Moments

Teachers frequently reported experiences of being a helpful presence in brief empathic moments of connection with students when they provided support and mediated presenting difficulties. Similar experiences, described as "windows of opportunity" were identified by Branch and Malik (1993) observing busy doctors competently attending

patients' emotional concerns in under seven minutes using conversational techniques.

In the current study, teachers detected these potential windows, described as "split moments", by sensing students' emotions. This reflects the concept of "empathic opportunity" proposed by Eide et al. (2004, p. 291) regarding openings for empathic responses during medical consultations. Some empathic moments relayed in the current study led to a simple application of counselling skills, e.g., corridor check-ins, diffusing conflict. Others, like intervening with a distressed student, led to a more structured, brief counselling-type interaction. The former are described in the literature as "counseling encounters" [sic] (Kottler & Kottler, 2007, p. 49) and the later as "counselling episodes" (McLeod & McLeod, 2022, p. 41).

Høigaard and Mathisen (2008, p. 297) have proposed a model delineating three stages of teachers' informal situated counselling: preliminary, counselling, and termination, but note "the form of the conversation will be varied and unclear" requiring nimble, skilled teacher responses. This threshold, illuminated in the sub-theme of *Responding in the moment: "The pause",* was reflected in current teachers' portrayals of their process on the cusp of the empathic moment, characterised by pause, mindfulness, and engagement with a choice-point regarding options and roles.

Similar pragmatic decision making features in Hazler's (2008, p. 95) seven-step plan for teachers engaged in "hallway helping" to balance competing dimensions of student concerns (personal/academic) with what is appropriate in the school environment, and what teachers can realistically achieve within their competencies (Figure 5.3).

Figure 5.3

Hazler's (2008) Seven-Step Hallway HELPING Model
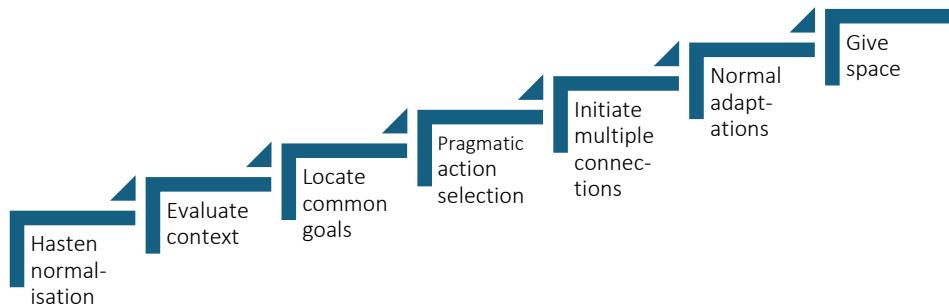
Similar factors were evident in many teachers' narratives, however, their implicit decision-making models were sometimes less comprehensive than conceptual models in the literature (Hazler, 2008; Høigaard & Mathisen, 2008; McLeod & McLeod, 2022). The counselling skills practitioner's capacity to effectively "recognise" a need for support, "respond" appropriately, and "refer" when circumstances exceed their professional remit, is fundamental to competent embedded counselling (BACP, 2020a, p. 12). Teachers' perceptions, in the current study, of being a helpful presence reflects this contextual negotiation, with divergences in experiences of reflexivity (Schön, 1991). This finding contributes an original and valuable understanding of the here-and-now dynamism of real-world practice to existing conceptual frameworks and linear process models. It may also reflect an atheoretical approach to embedding counselling among the current cohort which may indicate a gap in existing training programmes.

In summary, the third of the current study's key themes illuminates teachers' experiences of helpful presence identity as they employed

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counselling skills to foster safe spaces for students within pedagogy, wellbeing provision, and empathic interpersonal moments. This finding demonstrates counselling skills as transferrable within education, it contributes to ecosystemic conceptualisations of the teacher as *One Good Adult* (Dooley et al., 2019), and supports and contributes to existing process models of embedded counselling. Significant positive offerings of embedded counselling promoting student help-seeking and fostering positive teacher-student relationships in Irish post-primary education are apparent. However, high expectations of teachers embedding counselling to provide consistent and specialised student support may risk pressure and burnout among teachers (Ekornes, 2017).Teachers' perceptions of strategies and supports that sustained their practice are further explored in Section 5.5.

5.5 Role Duality

The fourth key feature of teachers' experiences of embedded counselling identified in the current study is role duality. This is illustrated in *GET 4: Navigating Identity: "A ditch each side of the road".* GET 4 reflects teachers' sense of having developed a counsellor dimension to their teacher identity and practice. The theme illuminates teachers' lived experiences of the duality of combining two perspectives simultaneously in opposing and complementary ways within their work.

The complexity of this endeavour pervaded teachers' accounts revealing rich exploration and engagement with role identity and evoking an array of struggles and satisfactions, confusions and clarity. For example, one described conflict at pivoting from caring to authoritarian which was confusing for students. But another comfortably experienced switching from empathetic to academic in the same class.

All teachers regarded their counselling skills training as deeply significant, changing them as teachers and opening their eyes to alternative perspectives. The transformative nature of training among counselling professionals has long been acknowledged (Henry et al., 1971; Rønnestad & Orlinsky, 2005) with similar findings among counselling trained teachers (Hall et al., 1996; Holliday, 2015; Kit & Tang, 2018).

With few in-depth studies of embedded counselling practitioner development, it is informative to consider this finding in the context of counsellor professional development literature. Rønnestad et al. (2019) synthesise two major longitudinal studies of professional development among 12,000 therapists globally. These authors' consequent conceptualisation of counsellor development, from novice to senior professional, articulates a life-long staged process where key elements, like reflexivity and external support, lead to work satisfaction, resilience, and coherent identity formation. Contrastingly, current embedded counselling teachers' accounts of role duality evoke the elusiveness of fully integrated professional identity when amalgamating counselling and teaching.

Several accounts referenced perceptions of switching between two separate professional identities in school, from "Teacher Hat" to "Therapist Hat", illustrating experiences of role duality that some found complicated and taxing. This finding crucially highlights the challenges for dual-qualified practitioners in maintaining focus on their primary role.

Social identity theory contends that where several role identities co-exist, role salience is influenced by the hierarchy of salience among identities (Stryker & Burke, 2000) and by context (Mitchell & Boyle, 2015). A qualitative study of healthcare clinician-educators' perceptions of dual-professional identities by Ong et al. (2019) found identity integration was strengthened by cognitive flexibility and perceived salience of the

secondary role, but hindered by individual and organisational tensions. Teacher variances in role duality within the current study similarly reflect individual differences in perceived role salience and organisational expectations. It appears that more equal role salience is helpful when embedding counselling within teaching. This dynamic is less well accounted for in existing conceptual models (Høigaard & Mathisen, 2008) where the pre-existing professional role is usually framed as primary and counselling as secondary (BACP, 2020b p. 5).

Lack of role clarity on the part of a practitioner embedding counselling potentially carries the risk of overextending or misrepresenting one's role and remit and establishing problematic dual relationships. Midwinter and Dickson (2015, p 35) emphasise that "ambiguity around dual role clarification can lead to distress and insecurity" for the clients of helpers embedding counselling skills.

These aspects evoke the ethical principle of integrity, a core principle of the national *Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers* (Teaching Council, 2016a) and shared by counselling codes of ethics (BACP, 2018a; IACP, 2018). Additional pertinent ethical principles of autonomy and non-maleficence are clearly explicated within counselling codes and are subsumed within the Irish teachers' code of conduct (BACP, 2018a; IACP, 2018; Teaching Council, 2016a). It is helpful that common ethical values exist across teaching and counselling as, in theory, this prevents conflict between professional standards. However, findings of the current study allude to nuanced professional tensions in practice that often required substantial engagement on the part of teachers to prioritise their teaching role.

Moleski and Kiselica (2005, p. 337) review literature on dual relationships in counselling ranging from "the destructive to the therapeutic" and argue that there may be benefits to dual relationships within some

cultures, small communities, and with adolescents, where familiarity and social connection builds a working alliance. Such insights have much to offer the embedded counselling field. The ethical ambiguities for Irish post-primary teachers embedding counselling skills emerging in the current study (detailed in Section 5.6) indicate a critical need for greater consideration of role duality and dual relationship within existing counselling and teaching codes of practice and within practitioner training and supervision. Absence of such guidance may have contributed to teacher role-conflict emerging in the current study and more broadly, may result in teachers generally being fearful or unsure about engaging with counselling skills within their role.

Teachers often framed their sense of professional self as atypical and specialised within their school due to their knowledge around mental health. Research has demonstrated that Irish post-primary teachers perceive limitations in their mental health knowledge (Dowling & Doyle, 2017; Stenson et al., 2018) and that teachers characterise existing SPHE curriculum as inadequate (Byrne & Carthy, 2021; Lodge et al., 2022). Accordingly, some teachers in the current study indicated they were frequently consulted by principals and colleagues regarding student mental health and the wellbeing curriculum. This finding suggests that post-training, their role had developed a twofold teacher/mental health function filling an organisational knowledge or resource gap while contributing to these teachers' sense of dual identity.

In a review of Irish research, Skerritt (2019, p. 160) concludes that Irish teacher identity is "based on having both authoritative control and good rapport with students". This highlights the perceived importance of discipline alongside care in Irish school culture. Interestingly, the current teachers' narratives frequently illustrated tensions they experienced at work, with colleagues or within themselves, arising from conflict

between their relational values and more dominant expectations around classroom management or fulfilling academic standards. On the other hand, some teachers believed that counselling skills helped with classroom management.

The prevalence of this friction globally is evident from qualitative research illuminating "a sense of a culture clash" between British teachers and colleagues regarding discipline post counselling training (Holliday, 2015, p. 25). Equally, it resonates with findings from Goodwin et al. (2021) systematic review of international wellbeing interventions in schools showing that academic subjects often take precedence over student support within school cultures. The tensions reported by teachers in the current study created stress and dissonance for many teachers as potentially incompatible expectations contributed to dichotomy in their professional identity.

In the current Irish education context, over-reliance on a humanistic approach appears at times to contribute to emotional and cognitive dissonance among teachers embedding counselling. For example, one teacher recounted her contradictory experiences of managing a student's challenging behaviour while empathising with his circumstances.

Such experiences challenge the utility of humanistic paradigms within school counselling and teacher formation (Aspy & Roebuck, 1977; Hornby, 2003; Rogers et al., 2014; Tausch, 2014). Equally these findings pose important questions for Irish embedded counselling teacher training and school policy regarding the management of tensions between informal counselling, pastoral care, and school discipline.

All teachers valued their counselling skills and most appeared comfortable embedding them generally. Yet within this, some teachers'

accounts evoked a sense of "dance", flow, and congruence, while some portrayed paralysing tensions, and some conveyed a disjointed mix of ease and apprehension. Notwithstanding these individual differences in teachers' capacities to tolerate the dualities and associated ambiguities within their roles, all teachers' experiences of role duality had some dynamic features.

The teachers that articulated the greatest ease embedding counselling all conveyed a clear understanding of their intentions and limitations with counselling skills and a strong sense of autonomy and purpose regarding their practice. Those who experienced self-doubt or role confusion were less clear, felt pressure to over-extend their counselling skills remit, or struggled when expectations and values clashed.

Clarity regarding role, dual relationship, the limits of practitioner competence, and having the capacity to manage associated tensions are sources of potential ethical dilemma for practitioners embedding counselling (BACP, 2020b; McLeod & McLeod, 2022). Writing about the ethics of counselling in schools, Nelson Agee (2003, p. 166) states that teachers must be clear "whether they are using counselling skills within the broad definition of their teaching role…within their pastoral capacity, or whether they are taking on a more specific counselling role."

More broadly, Lang (1999) emphasises the importance, within effective whole-school pastoral care, of clear understanding among wider school staff concerning differences between counselling and counselling skills. Furthermore, Lloyd (1999, p. 26) proposes schools develop specific ethical guidelines encompassing formal school counselling and counselling skills with "a statement of the aims and philosophy of counselling and helping skills", and clarification of practices concerning administration, interprofessional liaison, boundaries, and supervision.

It was clear from the accounts of most teachers in the current study however, that no such organisational recognition, structures, or support was available to them. Only one teacher identified and emphasised well-defined student support policies and staff functions in their school. In fact, many teacher accounts portrayed a sense of isolation, feeling misunderstood by colleagues, and lacking support from their school.

Crucially however, several teachers reported the benefits of accessing "a reflective space" through external support from supervision and personal therapy. These teachers appeared clearest about their role and more comfortable managing the intricacy of embedding counselling within teaching. Findings regarding the value of supervision, personal therapy, and organisational support are compatible with evidence from studies of embedded counselling (Chibanda et al., 2011; Kit & Tang, 2018; Malan et al., 2015; Scully, 2011) and wider professional counselling literature (Hawkins & McMahon, 2020; Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2013).

Counsellor professional development is formulated as integration of professional and personal self, optimised by congruence between values and methods, continuous reflection, "accumulated wisdom", and "an attitude of respect for the complexity of counselling/therapy work"[sic] (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003, pp. 27, 38). Integrating counselling and teaching adds another layer to this process. Current findings importantly demonstrate how identity integration may be facilitated through accessing reflexive opportunities (Ong et al., 2019), role clarity, ethical sensitivity, negotiating values, and feeling supported. This has significant implications for training, supervision, and policy development (see Chapter Six).

This fourth key theme of role duality conclusively highlights the complexity of embedding counselling for teachers and schools. It richly illuminates the impacts of embedded counselling on teachers' identity,

the affordances and dilemmas experienced, and the vital importance of ethical sensitivity and supervision when navigating dual identity. These critical dimensions of embedded counselling require careful and extensive consideration from teachers, their trainers, counselling supervisors, and school leaders.

5.6 Enriching, Challenging, and Complex Impacts

The enriching, challenging, and complex teacher impacts illuminated across the four GETs identified in the current analysis will now be explored.

Teachers reported numerous beneficial impacts. Many felt fortunate, more comfortable, and better resourced because they had counselling skills, especially when providing emotional and wellbeing support to students. They perceived their perspectives had widened, bringing fresh interest, compassion, and empathy with others. Most associated personal growth, enhanced mindfulness, and tolerance with having counselling skills and some attributed their capacity to maintain discipline to their counselling informed approach.

Together these findings represent enriching impacts that resonate with the outcomes of quantitative research with thirty-two Northern Irish priests engaged in pastoral counselling by O'Kane and Millar (2001, p. 330) where the majority (91%) perceived counselling to be rewarding and two-thirds found it "comfortable". British counselling qualified teachers' narratives in Holliday's (2015) qualitative exploration similarly evoked positive impacts like confidence, empowerment, satisfaction, and wellbeing.

However, teachers in the current study also reported some challenging impacts of embedded counselling as they encountered various barriers and burdens that generated conflicts and demands. Comparable

multifaceted impacts were similarly identified in O'Kane and Millar's (2001) research whereby two-thirds of priests surveyed additionally found embedding counselling draining, and in Holliday's (2015) study whereby teachers identified complex impacts like conflicts and tensions.

Challenging impacts for the current cohort were encountered in the school environment with obstacles such as time pressures, insufficient private spaces, and intrusive technology. Many accounts portrayed taxing levels of emotional and intellectual involvement as teachers tuned into multiple perspectives and processes as they worked. Additionally, teachers often articulated feelings of dissonance between their humanistic approaches and dominant academic and classroom-management expectations. Furthermore, some teachers' narratives reflected dilemmas relating to role identity and responsibility.

Many of these challenges are recognised across teacher counselling skills literature (Doyle et al., 2017; Harrison, 2019; Holliday, 2015; Hornby et al., 2003; King, 1999; Kottler & Kottler, 2007). However, the perception of technology as an obstacle to embedding counselling has not previously been highlighted, and may reflect ongoing expansion of the Irish educational digital landscape (Johnston & McGarr, 2022).

Challenges and complexities of embedding counselling illuminated in current teachers' stories often had ethical dimensions as teachers grappled with uncertainty around the appropriateness of embedding counselling. This was portrayed in accounts illuminating teachers' awareness and preoccupation with boundaries, confidentiality, dual relationships with students, responsibilities, risk, role identity, self-care, and student welfare. There are synergies between these findings and what Banks (2016, p. 35) identifies as "everyday ethics", describing "ethics work" to mean "the effort people put into seeing ethically salient aspects of situations, developing themselves as good practitioners,

working out the right course of action and justifying who they are and what they have done."

This finding critically highlights the importance of teachers accessing supportive and reflexive opportunities in which to engage in "ethics work" (Banks, 2016, p. 35). This places a responsibility upon both teachers and organisations to arrange appropriate practical resources such as supervision, teacher wellbeing initiatives, and peer support. However, with current lack of policy in this area, teachers and organisations may be hesitant to formalise such practices. Other possible barriers may include lack of understanding, timetabling, or funding issues.

The construct of ethics work emerged from qualitative analysis of social workers' perceptions of ethical aspects of their practice and is posited as a descriptive framework of situated ethics that contrasts with formal models of ethical principles and decision making (Banks, 2013, 2016). Social work perspectives on ethics in practice have value in the embedded counselling field (McLeod & McLeod, 2022) in addition to professional counselling ethical codes (IACP, 2018; Reeves & Bond, 2021).

Regarding current findings, there are analogies between these teachers embedding counselling and social workers who similarly move between roles of "carer and controller; educator or advisor" (Banks, 2016, p. 41). Furthermore, the wide spectrum of experiences that teachers associated with embedding counselling and the accompanying sense of burden or duty evoked resonates with the notion of "effort" and "work" described by Banks (2016, p. 35).

McLeod (2008, p. 14) states that "there are risks involved in offering counselling within another professional role" including client confusion, and counsellor overwhelm and over-extension. In a school context, teachers with counselling skills may encounter relationship ruptures with

confused students, role ambiguity with colleagues, work overload, and loss of authority (Nelson Agee, 2003). The findings of the current study suggest that teachers were aware of, and impacted by, such issues.

The seven features of ethics work identified by Banks (2016) and the accompanying concern to do good and avoid harm are reflected in teachers' experiences as follows, highlighting the complex ethical impacts of embedded counselling among this group:

1. *Framing work:* Teachers' meaning making around responsibilities, benefits, and harm.

2. *Role work:* Teachers' sensing of choice and dilemma regarding roles and relationships.

3. *Emotion work:* Teachers recognising emotions and empathy as important and meaningful.

4. *Identity work:* Teachers striving to do good work as an embedded counselling teacher.

5. *Reason work:* Teachers making situated and practical ethical choices in the moment.

6. *Relationship work:* Teachers caring for and about students, parents, and colleagues.

7. *Performance work:* Teachers presenting themselves to others as a helpful presence.

Complexity is an acknowledged aspect of professional counselling that practitioners must embrace (Egan, 2014; Rønnestad & Orlinsky, 2005). As therapists develop from trainees and novices into experienced practitioners they typically face challenges and anxiety as they negotiate the complexity of autonomous counselling in their particular context and

begin to construct a sense of professional identity (Rønnestad et al., 2019; Stoltenberg, 2010). Therefore, comparable findings suggesting that embedding counselling post training is perceived as demanding and complex are not surprising.

Nevertheless, it has been argued that embedding counselling is more challenging at times than professional counselling given the dynamic, multifaceted environments and positions occupied by the practitioner (McLeod, 2008; Reeves & Bond, 2021). Accordingly, the current theme richly illuminates the tensions that may present within this practice for Irish post-primary teachers.

In a key finding, this points to a possible cyclical dependency between affordances and challenges where cause and effect appear symbiotic. Experiences that are meaningful correspond with responsibilities while practices that feel discordant coincide with feelings of purpose. The enriching effects may over time contribute to some teachers finding themselves in draining and troublesome interpersonal situations. But equally such difficult interpersonal situations may be perceived by some teachers as more manageable and meaningful through engagement with counselling skills. This dynamic raises questions about the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural drivers or disruptors of this cycle.

Research of professional counsellor development shows that professional growth and resiliency are connected to how counsellors navigate challenge in their practice (Rønnestad et al., 2019). Important mediators occur at organisational levels with provision of supervision and reflexive opportunities, and at individual levels through practitioners' capacity for reflection, tolerating complexity, and processing difficult emotions (Rønnestad et al., 2019). The influence of both organisational and individual elements on teacher's perceptions of challenging impacts of embedded counselling are similarly captured in the findings of the

current study and highlight ecosystemic dimensions of embedded counselling (Bronfenbrenner, 1993).

Researchers of peer counselling programmes have emphasised the importance of organisations providing for supervision of informal counsellors (Kohls et al., 2018; Peltzer et al., 2014). Integrated and mandated supervision of emergency service peer supporters is an essential component of an empirically validated successful provision in Australia over eighteen years (Scully, 2011). Interestingly, Scully (2011, p. 40) maintains that "a high level of duty of care falls to the employer" when informal support for others within the organisation is provided on a voluntary basis by staff. He argues that organisations have a responsibility to provide regular mandated supervision in these instances. This view contrasts sharply with experiences of current teachers and underscores important organisational and practitioner obligations.

In the embedded counselling model, appropriate preparation and organisational resourcing that includes supervision are crucial to mitigate against ethical risks (McLeod, 2008; McLeod & McLeod, 2022). Teachers in this study demonstrated preparedness for embedding counselling when they articulated their openness to offering support and listening to students, their reflexivity regarding application and limitations of counselling skills, and their engagement with challenges inherent in their school context (McLeod & McLeod, 2022, p. 40). Nevertheless, at times the challenges and complexity of embedding counselling appeared quite demanding for some.

Support from organisational resourcing and supervision (McLeod & McLeod, 2022) featured less prominently in teachers' accounts with teachers tending to feel their work was misunderstood or taken for granted by colleagues. Some noted they were not entitled to the official supervision provided to guidance counsellors by schools as their

counselling role was informal (DES, 2022). However, some reported benefits of external support from personal therapy and supervision that they organised independently. But interestingly, one teacher felt there was "nobody to guide on it." perceiving that both school and external counselling supervisor did not understand embedded counselling. These findings draw attention to limited appreciation of embedded counselling within Irish education and professional counselling circles.

Beneficial and challenging embedded counselling impacts are demonstrated by current findings portraying a complex activity with ethical dimensions. Findings show that opportunities for teacher reflexivity were valued by teachers but that teachers experienced available organisational support as insufficient. Teachers and organisations have important ethical responsibilities to ensure embedded counselling contributes to beneficial effects for all concerned and avoids detrimental outcomes. Intervention at individual and systemic levels (Bronfenbrenner, 1993) across the life-span of teachers' careers (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003) that enhance teacher reflexivity and adaptability could support individual pressures (Ong et al., 2019), ethics work (Banks, 2016), and balancing role salience (Mitchell & Boyle, 2015; Ong et al., 2019), while supportive school leadership and educational policy could mediate organisational tensions (Holliday, 2015; Lloyd, 1999).

5.7 Conclusion

This interpretative phenomenological analysis of teachers' interviews yielded four group experiential themes highlighting key features of the experience of embedding counselling skills for this cohort: commitment to relational values, counselling informed understandings, helpful presence identity, and role duality. These experiences contributed to

enriching, challenging, and complex teacher impacts. These impacts appear intertwined in an interdependent cycle with individual and systemic components.

Embedding counselling skills within post-primary teaching roles emerges as a potentially humanising and impactful practice that is highly valued by Irish teachers in educational and pastoral work. This phenomenon contributes to teachers' sense of professional identity and generates opportunities and challenges within their practice. Personal development, access to supervision, organisational values, and everyday ethical sensitivity present as important aspects.

Adopting a caring role with students through embedding counselling can be experienced by teachers as fulfilling and affirming but may place the teacher in an unsustainable position if the barriers and burdens they experience when embedding counselling outweigh resources and rewards. Systemic culture and practice regarding student support, wider mental health resourcing shortfalls, and individual differences among teachers have been identified as central factors in tempering or exacerbating these tensions.

This study makes a considerable contribution by providing the first IPA-based exploration of how Irish post-primary teachers experience embedding counselling skills within their teaching role. It importantly illuminates a complex relationship between teaching and informal counselling engendering affordances and dilemmas for teachers with emotional, intellectual, relational, and ethical dimensions.

These findings demonstrate the significant positive contributions of embedded counselling teachers within Irish post-primary education and are critically important considering current mental health challenges among Irish adolescents and associated teacher wellbeing provision

concerns. Such challenges require urgent intervention. The establishment of large numbers of appropriately trained and resourced embedded counselling teachers within Irish post-primary education would offer a transformative and sustainable contribution to the alleviation of student overwhelm, and to teacher wellbeing self-efficacy, with substantial benefits. However, there remain significant barriers such as a lack of teacher education in counselling skills and an absence of formal recognition, supervision, and policy for embedded counselling teachers.

The next and conclusive chapter will deliberate the implications of these findings for practice, training, supervision, policy, and research and will propose constructive and actionable recommendations arising from the current study.

5.8 Researcher's Reflective Comment

As I developed this chapter I was reminded of Brinkmann and Kvale's (2015, p. 57) evocative analogy of the qualitative interviewer-researcher as the traveller coming back from a "journey to a distant country that leads to a tale to be told upon returning home". This resonated with my sense of no longer being with the teachers I had met and shared meaning-making with during the interviews, of now making meaning without them, and of sharing their stories for others to contemplate.

I had begun this journey from a position formed from my own multiple professional roles of psychotherapist, psychologist, counselling skills trainer, university educator, and doctoral researcher. I had embarked equipped with experiences and preconceptions from these roles, my reading of embedded counselling literature at the time, and my questions about this practice. I returned with souvenirs in the shape of tangible data, reflexive writings and sketches, and other more subtle

memories of how stories were shared with me and the awareness of how I have carried these within me since the interviews.

I knew I had been inspired by the teachers I had met, their commitment to their students and their innovative counselling skills practice. I could identify humanistic values, approaches, and dilemmas that we shared in some instances as educators. I was aware that my involvement in counselling skills training predisposed me to seeing embedded counselling in a positive light. But this background also raised questions for me about practitioner preparation that were amplified by the duality and complexity within teachers' experiences emerging from the analysis and not widely accounted for in the literature.

A significant challenge to my optimistic assumptions came early in the fieldwork, for example, with the account of a teacher grappling with embedding counselling. And in my later development of themes that illuminated teachers' satisfactions and struggles I could sense my understandings shifting. I also noticed how my formal psychotherapy informed expectations were sometimes challenged by teachers' accounts of flexible, situated counselling skills practice, and I acknowledged my own lack of post-primary teaching experience and expertise here.

The foremost context in which I now recount this tale of my research is that of a psychotherapy doctoral dissertation. This too brings expectations around a psychotherapy emphasis and conventions of presentation as the tale is told.

I have a sense of holding teachers, and holding the reader of this research, in mind as I write. Mindful of the responsibility of representing teachers' voices clearly in the multifaceted context of this dissertation, I have aspired in this chapter, to offer the reader material that might be of use,

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and to further our understandings of embedded counselling, by brokering a conversation between the teachers' voices, the reader, and the literature.

Chapter Six:

Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter synthesises the key contributions of this study highlighting its impact on conceptual and practice understandings of embedded counselling within education and counselling. The research has identified key phenomenological themes within embedding counselling. Together with the rich and resonant descriptions advanced of teachers' unique experiences, the findings extend current conceptual models of embedded counselling and contribute to existing empirical research in this field. This new knowledge advances current thinking, has meaningful implications for education and counselling practice, and establishes an empirical foundation for future research and policy development.

The chapter opens with an assessment of the theoretical transferability of current findings before discussing implications and recommendations arising. These pertain to practice, training, supervision, Irish post-primary education, the counselling profession, and further research. The overall strengths, limitations, and quality of this study are appraised against established criteria (Yardley, 2000). The chapter, and the dissertation, will close with a synopsis of the research and the researcher's concluding reflective comments.

6.1 Contributions of the Current Study

This is a pioneering study, the first IPA research in Ireland to explore embedded counselling in Irish education. It has captured and illuminated teachers' unique voices from a field that has received little academic attention. This research is innovative in its objectives and substantiates the importance of embedded counselling as a significant sphere of counselling practice and research.

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Using an interpretative phenomenological analysis this research has yielded rich and novel experiential descriptions of teachers' perceptions of their embedded counselling practice within a general teaching role. The participating teachers' narratives illuminated their concern and compassion for students as they positioned themselves as a consistent and caring adult ally in school. Their words illustrated how they worked to convey to each student that they mattered. These teachers sought to build strong, impactful connections with students by embedding counselling skills within their practice. Furthermore, they frequently discovered a sense of purpose, freedom, and empowerment through these relationships. For them, counselling-informed practice broadened their understanding and capacity for what one participant described as "the human connection piece" of relational working across wide-ranging learning and pastoral activities.

The in-depth iterative analysis undertaken highlights the intricacies and complexities of embedding counselling for this cohort. This phenomenon emerges as deeply meaningful and highly exacting encompassing experiences of teacher satisfactions, enhanced capacities, emotional encounters, structural challenges, and associated shifts in professional identity.

Teachers experienced embedded counselling as enriching, challenging, and complex with four key features:

1. Commitment to relational values

2. Counselling informed understandings

3. Helpful presence identity

4. Role duality

The findings' richness deepens understanding in an important area of counselling and pastoral support. They highlight extensive opportunities for further research and have substantial implications for practice, training, supervision, Irish post-primary education, and the counselling profession.

This study is timely in the current social climate where teachers have been positioned as frontline workers and encounter large numbers of adolescents experiencing diminished school-belonging and struggling with their mental health. Importantly, it contributes to understandings of Irish teachers' experiences of wellbeing and mental health provision that can benefit both teachers and students into the future.

6.2 Theoretical Transferability

The approach taken in the current study is idiographic focusing on the unique lived experience of the embedded counselling teacher in their particular context. Accordingly, the research outcomes are not empirically generalisable outside of these particulars (Smith et al., 2022). Nevertheless, some tentative theoretical transferability is possible as the findings of the analysis have been situated and interrogated within the broader context of the extant literature.

For example, the importance of interpersonal support within embedded counselling emphasised by the current study of teachers has also been identified among peer counsellors (Carandang et al., 2020) and nutritionists with counselling skills (Gupta et al., 2019). The current teachers also highlighted the centrality of responding to empathic opportunities with students and this experience is widely noted in the embedded counselling literature across various professions (Branch & Malik, 1993; Eide et al., 2004; McLeod & McLeod, 2014). Also comparable, is the appreciation of organisational support and supervision by teachers

in this research and by embedded counselling professionals in other fields (Chibanda et al., 2011; Malan et al., 2015; Scully, 2011). Moreover, perceptions of Northern Irish priests that embedding counselling is both rewarding and draining parallels the enriching and challenging experiences of the current cohort of teachers (O'Kane & Millar, 2001, 2002).

Thus, some of the implications and recommendations arising from the study may be cautiously considered for other groups that are similar to embedded counselling teachers. For instance, the research outcomes may offer some judicious conceptual insights for other professionals embedding counselling skills e.g., social workers, or for professional counsellors with dual roles e.g., counsellor and lecturer. Furthermore, as professional counsellors' work may involve counselling skills training, supervision, or activities that develop the counselling profession as a whole, the current research findings lead to more richly informed perspectives of embedded counselling among the wider counselling community with valuable applications.

6.3 Implications and Recommendations

6.3.1 Implications for Practice

The teachers who have spoken about their embedded counselling practice through this research have shared stories illuminating the rewards and demands of this way of working. This approach was important to them, and although some grappled with it, they appreciated its value for students and were strongly motivated to do this work well and appropriately. Findings clearly show that teachers considered their counselling skills training transformative and highlight the value of conceptual and experiential counselling education for this cohort. Teachers' experiences of work fulfilment when embedding counselling

skills within their teaching role were underpinned by reflexivity, however managing organisational culture and expectations often contributed to dissonance and dilemma. The findings suggest that comprehensive preparation and engagement with ongoing supports are vital to sustain a healthy balance between rewards and demands and help teachers negotiate complex contextual and ethical components.

Additionally, findings demonstrate, in the current Irish education context, embedded counselling teachers need to be able to clearly articulate the scope of their practice to all stakeholders to manage expectations and boundary issues effectively and ethically. The example of a teacher that was asked by management to work with complex student mental health and behavioural presentations highlighted the value of referring onwards to an external network of independent counsellors. However, related findings illuminate stretched or limited capacity among internal and external student support services and reveal the challenge of onward referral for teachers with counselling skills.

Arising from current findings and supported by wider extant literature (Byrne & Carthy, 2021; Holliday, 2015; Katsatasri, 2022; Kit & Tang, 2018; McLeod & McLeod, 2022; Seema, 2021), several recommendations for teachers embedding counselling are advanced:

6.3.1.1 Recommendations for teachers embedding counselling

It appears important that teachers embedding counselling would have access to quality, life-long counselling skills training encompassing a broad holistic curriculum of theory, practice, personal development, and ethics. This could help foster appropriate knowledge, skills, self-awareness, and reflexive practice for sustainable, high-quality student support. Furthermore, it may help to ensure teachers are familiar with relevant policy and codes of practice and, as illustrated in one

participant's case, can develop effective decision-making protocols for student support with counselling skills.

Active engagement and initiative within the school organisation could perhaps be a further priority for teachers embedding counselling. For example, teachers could clearly communicate the embedded counselling teacher's roles and responsibilities to all stakeholders, e.g., students, colleagues, parents/carers, management, supervisors etc. By inviting feedback and dialogue teachers could actively manage expectations and clearly establish their professional remit. Teachers could advocate for practical support of embedded counselling within their school e.g., access to supervision, and avoid over-extension of their role e.g., saying "no" to requests for input that are unreasonable or beyond what is appropriate.

Findings suggest that teachers could proactively resource themselves through engagement in reflection, peer-review, self-care, support and supervision as these are valuable to ensure ongoing professional development and protection from occupational burnout (Peltzer et al., 2014; Scully, 2011). Examples include peer community of practice, CPD, personal therapy, individual and group clinical supervision etc. Additional resourcing could involve, as one teacher's case highlighted, proactively identifying and engaging with a network of onward referral pathways for students.

These initiatives may help alleviate potential teacher pressures when embedding counselling and could contribute to enhanced role clarity at individual and systemic levels. Failure to address these priorities may risk over-extension and burnout among embedded counselling teachers and diminished pastoral care of students.

6.3.2 Implications for Training

Findings clearly show that counselling skills training can resource post-primary teachers' academic and pastoral provision. Teachers experienced enhanced interpersonal confidence, wellbeing self-efficacy, and resilience that they attributed to counselling training and, from this training, had acquired understandings of human nature that contributed to empathic, relational engagement with students. They valued the knowledge, skills and personal development components of their trainings and articulated their sense of feeling grateful to have completed these trainings. These findings demonstrate the utility of holistic and comprehensive counselling skills training curriculums for teachers.

Several teachers strongly advocated for universal teacher counselling skills training and argued that many teachers felt unprepared and underqualified for mental health support. However, the challenges evident in integrating counselling training into teaching practice identified by the current findings highlight a need for counselling education more closely aligned with the demands of embedded practice. Findings illustrated teachers grappling with multiple perspectives in fast-paced dynamic environments and adapting counselling approaches for brief and situated interventions. Many experienced ethically difficult dimensions highlighting a need for training for "ethics work" (Banks, 2016, p. 35).

Teachers that had developed their own working model of embedded practice, referred to by one participant as her "Counselling Mode", appeared more at ease with this complex role. Training that is more tailored to situated counselling may be of value to facilitate this assimilation process. Overlooking this within existing counselling training

courses in Ireland, particularly at professional level, may not fully prepare practitioners for embedded counselling.

These findings suggest counselling training during initial teacher education (ITE) and as continuous professional development (CPD) has potentially significant value if it is holistic, specific to educational contexts, and explicitly addresses embedded counselling theory and practice. It is likely that an introduction to counselling skills during ITE would build teacher confidence in supporting students emotionally (Seema, 2021). If offered, this could establish an elementary, threshold level of competence for all teachers, and may additionally encourage qualified teachers to pursue counselling skills CPD later in their career to further their skills.

Arising from the current findings and in view of current policy and practice (QQI, 2014; Teaching Council, 2016b, 2020), the following recommendations are made for training:

6.3.2.1 Recommendations for Teacher Education Policymakers and Trainers

It is suggested that teacher education policymakers consider the development of scaffolded counselling skills programmes for teachers. With scope to deliver career-wide learning, these could for instance, commence at elementary level within ITE and extend with life-long learning CPD modules. For example, CPD modules could be delivered nationally through existing Education Centres. Furthermore, current findings alongside previous research by Byrne and Carthy (2021) raise awareness of the importance of funding and timetabling initiatives to facilitate practicing teachers' attendance at counselling skills trainings.

6.3.2.2 Recommendations for Professional Counselling Education Policymakers

It is suggested that professional counselling education standards could promote the provision of bridging modules for professionals completing professional counselling qualifications to support embedding counselling within pre-existing helping and professional roles. This could help address some of the role identity challenges highlighted by professionally counselling qualified teachers in the current study.

6.3.2.3 Recommendations for Embedded Counselling Curriculum

The current findings have illustrated aspects of counselling training and formation that teachers appreciated including personal development, psychological theory, and counselling skills training. They also highlighted aspects of embedding counselling that some teachers experienced as difficult and appeared less well prepared for e.g., managing ethical demands, boundary issues, discipline. Correspondingly, ongoing engagement with systemic practices and policies, together with supportive and reflexive opportunities, were identified as valuable embedded counselling resources by several teachers in this study.

Accordingly, the findings raise the importance of developing embedded counselling curriculums that address several key principles. Firstly, provision of broad holistic content (theory, skills, personal development, ethics) that includes embedded counselling theory and practice appears important. Secondly, it seems helpful for practitioners to develop competence in making linkages between theories, practices, and policies within their primary profession and those of the counselling profession. Related to this, embedded counselling curriculum could include engagement with codes of ethics from the learner's primary profession and social work (Banks, 2016; McLeod & McLeod, 2022) in addition to

counselling ethics. The inherent complexity of embedded counselling illuminated by the current findings could be highlighted within curriculums, for example by studying interdisciplinary working and *wicked problems* (Rittel & Webber, 1973). Finally, practical skills development could include assertiveness training, reflexivity training, and an emphasis on the importance of self-care, support, and supervision.

These provisions are currently lacking, with potential detriment to teachers' pastoral provision. The implementation of these recommendations could help provide teachers with valuable knowledge, skills, and capacities for emotional working with students, and could contribute to lasting student wellbeing benefits and enhanced teacher confidence and efficacy.

6.3.3 Implications for Supervision

The importance of supervision as a resource for navigating embedded counselling practice was illustrated by several teachers' accounts revealing experiences of being supported by supervisors with burnout, ethical issues, professional values, and embedded counselling practice. However, in one case the teacher felt unsupported by their supervisor who they perceived was not knowledgeable enough regarding embedded counselling. This professional isolation was clearly burdensome and unhelpful. Importantly, it draws attention to potential lack of awareness and understanding of embedded counselling among professional counselling supervisors.

Considering the unique experiences of teachers embedding counselling demonstrated by the current findings and cognisant of professional standards and research in this area (BACP, 2020b; Chibanda et al., 2011; McLeod & McLeod, 2022), recommendations for supervisors are advanced as follows:

6.3.3.1 Recommendations for supervisors

Teachers' experiences indicate that two key components that could support constructive supervision of embedded counselling practitioners include supervisor familiarity with the distinct characteristics of embedded practice, and recognition of the dual professional identity of the supervisee. For example, it may be useful for supervisors to be able to identify aspects of embedded counselling that have been shown to challenge supervisees, e.g., duality, boundaries. Furthermore, it may prove helpful if supervisors understand how embedded counselling is practiced and experienced differently from professional counselling by practitioners, e.g. flexible, time limited. Additionally, it is suggested that supervisors draw upon conceptual models of supervision that acknowledge systemic, contextual components, e.g., Seven-Eyed Model (Hawkins & McMahon, 2020) and that accommodate integration of counselling skills with pre-existing professional practice e.g., Integrative Developmental Model (Stoltenberg, 2010).

Engagement with supervision is a core requirement within professional counselling (IACP, 2018) and is consistently advised for embedded counselling (Chibanda et al., 2011; McLeod & McLeod, 2022). Good outcomes are best achieved when embedded counselling practitioners have access to ongoing clinical supervision (Scully, 2011; Kohls et al., 2018) while failure to engage in supervision may contribute to burnout (Peltzer et al., 2014).

The current findings raise awareness of how central it is that embedded counselling supervision is appropriate to prevent supervisee stagnation or disengagement that could contribute to poor practice. Observance of these recommendations by supervisors could foster well-informed, supportive embedded counselling supervision and contribute to teachers' effective and ethical, sustainable practice.

6.3.4 Implications for Irish Post-Primary Education

Embedded counselling by teachers is context dependent (BACP, 2020) and experiences shared by teachers in this study spotlight the interplay between their practice, their school, and systemic educational components.

Teachers faced practical obstacles concerning time and space, for example responding to student needs and providing support in between class periods or in close physical proximity to other students. Some teachers felt unsupported or misunderstood in relation to embedded counselling practice within their organisation while several felt their school was over-reliant upon their skillset in the face of pressing student mental health needs and current challenges accessing external support services in a timely manner. Such challenges identified by the current research occurred within existing systemic policy and practice structures and raise awareness of the impacts of policy upon embedded counselling by teachers (Bronfenbrenner, 1993; Department of Education, 2022a; National Educational Psychological Service, 2010, 2021).

In this context, recommendations are made for Irish Post-Primary Education arising from these findings:

6.3.4.1 Recommendations for School Leadership

Findings suggest that school leaders could support best practice among embedded counselling teachers by addressing several key practical and policy components. It appears important that school leaders would be familiar with the scope of embedded counselling by teachers and that they consider the implementation of suitable embedded counselling structures and supports within their schools. Current findings raise awareness of the likely benefits of resourcing through provision of clear protocols regarding internal and external pathways to student supports,

e.g., school policy regarding counselling skills, counselling roles, communication, and referral procedures (Lang, 1999; Lloyd, 1999). Additionally, it seems important to provide practical resourcing including delivery of infrastructure creating suitable spaces for informal support, e.g. meeting pods, and timetable allocations for pastoral work and related professional development activity, including supervision.

These initiatives would appear to be fundamental to supporting embedded counselling teachers in Irish schools. They have the potential to encourage more teachers to enrich their teaching practice with counselling skills. Notably, they could help to safeguard against occupational stress among teachers while protecting students' welfare. School leaders can play a vital role in ensuring considered and appropriately resourced embedded counselling within schools that enhances a whole-school approach to wellbeing.

6.3.4.2 Recommendations for Educational Policymakers

At an educational policy level, it would appear from the experiences of teachers in the current study, that there is a need for stronger guidance on counselling skills training, practice, supervision, and ethics for teachers and schools. It is suggested that policy that clearly recognises the contributions, limitations, and requirements of embedded counselling teachers and that clearly distinguishes student support for everyday "problems of living" (McLeod & McLeod, 2022, p. 4) from mental healthcare would be beneficial. New Irish education policies in these areas could bring much needed clarity to all stakeholders.

It has been argued that organisations have a duty to provide access to supervision to members providing informal support to others in the setting (Scully, 2011) but currently this is only mandated for guidance counsellors in Ireland (Dept. Educ., 2022a). This highlights the merits of

considering that current supervision provision for guidance counsellors be extended to all embedded counselling teachers.

Irish education policy advocates for broad wellbeing provision with some mental health responsibilities within teacher pastoral care (NEPS, 2010, 2021). Teachers' experiences illuminated in the current study draw attention to the demands this wellbeing work places on teachers, particularly those with counselling skills, and highlights a need for support and supervision for this work that is currently not acknowledged or mandated in this country. This may reflect a current systemic deficit that could be addressed through the proposed policy recommendations.

6.3.5 Implications for the Counselling Profession

Counselling professionals may encounter embedded counselling through provision of counselling skills training, supervision, and consultancy. Alternatively, they may engage in embedded counselling themselves particularly in contexts where they hold dual roles. The current study stems from the researcher's professional experiences in counselling skills training and as a psychotherapist/ lecturer. It reports on the lived experiences of dual qualified teachers that have completed counselling trainings in Ireland including foundational and professional qualifications. Findings of the present study highlight the lived experiences of several teachers who described themselves as wearing more than one professional "hat".

These findings draw attention to challenges experienced by teachers that had developed a counselling dimension to their teaching role following counselling training, including professional counselling qualifications. Several teachers experienced nuanced professional tensions in areas of their work, such as classroom management and dual-relationship with

students, as they negotiated role-salience (Ong et al., 2019) within dual professional identities.

Arising from such findings that highlight tensions and dilemmas experienced by dual-qualified practitioners embedding counselling skills in a pre-existing professional role, the following recommendations are made for the counselling profession:

6.3.5.1 Recommendations for Professional Counselling Education

It could be helpful for future dual-qualified counsellors if embedded counselling were explicitly recognised within professional counsellor education as a core element of professional preparation and development. Accordingly, it is suggested that counselling education programmes consider including modules on embedded counselling theory and practice that could support graduates with any professional identity concerns if they engage in embedded counselling once qualified.

6.3.5.2 Recommendations for Professional Counsellors

It is suggested that professional counsellors delivering counselling skills training or supervision expand their proficiency with embedded counselling theories and applications which could enhance their provision. Additionally, professional counsellors could consider conducting research in this area and disseminating findings to peers and wider society. Adopting these principles could facilitate meaningful and positive contributions to embedded counselling practice locally and globally.

6.3.5.3 Recommendations for Irish Professional Counselling Bodies

Irish voluntary regulatory professional bodies play a vital part in the development of the profession and in ensuring high standards are upheld (Feldstein, 2011). Findings of this research pertaining to professional

counselling education and professionally qualified practitioners raise awareness of the relevance of embedded counselling for these organisations. It is suggested that Irish professional counselling bodies consider providing structured guidance on this matter as has been provided in Britain (BACP, 2020b). For example, development of criteria for embedded counselling training and guidance for effective and ethical embedded counselling practice that could support trainers and practitioners could be considered.

Embedded counselling is an important and emergent field in this country. There is scope for professional counsellors to deepen their understanding of their own embedded practice in addition to recognising the potential contributions they can make to the sustainable development of embedded practice by others. The counselling profession is well placed to provide leadership in this area by engaging with these recommended principles.

6.3.6 Implications and Recommendations for Research

The present study of embedded counselling within Irish post-primary education signifies important inaugural research into this valuable but little documented field of counselling practice in Ireland. Growing extant literature concerning embedded counselling indicates the huge research potential of this subject and there have been calls for greater research engagement with this "exciting opportunity" (Dryden, 1985; McLeod & McLeod, 2014, p. 38).

The IPA approach of this current study has yielded rich findings illuminating the essence of the phenomenon demonstrating a methodology that fits well with exploration of this human endeavour experienced by teachers in this study as meaningful and transformative. Additional IPA, or other qualitative, studies may help deepen this

understanding further while quantitative, or mixed-method research could generate valuable and complementary data. Longitudinal research offers the potential to helpfully assess outcomes. Widening the scope of research by engagement with all stakeholders through interdisciplinary investigations, inclusive and participatory research designs, and attention to practical research impacts raises additional possibilities for developing understandings of this field of counselling practice.

Further research would appear to be needed to establish baseline information concerning the extent of embedded counselling in Irish post-primary schools including assessing teachers' counselling qualifications. It seems important to evaluate existing counselling skills training provision for teachers and examine practicing teachers' counselling skills, interventions, and outcomes. A wider research focus could explore the lived experiences of embedded counselling among students, parents/carers, and colleagues. Finally, research that investigates embedded counselling supervision and self-care practices among teachers may be highly beneficial.

Additional empirical data, regarding embedded counselling among teachers, generated by such research would build considerably upon the findings of the current study. This would beneficially advance extant conceptual models and support practical applications regarding counselling skills e.g., training, and teacher-student relationships e.g., school-belonging. Ongoing empirical investigation of embedded counselling has potential to build upon the foundation established by the current study and may yield constructive responses to the recommendations and considerations raised in this inaugural work.

Further research has potential to contribute to policy development and educational reform in several domains. Key areas raised by the current findings suggest this may be advantageous in relation to training

standards and codes of practice, mandated supervision, wellbeing policy, and wider mental health research agendas. This reflects multiple crucial facets of embedded counselling that have often been neglected by researchers to date. Accordingly, extensive future research of embedded counselling within Irish post-primary education is recommended. Resultant new knowledge could contribute significant benefits for teachers and students within this vital field of counselling.

6.4 Quality of the Study

To appraise and demonstrate the quality and validity of the current study this section will firstly present a critique of the limitations of this research followed by an evaluation of its strengths and performance against recognised quality standards for qualitative research (Drisko, 1997; Levitt et al., 2018; Nizza et al., 2021; Yardley, 2000).

6.4.1 Limitations

The IPA design prescribed a small sample size, preventing empirical generalisations. While this was not the study's aim, it does limit the broader applicability of the findings.

Furthermore, the recruitment method that invited teachers to self-select may have only yielded teachers that felt invested and confident enough in their practice to engage in peer review. It is possible therefore that self-selection bias returned teachers with positive opinions about embedded counselling producing skewed findings. To mitigate for this, care was taken to represent both convergent and divergent perceptions within the analysis. It was notable also that, during interviews, teachers were frank and open about their reservations about embedding counselling in addition to enthusiasms.

Teachers volunteered to participate in response to advertising through CPD and other professional development channels. The research therefore may not fully reflect the experiences of all Irish embedded counselling post-primary teachers as the experiences of teachers that felt less confident with counselling skills or those that do not engage with professional development may not have been captured.

Equally, no participants from an all-boys school were recruited possibly missing some useful perspectives. However, this could alternatively be considered to have strengthened the desired homogeneity of the sample which was essential to gather in-depth idiographic insights about a phenomenon with very specific and consequential meanings for those teachers that volunteered.

Nevertheless, these recruitment issues raise interesting questions about impacts of school culture, or teacher development and embedded counselling that warrant further enquiry. For example, the lack of teachers' experiences from all-boys schools may have affected current interpretations of embedded counselling by failing to illuminate teacher-student relationships within a dominantly male school culture. It is important to consider present limitations when contextualising current findings. Moreover, these limitations reinforce the need for future research in which they might be addressed.

6.4.2 Evaluation of Strengths

This is a unique study that illuminates for the first time how Irish post-primary teachers with counselling skills make sense of embedding these within their existing teaching role. The contribution, validity, and strengths of this work will next be considered in relation to four evaluative principles: sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, transparency and coherence, impact and importance (Yardley, 2000).

6.4.2.1 Sensitivity to Context

As a situated practice, embedded counselling is inherently context dependent (BACP, 2020) therefore it was essential the research design acknowledged the many transdisciplinary, cultural, and social components involved. Accordingly, the researcher critically examined literature and empirical research from education and from counselling throughout. Moreover, the IPA research methodology used was chosen as it is highly appropriate for exploring "sense-making in a particular context" (Smith et al., 2022, p. 39) and experiences, like embedded counselling, that are "complex and ambiguous" (Smith & Nizza, 2022, p. 76). The study aimed to give voice to post-primary teachers, a distinct group of embedded counselling practitioners, recognising that their unique experiences had yet to be heard within the wider counselling profession in Ireland.

During the interviews and analysis, the researcher took exceptional care to fully hear and respectfully appreciate the words and stories that teachers shared and to reflect on her own experiences within the social relational context of these endeavours. As a professional psychotherapist and counselling skills trainer, the researcher was conscious of her position of both outsider and insider and of how this might generate power imbalance or tension with teachers (Costley et al., 2010; Yardley, 2000), e.g., researcher perceived as academic looking in, and/or as counsellor-educator peer walking alongside. However, the researcher's background as an experienced psychotherapist, alongside comprehensive reflection in and on her practice throughout (Schön, 1991), ensured that she thoughtfully examined any impacts. Additionally, shared experience likely deepened this researcher's interpretations as she could access insights that would not be readily available to an

outsider researcher, e.g., the felt experience of deep empathy with learners.

A significant strength of this study lies in the researcher's professional skill in sensitively facilitating each interview, allowing space for teachers to feel comfortable and openly share significant, difficult, complex or contradictory feelings, experiences, and perceptions. Interactions with teachers were ethical, responsive, and flexible throughout including offering detailed briefing and debriefing, choice of geographical locations for in-person interviews and online options.

6.4.2.2 Commitment and Rigour

The researcher's commitment to this field of enquiry is underpinned by her many years' experience of counselling skills programme development and delivery and her sustained interest in counselling education over two decades. This instils a high degree of "trustworthiness" to the study (Levitt et al., 2018, p. 32). The research project itself has been this researcher's priority for over four years during which she took a period of extended study leave to focus on data gathering and analysis demonstrating rigour and yielding high quality data and analytic outcomes. Throughout the project the researcher developed expertise in the topic and in qualitative research through structured study, research supervision, extensive reading, engagement with the international IPA research community online, and participation in IPA masterclasses with Paul Flowers, an originator of IPA. This ensured the project aligns with current thinking and standards within IPA research globally.

The chosen IPA methodology strengthens this research as it is a highly systematic, reflexive, and iterative approach that lends itself well to rigorous engagement with the data. The high quality of the research is

clear from the large amounts of rich data gathered through lengthy interviews with a homogenous group of eight purposively selected teachers (Levitt et al., 2018) who were highly articulate, reflexive and very generous with their time. Rigour was evident as creative digital and manual data management and analysis methods were methodically applied to facilitate embodied immersion in the data and were documented as part of a meticulous audit trail and peer review (Figure 6.1, Section 6.4.2.3). Prolonged periods of time were spent with the data, engaging in "close analytic reading of participant's words" (Nizza et al., 2021, p. 371) and reflexively moving across several levels of interpretation, before reaching a final analytic outcome.

Figure 6.1

Immersion in the data.
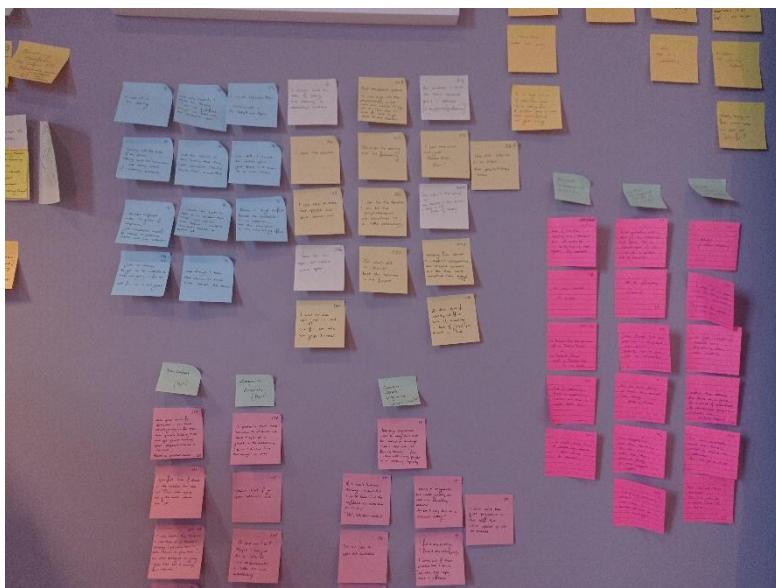
> **"As my study becomes papered with her**
> **phrases, I feel as though I am inhabiting a room**
> **made from her words." (Researcher's memo, Nov.**
> **2023)**

Note: This image shows the researcher's office wall during the analysis, covered with quotes from teachers' interviews on colour-coded notes. This is accompanied by a brief researcher's memo documenting the researcher's experience of immersion in the data.

6.4.2.3 Transparency and Coherence

A further strength of this study is reflected in its detailed representation of teachers' voices throughout this dissertation in a compelling narrative (Nizza et al., 2021) that firmly grounds and articulates the research. This is supported by transparent presentation of the specifics of data collection and analysis. This has included comprehensive record keeping, research memos and sketches, analytic strategies and outputs, and engagement with supervision and peer review. Examples are included in the appendices section. Details of each case analysis were provided to

supervisors to ensure the analysis was plausible and coherent. Furthermore, the researcher undertook extensive structured reflective writing, drawing, and discussion with clinical and research supervisors and within a peer research group to reflexively examine her motivations, preconceptions and responses to the project to recognise and understand how these may impact the study.

The choice of IPA, philosophically underpinned by phenomenology, idiography, and hermeneutics, is highly appropriate for this study that seeks to explore and illuminate teachers' unique phenomenology of embedding counselling. "The essence of IPA lies in its analytic *focus*" [sic] upon "participants' attempts to make sense of their experiences" (Smith et al., 2022, p. 75) and this is in close alignment with the aim of the current study of how teachers make sense of embedding counselling skills within their primary role. Additionally, using this approach has ensured that the analysis encompasses convergences and divergences in the data such that potentially disconfirming data has been considered at length (Drisko, 1997; Levitt et al., 2018; Nizza et al., 2021), further strengthening the quality of the research.

Overall, this project was successful in comprehensively realising all four objectives identified at the outset. Four group experiential themes were identified through a cross-case analysis of the eight interviews conducted that together meet the research aim of exploring how teachers make sense of embedding counselling skills within their primary role. These themes can be mapped consistently against the objectives demonstrating the thoroughness of the analysis (Table 6.1).

Table 6.1

GETs and key features of teachers' lived experiences mapped against the research objectives.

Research objectives	GET number + key features identified
To capture teachers' lived experiences of embedding counselling skills.	1. Commitment to relational values 2. Counselling informed understandings 3. Helpful presence identity 4. Role duality
To discover the meanings that teachers attribute to embedding counselling skills.	1. Commitment to relational values 2. Counselling informed understandings 3. Helpful presence identity
To explore how teachers experience the impact of embedding counselling skills.	1. Commitment to relational values 2. Counselling informed understandings 3. Helpful presence identity 4. Role duality
To illuminate teachers' perceptions of dual counselling and teaching roles.	2. Counselling informed understandings 4. Role duality

Note:

GET 1 is named: Privileging Relationship: "All in the relating"
GET 2 is named: Working with an Additional Lens: "Reaching into my toolkit"
GET 3 is named: Being a Helpful Presence: "Being properly there"
GET 4 is named: Navigating Identity: "A ditch each side of the road"

6.4.2.4 Impact and Importance

This research has significant impact on several levels. Firstly, it is clear that participation in the study was impactful for teachers, affording them with recognition and affirmation of their commitment to embedded counselling practice, and a sensitively facilitated reflexive opportunity in which to consider their work (Drury et al., 2007). Most were not aware of any other teacher doing similar work and were encouraged to learn of the existence of peers. During debriefing, half the sample requested the summary of research findings offered upon conclusion of the project. The research findings and other future disseminated outputs are likely to be educational for teachers that participated, demonstrating an important research contribution (Haslam & McGarty, 2019). It is hoped that this will extend to the wider teaching community through publications and other modes of engagement with teachers and schools by the researcher.

Secondly, this research demonstrates strong conceptual worth. For instance, the key finding of teacher commitment to relational values demonstrates valuable contemporary support for humanistic constructs within person-centred education as advanced by Carl Rogers (Rogers et al., 2014). Furthermore, the key finding of helpful presence identity among embedded counselling teachers indicates fruitful connections between embedded counselling and the *One Good Adult* paradigm (Dooley et al., 2019).

It has yielded new and in-depth descriptions of an under-researched phenomenon with important pastoral and educational applications. The findings illuminate existing empirical research and extend prevailing models of counselling skills through detailing the phenomenology of processes and practices of embedded counselling, in particular highlighting enriching, challenging, and complex experiential elements. Furthermore, these new understandings have wide-ranging and practical

implications for practice, training, supervision, Irish post-primary education, the counselling profession, and further research.

Lastly, this study is important because it elevates awareness of embedded counselling within counselling, education, and wider society. To date the researcher has presented this research several times to undergraduates and peers, including several counselling skills training sessions and a research conference for education and healthcare professionals. The researcher intends to further disseminate the research findings in the future and one publication is currently in development. These actions show a further strength of this study in that it has significant practical utility in areas such as teaching and counselling education and has generated accessible and highly valuable connections between research and practice (Oakes, 2017).

6.5 Conclusion

Empirical exploration of the lived experiences of embedded counselling post-primary teachers in Ireland has been lacking to date. The current study is the first of its kind and represents a substantial and significant piece of research in terms of scale, standard, and scope. In an in-depth and concentrated investigation, this research has accessed the experiences of eight teachers with counselling skills qualifications from across Ireland's post-primary schools and richly illuminates how they embed counselling skills within general teaching. This is an accessible, high-quality study that meets established quality standards, and features abundant heuristic value.

The research sheds light on how these teachers with counselling skills foster and prioritise their teacher-student relationships to support student welfare and learning and illustrates what this practice means to them. Their methods reflect a critically important approach to working

with adolescents. With above average, and escalating, levels of stress and mental health concerns, Irish adolescents are struggling at a time when protective levels of school belonging have reached a worrying low. This adolescent overwhelm in Irish schools signals potential mental health and wellbeing challenges into the future and urgent intervention is required.

Embedding counselling skills within teaching can meaningfully respond to these issues and can optimise the powerful benefits of strong positive teacher-student relationships for adolescent self-worth, wellbeing, and school performance. Irish teachers are invested in their students' wellbeing, but many are struggling to confidently meet current expectations around pastoral and wellbeing provision. They have sought the introduction of practical resources for this aspect of their role, but counselling skills training that could meet this need is not currently stipulated within pre- or in-service teacher education. This research strongly demonstrates the merits of counselling skills training for teachers.

The teachers in this study are among those who voluntarily and independently upskill with counselling skills. Their compelling experiences, illuminated here, show the reality, potential, and difficulties of embedding counselling skills within teaching. For these teachers, embedding counselling is an enriching, challenging, and complex experience. Their stories reveal that there are potential risks with this practice, e.g., stress and boundary issues. But they also clearly convey that many long-term benefits are achievable with embedded counselling that is conducted thoughtfully and ethically, e.g., student connection and teacher self-efficacy. These are important findings for all involved in education, counselling, and adolescent mental health with notable impacts for students, teachers, counsellors, and policymakers.

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Research into embedded counselling is expanding but the field lacks cohesion. Existing studies range across a breadth of disciplines, continents, methodologies, client populations, and often reflect diverse conceptualisations of counselling skills. Additional work in this area is crucial especially in Ireland where this is a fledgling field of enquiry.

This research confirms the pivotal significance of embedded counselling within the disciplines of counselling and education with significant implications for professional training and development across both fields. It has decisively established a strong empirically evidenced foundation for future embedded counselling research, practice, and policy development within Irish education and globally. Broadening and optimising embedded counselling among teachers valuably extends the possibility of far-reaching, enhanced wellbeing and mental health outcomes for students and enriched, sustainable teacher experiences.

As the inaugural research into embedded counselling among Irish teachers, the present study importantly contributes to this worthwhile project and marks an exciting threshold for counselling practice and research in Ireland and internationally. Now is the time to acknowledge embedded counselling as a field of advanced applied counselling with distinct professional requirements and to commit to consolidating its position within the counselling and psychotherapy world.

6.6 Researcher's Concluding Reflective Comment

"Just go softer."

"Skyler's words – And in her words I hear the learning, the self-awareness, the valuing of the young person, the openness to relation infused with potentiality and vulnerability, the offering of an alternative way of being, an invitation, or challenge, but also a sense of the work of this, there is an edge in the word 'just' that seems to acknowledge that some letting go or leap of faith might be required and that to trust this is not simple." (Researcher's memo, Sept. 2024)

I began this research process over four years ago filled with passionate curiosity about embedded counselling stimulated by my counselling skills training work with helpers from many backgrounds, personal experiences as a psychotherapist and university educator, and my frustrated sense that something was missing in the literature, and in my own understanding.

Initially, I found I needed to make a case for this research within a psychotherapy context. I found this challenging as there was so little clarity within the literature and often very little awareness among psychotherapists in Ireland. I often experienced uncertainty, and although this diminished through the process, most notably once I started to speak with teachers themselves, I believe this was valuable, simultaneously motivating me to discover more and spurring me to keep questioning what I found. To me, this position was a good fit with IPA's double hermeneutic combining "a hermeneutics of empathy and a hermeneutics of suspicion" (Smith et al., 2022, p. 30).

Some of my richest moments in the research were during the interviews and analysis. I felt privileged to be invited into the teachers' worlds

where they shared a wealth of insights and experiences including some of tensions that I had not anticipated. For instance, it was challenging to know that some teachers were feeling alone and unsupported in their work, or that some worried about blurred boundaries. I believe it was essential for the quality of this research that I trusted their wisdom and lived experience and gave this voice.

The teachers' commitment and perceptive consideration of their practice humbled and inspired me. Their pioneering stories have fuelled my hope for the future that embedded counselling will be universally and sustainably integrated into Irish education with the ongoing support of the Irish counselling profession. I am personally excited to now bring the fruits of this research back into my own classroom and clinic and am eager to share my expanded understanding of embedded counselling within skills training where I intend to highlight the richness, complexity, and distinctness of embedded counselling.

Most of all, this research has reminded me of the profound helpfulness of simple, empathic, human connection both in and outside of counselling and I conclude this work mindful to attend to Skyler's invitation to "just go softer" in my practice too.

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Appendices:

Appendix A: Semi-structured Interview Guide - Questions and Prompts

1. **Having already had a career in teaching what drew you to doing a psychotherapy/counselling skills training?**

   - *Hopes / challenges / opportunities of training. How might teaching have been a factor if at all?*

2. **And now that you have done psychotherapy/counselling training have you noticed anything changing in relation to your teaching role?**

   - *Any sense of having **multiple roles**? How do you see yourself now? How do others see you now?*

3. **Can you tell me about how you use/ have used counselling skills <u>informally</u> as a post-primary teacher?**
   - *Contexts / **situations** / aspects of the job / multiple roles*

4. **Can you describe a (recent) time when you used counselling skills <u>informally</u> in your role as a teacher? ………… Any other contexts?**

   - *Think back to a time when. Tell me **the story** from start to finish. How you felt & what happened? Thoughts, feelings, actions. Looking back – your take on it? Stand out features?*

5. **When you find yourself using counselling skills <u>informally</u> as a teacher, what are the standout features for you?**

   - *What happens? Which skills? How do you recognise/ decide/ know? Typical contexts. Differences. Multiple roles.*

6. **What is it like for you as a person when you use counselling skills within your teaching role?**

   - ***Impact** you? Concrete examples. Metaphor. How do you **see yourself**? How do others see you now? your role? How does it compare with? Your sense of **multiple roles**?*

7. **So, in terms of embedding counselling skills into your teaching role post training, how has/is that going for you?**

   - ***Anything that stands out? Process**. Metaphor. Best/worst thing. Favourite/least. Supports/challenges. concrete examples.*

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Appendix A continued: Semi-structured Interview Guide - Schedule

A. Informed Consent:

Thank you for taking part.

☐ Have you read the Plain Language Statement? Do you have any questions?

☐ Are you okay with the arrangements around confidentiality of your data, including the legal limits to this?

☐ Have you signed & returned the Informed Consent Form?

☐ The purpose of this interview is **to help me to understand what it is like for you** to be a teacher who has done counselling skills training and is using counselling skills in your role. So, I'm really interested in **your day-to-day experiences in school**.

☐ I have a set of questions to ask and if we drift off track, I'll bring us back to these.

☐ Please respect the confidentiality of others during the interview and as we are both Mandated Persons be mindful of our obligations under Children First.

☐ I will record the interview now and it will last about an hour.

☐ Please let me know at any point if you wish to pause or end the interview.

B. Interview Questions (Page 1)

C. Closing Questions:

☐ Is there something that that we haven't spoken about, but you feel is important? Or something you'd like to add to, or clarify further?

☐ Have you any questions?

Thank you. I will stop recording now.

D. Debriefing:

☐ How are you now? Have you any questions or feedback?

☐ Let me remind you how to contact me if you wish in the future.

☐ I'd like to run through this Debriefing Information Sheet with you before you go. (contact/ free debriefing interview/ opting out)

Appendix B: Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee Letter of Approval

Oilscoil Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath
Dublin City University

DCU

Ms Anna Fewer-Hamilton
School of Nursing, Psychotherapy and Community Health
23th January 2023

REC Reference: DCUREC/2022/236

Proposal Title: An interpretative phenomenological analysis of the
experiences of second level teachers that have completed
counselling skills training and are embedding counselling
skills into their teaching roles in an Irish context.

Applicant(s):   Ms Anna Fewer-Hamilton, Dr Ray O'Neill, Dr Siobhan
Russell

Dear colleagues,

Thank you for your application to DCU Research Ethics Committee (REC). Further to
expedited review, DCU REC is pleased to issue approval for this research proposal.
**This approval is conditional on the DCU Data Protection Unit (DPU) approving
the project and any related documentation, such as a data protection impact
assessment (DPIA). Research should not begin until this is in place.**

DCU REC's consideration of all ethics applications is dependent upon the information
supplied by the researcher. This information is expected to be truthful and accurate.
Researchers are responsible for ensuring that their research is carried out in
accordance with the information provided in their ethics application.

Materials used to recruit participants should note that ethical approval for this project
has been obtained from the Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee. Should
substantial modifications to the research protocol be required at a later stage, a further
amendment submission should be made to the REC.

Yours sincerely,

DCU
Research & Innovation

Taighde & Nuálaíocht Tacaíocht
Oilscoil Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath,
Baile Átha Cliath, Éire

Research & Innovation Support
Dublin City University,
Dublin 9, Ireland

Dr. Melrona Kirrane
Chairperson
DCU Research Ethics Committee

T +353 1 700 8000
F +353 1 700 8002
E research@dcu.ie
www.dcu.ie

Note: Please retain this approval letter for future publication purposes (for research students,
this includes incorporating the letter within their thesis appendices).

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Appendix C: Recruitment Advertisement

Appendix D: Recruitment Information for Circulation to Organisations

<u>Are you a post-primary teacher who has completed training in counselling skills?</u>

A new research study into the experiences of post-primary teachers with counselling skills training who are teaching in the Republic of Ireland is currently seeking volunteers to take part in one-to-one interviews.

Although research has shown that teachers are completing counselling skills training and are using counselling skills in their work, less is known about what this is like for teachers and how this impacts their role.

The study aims to discover what this experience is like for post-primary teachers by asking them to share their accounts of using counselling skills as a teacher, after they have completed counselling skills training. It is hoped that this research will shed some light on an important but under researched field of practice with a view to advancing and developing counselling skills training and practice into the future.

It is being conducted by Anna Fewer-Hamilton, a Chartered Counselling Psychologist (PSI) and lecturer at Atlantic Technological University, Sligo, who is completing this research as a Doctoral candidate on the Doctorate in Psychotherapy programme at Dublin City University.

To find out more please contact:

Anna Fewer-Hamilton, Email: anna.fewerhamilton2@mail.dcu.ie Tel: 087 24 66 873

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Plain Language Statement

Research study title

The experiences of second level teachers who have completed counselling skills training and are embedding counselling skills into their teaching roles.

Who is conducting this research?

Anna Fewer-Hamilton is a Chartered Counselling Psychologist (PSI) and a lecturer at Atlantic Technological University, Sligo. She is conducting this research as a Doctoral candidate on the Doctorate in Psychotherapy programme with the School of Nursing, Psychotherapy and Community Health at Dublin City University. Anna is the Lead Researcher throughout this project alongside her supervisors Dr. Ray O'Neill, Assistant Professor in Psychotherapy, and Dr. Siobhán Russell, Assistant Professor in Mental Health Nursing, both with Dublin City University. This project has been approved by the DCU Research Ethics Committee.

What is this research study about?

It is about the experiences of people who use counselling skills informally within their primary role, specifically the experiences of second level teachers with counselling skills training and who are teaching in the Republic of Ireland.

Although research has shown that teachers are completing counselling skills training and are using counselling skills in their work, less is known about what this is like for teachers and how this impacts their role.

This study aims to discover what this experience is like for second level teachers by asking them to share their accounts of using counselling skills as a teacher, after they have completed counselling skills training. It is hoped that this research will shed some light on an important but under researched field of practice with a view to advancing and developing counselling skills training and practice into the future.

Why are you being invited to participate?

You are being invited to participate as you may have the relevant background, training, and experience in second level teaching and counselling skills to inform this research. Such insight, know-how, and familiarity with the subject matter is central to this research.

Who can participate in this research?

The research project is about second level teachers who have completed counselling skills training and are embedding counselling skills into their teaching roles. Any second level teacher who wishes to participate and who meets the criteria for inclusion can volunteer to take part. About 6 to 8 participants are needed so once this number of volunteers is reached recruitment will end. You can find out more about the criteria by contacting the Lead Researcher (Anna Fewer-Hamilton) at her details below.

How do I volunteer to participate?

If you're interested in participating, please let the Lead Researcher (Anna Fewer-Hamilton) know at her details below. Anna will fill you in on all the details and will answer any questions you may have.

What will participation in this research study involve?

You will be invited to take part in an in-depth interview with the Lead Researcher (Anna Fewer-Hamilton) about your experiences of using counselling skills in your teaching role. The interview will be audio recorded.

Before this goes ahead, you will be asked to read this information sheet carefully and to give your consent to taking part in the research. You will have the chance to ask as many questions as you want about the research. You will be asked to sign the Informed Consent Form prior to the interview.

The interview will last about an hour and will take place at a time and location convenient to you. If you prefer, the interview can take place online using Zoom.

You can contact the Lead Researcher (Anna Fewer-Hamilton) up to 14 days afterwards if you have any follow up questions or comments, and you will be asked to consent to the Lead Researcher (Anna Fewer-Hamilton) contacting you within 14 days also, if she needs to clarify any details with you.

Is participation voluntary and can I opt out at any stage?

Participation is entirely voluntary, and you can pause the interview, end the interview, or withdraw from the research study at any stage, even after the interview has taken place, up to the point of publication and dissemination of the outcome of the research or within 2 years of the study when all stored data will be destroyed, whichever is first. There is no need to explain should you wish to withdraw from the research study. If you decide to withdraw from the study your information will be securely destroyed in accordance with the Privacy Notice below.

Information about the confidentiality of information provided by participants.

Your information will be handled with exceptional care and in line with GDPR. Every effort will be made to keep your information confidential. Confidentiality of information can only be protected within the limitations of the law - i.e., it is possible for data to be subject to subpoena, freedom of information claim or mandated reporting by some professions.

Small, anonymised extracts from participant interviews that have had identifying details removed and that use pseudonyms may be used to illustrate the findings of the research project when it is written up and disseminated. While great caution will be applied when disseminating the findings of the research study, there remains a small possibility that participants might be identifiable because of the small sample size.

You are reminded of the importance of respecting the confidentiality of others e.g., students, when speaking about your work during your interview. In the unlikely event that potentially unethical professional practice or child protection concerns come to light during the research project the Lead Researcher (Anna Fewer-Hamilton) will consult with her research supervisors, her professional body, the Psychological Society of Ireland, and will follow Children First (2015) Guidance, as appropriate.

What will happen to the information that I provide?

The information that you give to the Lead Researcher (Anna Fewer-Hamilton) and the recording of your interview will be carefully and securely stored at all times. Digital information will be encrypted and password protected. Paper records will be kept in locked files and only the Lead Researcher (Anna Fewer-Hamilton) will have access to them. Written transcripts of participant interviews will be studied carefully to help the researchers to learn about the experiences of teachers using counselling skills. Small, anonymised extracts from participant interviews that have had identifying details removed and that use pseudonyms may be used to illustrate the findings of the research project when it is written up and disseminated.

The overall findings of this research project will be written up as a doctoral thesis which will be stored in the Dublin City University library online research repository Doras. The research findings and information provided may be used in publications in professional journals, and disseminated at professional conferences and meetings, and to counselling and psychology students through lecturing activities. A summary of the research results will be shared with participants on request once the study is complete.

When will the information that I provide be destroyed?

After the completion of the research study, all data will be securely stored for a period of two years, and then it will be destroyed the Lead

Researcher (Anna Fewer-Hamilton). Digital records will be irrevocably erased, and paper records will be confidentially shredded.

Are there any risks from participating in this research study?

There are minimal risks from participating in this research study. You will be invited to discuss your professional activities and will not be asked about personal or sensitive issues. Participation is entirely voluntary, and you can pause the interview, end the interview, or withdraw from the research study at any stage, even after the interview has taken place, up to the point of publication and dissemination of the outcome of the research or within 2 years of the study when all stored data will be destroyed, whichever is first. Extensive care will be taken to protect your privacy. There is a small possibility that participants might be identifiable in disseminated findings because of the small sample size but robust procedures are in place to safeguard your identity.

Should the need arise, you can avail of avail of a free debriefing interview with a professional psychotherapist in the Dublin City University Healthy Living Centre following your interview. This can be arranged in confidence by contacting the Dublin City University Healthy Living Centre on 01 7007171 or by email hlc@dcu.ie .

Are there any benefits (direct or indirect) from participating in this research study?

Although direct benefits from taking part are not expected, there may be some indirect benefits. You will have the chance to give voice to what it is like to use counselling skills as a second level teacher. Discussing experiences that may not have been articulated before during in-depth interviews may have a therapeutic effect, even though it they're not therapy sessions.

Additionally, your contribution to this research study may help to grow the existing body of knowledge about counselling skills.

Privacy notice

The following information advises you about the use of your personal data in this research project.

- The Data Controller responsible for the security of all personal data in this study is Dublin City University.
- The Data Processors for this study are the researchers, Anna Fewer-Hamilton, Dr. Ray O'Neill, and Dr. Siobhán Russell, of the School of Nursing, Psychotherapy, and Community Health, Dublin City University. A Data Processor may hold or process personal data but does not exercise responsibility for or control over the personal data.

- The Dublin City University Data Protection Officer is Mr. Martin Ward (data.protection@dcu.ie Ph.: 7005118 / 7008257)
- Data is processed in this study for the purpose of gathering and analysing raw data for a research project.
- Personal data processed in this study will include names, contact information, sociodemographic information, and descriptions of professional activity.
- A 2-year data retention period will apply following completion of the study during which time data may be used for the purposes of publication.
- Participants have the right to lodge a complaint with the Irish Data Protection Commission.
- Participants have the right to access their own personal data and can request a copy of their data by contacting Anna Fewer-Hamilton anna.fewerhamilton2@mail.dcu.ie or alternatively by contacting the Dublin City University Data Protection Unit data.protection@dcu.ie .
- Participants have the right to withdraw and can do so by contacting Anna Fewer-Hamilton anna.fewerhamilton2@mail.dcu.ie.Once a participant withdraws, their personal data will be securely destroyed.
- Anonymised data may be used in publication and dissemination of the findings of this research project.

Any other information

Participants are very welcome to contact the Lead Researcher (Anna Fewer-Hamilton) should they wish to receive a summary of the results of this study when it is complete.

Contact details.

Anna Fewer-Hamilton, Email: anna.fewerhamilton2@mail.dcu.ie Tel: 087 24 66 873

Thank you for your time and consideration.

If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact: The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Research and Innovation Support, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel 01-7008000, e-mail rec@dcu.ie

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Informed Consent Form

Research study title

The experiences of second level teachers who have completed counselling skills training and are embedding counselling skills into their teaching roles.

Clarification of the purpose of this research

This research is about the experiences of people who use counselling skills informally within their primary role, specifically the experiences of second level teachers with counselling skills training and who are teaching in the Republic of Ireland. This study aims to discover what this experience is like for second level teachers by asking them to share their accounts of using counselling skills as a teacher. It is hoped that this research will shed some light on an important but under researched field of practice with a view to advancing and developing counselling skills training and practice into the future. This project has been approved by the DCU Research Ethics Committee.

Participant – please complete the following (Circle Yes or No for each)

Confirmation of particular requirements as highlighted in the Plain Language Statement

I agree to participate in this research study as described in the Plain Language Statement.	Yes / No
I agree to taking part in an interview with Anna Fewer-Hamilton.	Yes / No
I am aware that my personal data is being collected by Anna Fewer-Hamilton for the purpose of conducting this research study as described in the Plain Language Statement.	Yes / No
I have read the Plain Language Statement (or had it read to me).	Yes / No
I understand the information provided.	Yes / No
I understand the information provided in relation to data protection.	Yes / No

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study.	Yes / No
I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions.	Yes / No
I am aware that my interview will be audio recorded.	Yes / No

Confirmation that involvement in the Research Study is voluntary.

I am aware that participation in this research study is voluntary.	Yes / No
I am aware that I may pause, conclude, or withdraw from the interview at any stage.	Yes / No
I am aware that I may withdraw from the research study at any point, up to the point of publication and dissemination of the outcome of the research or within 2 years of the study when all stored data will be destroyed, whichever is first.	Yes / No

Confirmation of arrangements to be made to protect confidentiality of data, including that confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations.

I understand that measures are in place to protect the confidentiality of data as outlined in the Plain Language Statement.	Yes / No
I understand that small, anonymised extracts from participant interviews that have had identifying details removed and that use pseudonyms may be included in the final write up of the research and in other forms of dissemination as outlined in the Plain Language Statement and that although steps will be taken to disguise my identity, there is a small possibility that I may be identifiable from these small, anonymised extracts.	Yes / No

I understand that confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations i.e., it is possible for information to be subject to subpoena, freedom of information claim or mandated reporting.	Yes / No
I understand that if child protection concerns arise, Anna Fewer-Hamilton will consult with her research supervisors, her professional body, the Psychological Society of Ireland, and will follow Children First (2015) Guidance, as appropriate.	Yes / No

Confirmation of arrangements regarding the retention / disposal of data

I understand that data will be stored securely for a retention period of 2 years after completion of the research study and that it will then be securely destroyed by Anna Fewer-Hamilton, as outlined in the Plain Language Statement.	Yes / No

Confirmations relating to any other relevant information as indicated in the Plain Language Statement

I am aware that if I have any queries or concerns in relation to the interview, I can contact Anna Fewer-Hamilton, or the DCU Research Ethics Committee, using contact details provided in the Plain Language Statement.	Yes / No
I understand that I may contact Anna Fewer-Hamilton within 14 days of the interview if I have any questions about the research study.	Yes / No
I consent to follow up contact from Anna Fewer-Hamilton within 14 days of the interview for the purpose of clarification of points made during the interview, if required.	Yes / No
I understand that I may contact Anna Fewer-Hamilton to request a summary of the research findings when the research study is over.	Yes / No
I understand that should the need arise, I can avail of a free debriefing interview with a professional psychotherapist in the Dublin City University Healthy Living Centre following my interview as outlined in the Plain Language Statement.	Yes / No

I understand that anonymised data may be used in publication and dissemination of the findings of this research project.	Yes / No

Participant Signature

I have read and understood the information in this form. My questions and concerns have been answered by the researchers, and I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I consent to take part in this research project.

Participant's Signature: _____

Name in Block Capitals: _____

Witness: _____

Date: _____

Participant Debriefing Information Sheet

Research study title

The experiences of second level teachers who have completed counselling skills training and are embedding counselling skills into their teaching roles.

Researchers

Anna Fewer-Hamilton (Lead Researcher), Dr. Ray O'Neill, Dr. Siobhán Russell. School of Nursing, Psychotherapy and Community Health, Dublin City University

Follow up Queries.

You can contact the Lead Researcher (Anna Fewer-Hamilton) at any stage afterwards if you have any follow up questions or comments, or if you would like to receive a summary of the results once the study is complete.

Debriefing Interview

Should you wish, you can avail of avail of a free debriefing interview with a professional psychotherapist in the Dublin City University Healthy Living Centre following your interview. This can be arranged in confidence by contacting the Centre by email hlc@dcu.ie .

Change of Mind

Participation is entirely voluntary, and you can withdraw from the research study at any stage, even after the interview has taken place, up to the point of publication and dissemination of the outcome of the research or within 2 years of the study when all stored data will be destroyed, whichever is first. There is no need to explain should you wish to withdraw from the research study. You can contact the Lead Researcher (Anna Fewer-Hamilton) at any stage afterwards if you wish to withdraw, up to the point of publication and dissemination of the outcome of the research or within 2 years of the study when all stored data will be destroyed, whichever is first.

Contact details of Lead Researcher

Anna Fewer-Hamilton, Email: anna.fewerhamilton2@mail.dcu.ie Tel: 087 24 66 873

<p align="center">Thank you again for your time and consideration.</p>

If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact: The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Research and Innovation Support, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel 01-7008000, e-mail rec@dcu.ie

Appendix H: Extract of Exploratory Noting on Brigid's Transcript

No.	Interview Transcript A = Researcher, B = Brigid (pseudonym)	Descriptive Exploratory Notes	**Linguistic Exploratory Notes**	*Conceptual Exploratory Notes*
151	A: So, the use of counselling skills, those are two really, you know, really interesting examples and the use of counselling skills in those two scenarios: What is that, what was that like for you?			
152	B: **It was a relief to be honest with you, because I I trusted the fact that I had developed the ability to, I suppose, I think, go into Counselling Mode without having my Counsellor Hat on.**	using c skills was helpful	**mode = embedded? Hat = professional?**	*a sense of feeling resourced? Opposite of typical reaction? Seems quite assured in her approach?*
153	**And the Mode is it's it's you're keeping calm. You're not. You're you're in a non-judgmental state of mind. You're in a responsive rather than reactive state, which** as a teacher, reactive can be the go-to.	felt calm & less reactive	**of mind - internal? Responsive vs reactive?**	
154	A: Yeah, Okay			
155	B: You're reacting to behaviour. Because you have to put it up on VS Ware and "Such and such is up there 12 times. Well, why is nobody dealing with it?" And it brings a whole circle of judgement,	teaching is typically reactive &critical i.e. focused on behaviour & recording		*pressure of accountability contributing to reactiveness?*

			bad behaviour
156	whereas the counselling skills, being able to maybe, (pause) **I'm not going to say shut down the intellect, but to shift it aside, it's like pushing a file back in a filing cabinet and taking out another one, and** to have the resources to be able to park the reaction, and take a few breaths and respond.	could take a moment and then respond	**filing cabinet analogy - options**	*a shift from academic to relational and intrapersonal? From head to body (heart)?*
157	A: Mmm Yeah,			
158	B: As opposed to "You're not allowed to say that kind of thing. That's bullying!" (bossy voice)			
159	A: Yeah,			
160	B: It's it's to put judgement to the back, you know.	instead of cross & judgemental		
161	A: Yeah,			
162	A: And the Counselling Mode? Can you describe to me the arriving into that Counselling Mode? Or or how that happens, do you've any sense of it?			
163	B: I do. For me it's a case of, it's a case of opening a door. Em,I take a breath and I go, "Okay. Flick through the, flick through the…"(laughs)"Okay, this can go Boom or I can open the door and let some of the air out of this."	considers best option	**filing cabinet image/ options Boom - explosion - dangerous**	*a consciousness around what she is doing? Self-regulation & self-awareness?*
164	A: Okay.			

165	B: And it's opening the door for me to access Counselling Mode as such, which is: it's evaluative as opposed to judgmental. So, "What is the best way here?" It's de-escalation. **I first regulate, and I, that's what I do, with breathing.**	takes a breath	**opening the door - intention - welcome - an alternative**	*importance of a pause/ a breath?*
166	A: You first regulate.			
167	B: Yeah, yeah, because I have learned over the years, and I mean I have made faux-pas left, right, and centre, but if I don't take the breath, and calm em, like a dysregulated or an unregulated adult is never going to help a dysregulated child. And you know, **I offer them, I offer them a calm moment then, because I'm calming.**	is calm & can then calm YP		*recognising own role/ contribution in YP behaviour? Self as medium for changing the outcome?*

"Me having to slow down and meet the young person where they're at." (L. 275)

For Kevin, being a teacher was something that extended beyond the classroom. He stated, "I see the teacher's role just as being everything" (L. 327) and for him this encompassed a breadth of educational and caring duties and opportunities. Articulating this during the interview seemed important to Kevin and seemed connected to how he made sense of using counselling skills as a teacher.

> My teaching skills aren't necessarily my classroom teaching skills. I mean, it's my overall skills … in whatever duties. (L. 335)

Thus, he spoke about having meaningful conversations with students individually or in groups in the classroom and in non-teaching spaces. He seemed to feel that, like counselling, "the relationship as a teacher you have with your students is key" (L. 67) and, referencing "the basic Rogerian piece" (L. 33), described drawing on counselling to forge strong relationships with students whenever and wherever the opportunity arose. So, he was mindful in classroom activities to build a sense of trust and safety so students might feel they could come to him with their worries another time, should they wish. Kevin seemed to perceive that teaching could be an important holistic and transformative engagement with students.

It seemed that the potential of counselling skills within teaching had taken him by surprise initially. Although people had said he was a good listener before he started counselling training, he had been focused on acquiring new knowledge rather than skills. However, training had developed his skills and involved extensive personal growth work, and he shared how much he appreciated this learning and what it brought to his teaching work today. He gave a sense that this had added to his capacity as a teacher in new and important ways.

At the forefront of Kevin's account were the struggles of students in his school and his awareness of this. It seemed to the researcher that he was making sense of how he was using his counselling skills as he recounted how he helped his students to make sense of their own emotions and experiences. This intersection between the student experience and his own was notable through the interview and suggested that empathy was a central aspect of his interactions.

He described how many students felt chronic stress and intense academic pressure leading to feelings of shame and low self-worth. Others experienced anxiousness, frustration, loneliness and isolation in school. It was clear that

Kevin was regularly encountering very distressed and overwhelmed students and that he had strong empathy for them.

> *It's a huge amount of overwhelm when you're sitting from 9 to 4, five days a week, where you're feeling not good enough.* (L. 49)

He indicated that if he became aware of an opening to offer emotional support to a student he would respond. Sometimes this happened when he tuned in to the deeper emotional content of a student's off-the-cuff remark in class and reciprocated by "giving them the space to process that" (L. 45). So, a quip like "I'm crap at Maths" (L. 212) might become the opener to a conversation about that student's sense of shame and self-consciousness at having dropped from Higher to Ordinary Level.

Kevin seemed able to recognise and engage with students in the in-between moments. The situations he described seemed to offer a kind of axis point in terms of holding potential for deep interpersonal connection, and for drawing on elements of both teaching and counselling practice. He used the expression 'split moments' to refer to such transient instances between student and teacher, easily missed in the busyness and structure of the school day or lost when a student withdrew or had trouble accessing the existing support systems in the school.

In one detailed example Kevin recounted supporting a highly distressed student who had withdrawn from another classroom in a state of panic. Kevin outlined how he navigated along a process of engagement, assessment, contracting, problem-solving, considering referral options, and closure with this student over a relatively short period of time. While the steps he followed involved counselling skills, and shared some features with a professional counselling session, this encounter was a very time limited stand-alone one. Kevin focused on supporting the student to engage with required classroom activity through collaboratively identified situated solutions and empathically exploring with her how she was feeling and making sense of her overwhelm in school in that moment.

Kevin spoke about feelings of nervousness he sometimes felt at the outset of such encounters when he had concerns about a student's safety. Over his career, several students in his school had completed suicide, and Kevin felt the responsibility and uncertainty of having "a Child Protection Head on" (L. 160). Nevertheless, the predominant sense around his engaging at this emotional level to support students was a positive one.

> *I think it's great. I mean, I feel so fortunate that I have counselling skills.* (L. 246)

Kevin seemed to locate his sense of satisfaction and ease embedding counselling skills within his teaching role more at the micro level than the macro level. Positive feedback that he received from students and parents aligned with his own beliefs that kindness and understanding where the other is coming from matter. But it seemed that Kevin also perceived that his approach was at odds with the wider school ethos where "the aspirations is that everybody goes into Higher and get 625 points" (L. 44) and "we're all potentially in in boxes depending on the job we do "(L. 284). He acknowledged that this stirred up frustration for him. In grappling with this and in "really trying to find where does my skill set fully fit?" (L. 292) he found himself questioning whether he could continue to work long term in this embedded way in his present context despite the satisfactions it brought.

Appendix J: Samples of Iterative Analysis of Rosetta's Transcript using MS Whiteboard
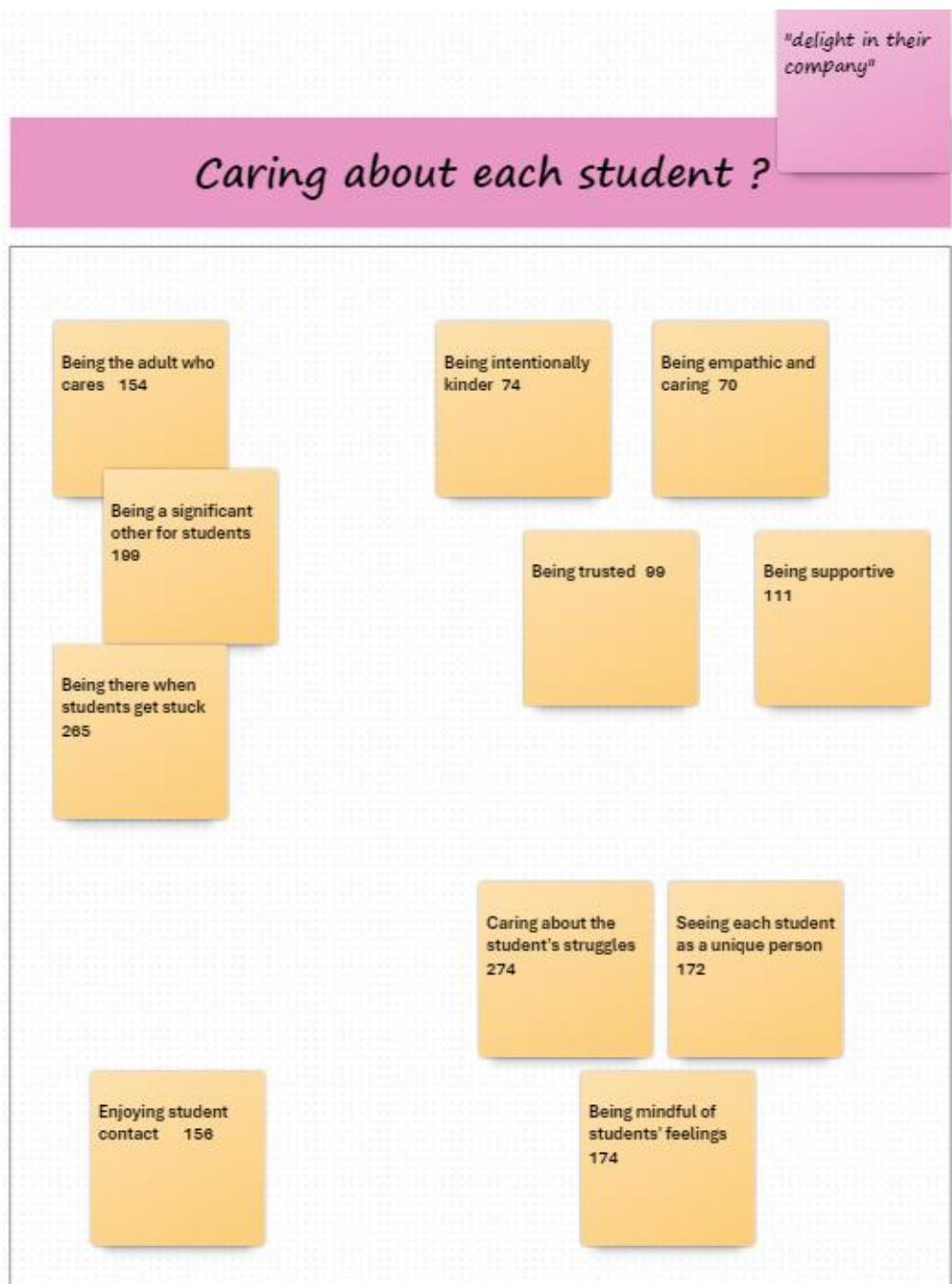
Note: This image shows some early clustering of Experiential Statements to create a tentative PET. Here the PET has not been named and Experiential Statements are loosely grouped together to reflect similar experiences. The researcher's tentative interpretation of "Caring about each student?" is used alongside Rosetta's words, "delight in their company" illuminating her experience. Line numbers appear on each tile for transparency.

Appendix J continued: Samples of Iterative Analysis of Rosetta's Transcript using MS Whiteboard

2. CARING DEEPLY: PRIVILEGE AND BURDEN

Delighting in their company	Helping them over the hurdle	Carrying the responsibility	Being the change
Being affirming with a smile 140	Being intentionally kinder 74	Being conscientious about her impact 151	Being reflective and ethical 202
Being the adult who cares 154	Caring about the student's struggles 274	Feeling a pressure to be consistent 208	Growing concerned about her part in the bigger picture 298
Enjoying student contact 156	Wanting to find the positives 76	Feeling the weight of her therapeutic approach 200	Being unsure how to contribute further 300
Feeling privileged to be able to help 149	Fostering learning through relationship 98		

Note: This image shows the final clustering of Experiential Statements into a PET with four sub-themes. Some additional Experiential Statements have been included and others have been discarded. The PET name captures both the researcher's interpretation and Rosetta's words. Sub-themes have been named phenomenologically.

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Appendix K: Hazel's Personal Experiential Themes (PETs) Table

Sub-themes	Experiential Statements	Line No.	Key phrase in transcript
	PET 1: BEING A SKILLED HELPER		
Exploring feelings	Being aware of body messages	79	I might just check in with them one to one. Might notice they're saying yes, but their body's saying no, and the training is really helpful in that regard
	Being an active listener	270	I said, "that sounds really overwhelming." And she went. "Yeah, that's <u>exactly</u> what it is." So that was Therapy Speak coming in. We were able to name it
	Being concerned about students	252	just doing a little check in here and there. "How are you doing now?" You know, "How're thing's going? How're the stress levels?" those kind of questions
Being boundaried	Being structured in her support	152	always in a private space. And she was aware that, I actually, almost contracted with her in the beginning.
	Being aware of role limits	240	I have to be boundaried in myself. It's not my role to jump in and care for everyone or fix everyone.
Providing ways forward	Being solution focused	278	This is one tiny thing I can do in this moment to try and address one part of this issue.
	Being a resource for students	137	and sometimes it would just be practical stuff ... other times ...just needed to be brought back down to Earth and brought back into themselves.

	Being able to signpost to help	103	I can suggest that she might go to the Guidance Counsellor or to an outside service
Pressed for time	Being challenged by time and space	103	I don't have the time, this physical space to sit with that student. ...but a lot of our interactions are so short ...That's a challenge
	Being present but running late	263	I'm still calm and able to be with what they're saying. But I'm aware I've to get into the class
	Helping in a tight spot	280	brief corridor interaction, and someone else came along and disrupted the chat...And it's hard
Being a caregiver	Having a pastoral outlook	12	pastorally in my school we have a very strong focus on wellbeing. So, this was always very present for me.
	Being the one who connects	108	the importance of the human connection there. So even though she still doesn't feel better, someone asked her is she OK?
	Feeling like a healer	144	I came in in this kind of caregiver healing kind of role
	Being altruistic	160	I was feeling this sense of care to this person... it felt like I was doing good. I was helping
PET 2: TAKING THEM UNDER MY WING			
Being there for the overwhelmed	Feeling drawn to struggling students	16	magnetised towards students who are a bit lost, and they don't know what they're doing
	Being aware of student distress	126	moments where I might see them upset on the corridor.
	Being with strong emotions	146	days where I would just listen, and she was so activated and upset, like tears and rant.

Counting the cost	Being the Go-To Person	**230**	They become dependent on me. So, because I've shown empathy and kindness,
	Aware of neediness as a drawback	**249**	the negative side can be that you become this crutch for students.
	Being comfortable with role limits	**282**	I can't be everything… and I think I'm OK with that.
Opening the toolbox wider	Being self-aware	**324**	this extra layer of like metacognition going on and I was like, "oh, that's really interesting,"
	Being less reactive since training	**54**	I don't react the way, maybe at the start of my career
	Choosing to draw on counselling	**174**	"OK, what will I say here that's going to help her." And that was the therapy piece coming and going "What can I use in my toolbox that's going to help this student?"
	Growing in her job	**333**	this image of a silhouette of a human that's just expanding and growing… and that's my own growth mindset in relation to my job
PET 3: DANCING WITH DUALITY			
Teaching with empathy	Being attuned to distress in school	**303**	I'm looking at people <u>so</u> differently… so I can go, "OK. There's something going on there"
	Empathising with student learning experiences	**58**	put myself in their shoes to give <u>them</u> more autonomy over, say, workload and stuff like that.
Supporting with empathy	Recognising the hidden struggles	**80**	with the vulnerable students... I just have so much space for what they have lived

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			through. Without knowing what they have lived through
	Being in a therapeutic relationship with a student	**139**	and a really strong therapeutic relationship developed.
See-sawing	Being in flux	**203**	The dance… It's like a see-saw!
	Leaning into one role or the other	**148**	very much had my therapist hat on and the teacher piece would come in
	Being able to switch roles	**200**	I'm kind of with what might be going on with them. But then there is a sense of "Right, down to business!" There's still a course that has to be covered.

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Appendix L: Noah's Personal Experiential Themes (PETs) Diagram

SHAPING A RELATIONAL CURRICULUM	CONNECTING IN CLASSROOMS AND CORRIDORS	KEEPING IN BETWEEN THE DITCHES
Prioritising relationships	Teaching moments of openness	Navigating the edges of roles
Choosing contact	Helping moments of approachability	Holding a person-centred focus
Allowing safe spaces		
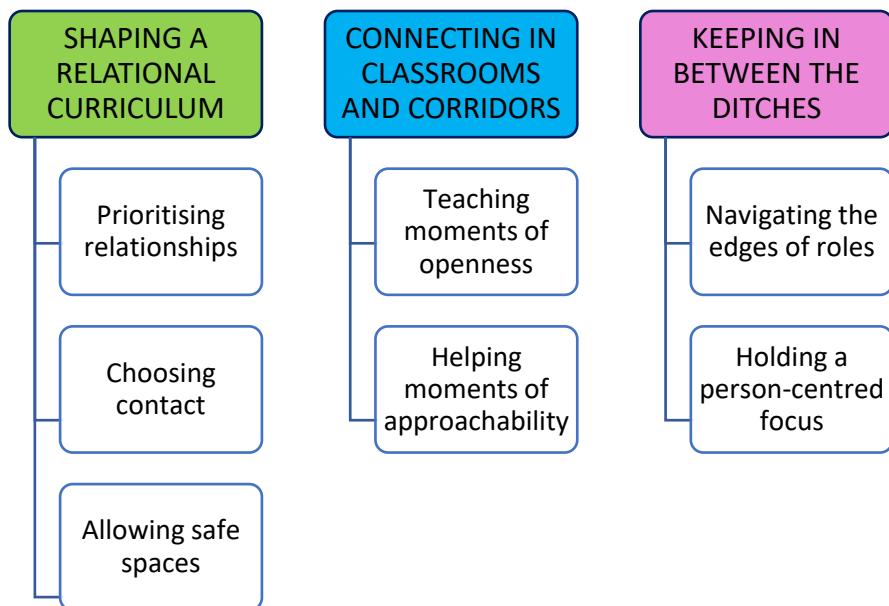
Appendix M: Group Experiential Themes (GETs) Table

Sub-themes	Experiential Statements	Key phrase in transcript	Teacher	Line No.
GET 1		**PRIVILEGING RELATIONSHIP: "ALL IN THE RELATING"**		
Connecting meaningfully: "Looking into the eyes"	Seeking out relational work.	I've always wanted more the role of I suppose the listening, the relationship.	Carol	18
	Privileging relationship in teaching	I really notice that my huge focus is around that relationship... and that actually it's key	Kevin	72
	Being in contact	there's an actual contact and conversation started, and names used	Noah	43
	Being energised by students	I feel very excited, and I suppose empowered when that exchange happens	Brigid	332
Caring about young people: "I delight in their company"	Esteeming young people	they're great. Young people are mighty!	Brigid	467
	Being protective	I have them under my wing	Kevin	71
	Being aware of overwhelm	There's just so many kids who are overwhelmed.	Jasmine	150
	Being affirming	I want to see you guys do well... And if I can help you guys do that.	Skyler	240
	Aware of neediness as a drawback	the negative side can be that you become this crutch for students.	Hazel	249

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Making a difference: "The kids light up"	Being the adult who cares	the adult who, this adult is giving me a moment of their time	Rosetta	154
	Believing respectful relationships matter	the accumulation of respectful relationships has a massive impact in a school	Noah	49
	Sharing Aha! moments	it just became so much clearer to her…she could see where she was in it	Carol	164
	Being altruistic	it felt like I was doing good. I was helping	Hazel	161
GET 2		**TEACHING THROUGH AN ADDITIONAL LENS: "REACHING INTO MY TOOLKIT"**		
Fine-tuning a counselling lens: "My eyes are always wide open"	Being aware of underlying issues	there's a lot going on and the behaviour is speaking	Jasmine	267
	Having a skills menu	an awareness of me using the skills... repeating back and active listening	Carol	80
	Being attuned to emotional process	space to tune into the feeling in the room, and to tune into responses in the room	Noah	91
	Being sensitive and safe	always be to make sure that they're safe...you've kind of got your antennae out	Jasmine	115
	Feeling costs and benefits	So it can be draining, but it's fascinating.	Skyler	322

Tuning in to self: "This is my stuff"	Being self-aware within teaching	so that I know who I am at a particular time	Brigid	264
	Being supported in personal therapy	I do in and out of therapy...if there's stuff that comes up from work, I can bring it up there.	Kevin	262
	Being non-defensive	I don't take it personally.	Rosetta	266
	Being real with students	I'm willing to let them see me as not a stern teacher, but as a person with personality	Skyler	217
GET 3		**BEING A HELPFUL PRESENCE: "BEING PROPERLY THERE"**		
Holding a safe space for learning: "A container"	Aiming for a safe learning space	the person has to be, I suppose, held and made feel safe, before they can learn a subject.	Brigid	22
	Letting learning flow	allowing a bit of space for the process and seeing where that goes, and that the learning emerges in that	Noah	96
	Empathising with student learning	put myself in their shoes to give them more autonomy over, say, workload and stuff	Hazel	58
	Being responsible for education	well actually, my responsibility here is to teach a class and is to get through the curriculum	Jasmine	266
	Being a disciplinarian	I have to go into teaching role. I have to be the disciplinarian, or I have to carry through	Carol	93
Being around wellbeing:	Supporting teenagers	I allow them the safe space to practise being an adult.	Brigid	306

"Let's talk about it"	where they're at			
	Being psychoeducational	give them this little pep talk…a psychoeducational kind of role	Skyler	140
	Being creative with the curriculum	hey, can I apply this to a classroom setting? And might this work in a classroom setting?	Jasmine	57
	Wanting to find the positives	to help them to see even the smallest thing in a more useful light.	Rosetta	76
	Being prepared to talk about mental health	there was a suicide... they just said, "can we talk about this?" and I said "yes"	Jasmine	36
Responding in the moment: "The pause"	Being available in the moment of contact	that initial moment of contact, that I'm aware of someone is asking, "Can I talk to you for a minute?"	Noah	114
	Catching the fleeting opportunity to connect	the split moments ...just to be able to talk through and actually being able to allow them the space	Kevin	51
	Taking a moment for oneself	I first regulate, that's what I do, with breathing.	Brigid	165
	Widening the lens	lots of things flooded through my mind.	Skyler	177
	Helping in a tight spot	brief corridor interaction, and someone else came along and disrupted the chat...And it's hard	Hazel	280
GET 4		**NAVIGATING IDENTITY: "A DITCH EACH SIDE OF THE ROAD"**		

Being different: "She teaches in the forest"	Being on the edge	There she goes. So, she's still a teacher... But she teaches in the forest.	Skyler	277
	Feeling taken for granted	a little bit undervalued in terms of, you're kind of getting two for the price of one here	Jasmine	169
	Being seen as knowledgeable	and the school is very lucky that they have someone like me there, that knows this	Carol	66
	Being tapped out	I had to pull back from, the Principal was relying on me quite a bit to interpret other colleagues	Anon.	373
	Being a champion for relational working	a real challenge to be constantly reclaiming a focus for the human beings and the relationships	Noah	187
	Feeling professionally alone	There's nobody to help or there's nobody to guide on it.	Skyler	450
Dancing and wrestling with duality: "Like a see-saw"	Having a unified approach	it's the two of them together. Very seamless.	Rosetta	114
	Being in flux	The dance… It's like a see-saw!	Hazel	203
	Being professionally torn	but that's not what I'm meant to be doing. That's not my role here.	Jasmine	141
	Being disconnected	I would separate them.... I literally call it the Jekyll and Hyde.	Carol	103
	Questing to find a home for the skills	Really trying to find where does my skill set fully fit?	Kevin	292
	Being supported and professional	importance of supervision for me in helping me stay in the road and not fall into those ditches either side	Noah	211

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