Complexities of a Bhutanese school counselling community: A critical narrative insight

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While school counselling was introduced to the Bhutan school system in recent years due to increased concerns about student wellbeing, there is a significant dearth of research on the influences and experiences of the profession. This is the first documented study on school counselling in Bhutan by an insider, a Bhutanese school guidance counsellor. Using social constructionism and critical theory to inform a narrative inquiry methodology, we story the complexities and struggles of a first generation school counsellor in Bhutan. This study enables voice on explaining counsellors’ multifaceted roles and responsibilities, and on disclosing tensions in the school system. School counsellors are challenged by limited training and professional development, and yet are expected to provide expert-led responsive services. Regarding these challenges, we examine the influence of metanarratives (governing community expectations) on counsellor legitimacy – and uncover counsellor counter-narratives as enactments of voice and resistance. We adapted a semi-structured narrative interview and thematic narrative analysis to facilitate participant reconstructions of events with their experiences. Findings suggest a need for relevant stakeholders within the education system to acknowledge and collectively address the current challenges faced by school counsellors.

Bhutan is a tiny Himalayan Buddhist kingdom that has faced challenges in societal changes to youth wellbeing. Twenty-five percent of its 708,000 inhabitants are school children (National Statistics Bureau, 2011). Bhutan transitioned from a feudal and monastic education structure to a modern capitalist economy and mass education system where English became the medium of instruction for primary, secondary and tertiary education (Ministry of Education, 2013). Since Western modernisation, there have been concerns of its greater influence of social and economic development on Bhutanese culture, traditional values and belief systems. Youth now have a lifestyle based on consumerism and Western modern values (Mathou, 2000). A rise in self-harm, suicide, drug abuse, theft and crime rates has been linked to a shift of values, attitudes and expectations that potentially isolate and create social disharmony (Wangyal, 2001). Foreseeing the needs of young people to acquire greater skills than before, the Bhutan Government responded by directing their Ministry of Education (MoE) to develop and institutionalise youth guidance and counselling services.

School counselling services have been growing rapidly around the world as a part of Western globalisation and they have been adapted by Asian countries (Rivera, Nash, Wah & Ibrahim, 2008). In Asia, education officials are now investing in the psychosocial wellbeing of both children and young adults at all levels within the school system (Low, Kok, & Lee, 2013) and Bhutan is no exception.

Bhutanese counselling initiatives commenced in the late 1990s as a response to a Royal Decree. School counselling began with the Youth Guidance and Counselling Section (YGCS) in 1996 under the Ministry of Education (MoE), which expressed the "need for proper youth guidance and counselling to impart wholesome education to our younger generation" (Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 10). Since then, the YGCS has grown into the Department of Youth and Sports. Its Career Education and
Counselling Division (CECD) worked towards institutionalising comprehensive and systematic guidance and counselling programs, which involved recruitment, training and placement of a new generation of full-time school counsellors in various secondary schools across Bhutan (Ministry of Education, 2010). The first twelve full time school guidance counsellors were placed in the schools in 2010. They provide counselling services, plan and facilitate guidance curriculum, prevention programs, and the school parenting educational awareness programs. Systematic guidance and counselling services were promoted for general wellbeing and academic achievement of all students and to provide equitable services to all students in their school communities. Training for school counsellors then became more sophisticated with the introduction of the first Postgraduate Diploma in Guidance and Counselling in 2011.

The National Board of Certified Counsellors (NBCC) U.S., along with the non-governmental organisation (NGO) called Respect, Educate, Nurture and Empower Women (RENEW), founded in 2004 by her Majesty Ashi Sangay Choden Wangchuck, offered assistance to develop counselling between Bhutan and USA to better understand and shape the global emergence of the counselling profession (Lorelle & Guth, 2013). The implementation of these initiatives in Bhutan parallels the influence and development of Western consumerism and modern values in the country.

**Study Rationale**

Although school counselling has developed globally, understanding the concept and benefits of counselling has been a major hurdle for the profession. Counselling is constructed as an imported concept from the West by principals, teachers and parents. There was resistance to counselling because they assumed it would influence traditional ways of working with students. Conversely, there is a strong need for an intervention to cater to the needs of the rising youth issues, and facilitate better academic performance, adjustment and career development. Thus, school counsellors are caught in a web of these complex situations.

As a first generation school counsellor in Bhutan, I (Kuenga) was confronted with many challenges in implementing the guidance and counselling programme in my school. Initially, the guidance and counselling programme was not given much importance like other academic and non-academic programs in the school system. There was a general lack of understanding about the nature of counselling among principals and teachers, which led to role confusion. There was no fixed time allocated for the counselling programme during school hours. I had to manage my time to provide services to students. This eventually led to overwork, working out of school hours to provide individual and group counselling services, along with teaching guidance and career education and other non-counselling related activities during school hours. I experienced a sense of helplessness, and, in retrospect, burnout. We did not have clinical supervision as it is practised in Western countries, and consequently my limited knowledge and skills further added to the challenges in working with diverse issues that were confronting students. These experiences motivated me to explore and understand the complexities of the Bhutanese school counselling profession and find ways to communicate with various stakeholders, including the educators, students and families, to understand the realities of the 'experts' that have been placed in schools.

Hence, the purpose of this study was to explore these complexities in the school counselling profession and find ways to overcome these intricacies to enhance the practices of the profession in Bhutan. The specific aim was to explore and understand, within a critical narrative framework, the complexities and challenges of the first generation of school counsellors in Bhutan. This was to enable an in-depth understanding of the challenges they face in implementing their programmes in schools to inform and potentially transform the systems that structure their practice. School counsellors’
experiences are largely undocumented. If we consider them as key players in educational reform, it is valuable to hear their voice. This is the first study on school counselling in Bhutan by an insider and this may open a dialogue to understand the profession and shed light on future directions.

Given the dearth of research on school counselling in Bhutan, this study documents the work of the pioneers in the field. I (Kuenga) wanted to live alongside their stories and understand their lived experiences, as these people created the system of guidance and counselling in schools. The school counselling profession that exists today in Bhutan will have a huge impact on its future quality. Therefore, it is essential that we understand its present situation and give school counsellors a voice to enhance their knowledge and practices. I (Kuenga) will also look at a case narrative of a school counsellor and his accounts of how principals and teachers position him.

**Literature Review**

As no research exists specifically on the Bhutanese school counselling profession, the literature review focused on two aspects. Literatures were examined where school counselling is at a developing stage, similar to that in Bhutan. However, these resources did not highlight the complexities of school counselling. Consequently, I (Kuenga) looked at different elements of school counselling from various literatures, including research from Asian countries, to appreciate the potential complexities of school counsellors in Bhutan.

School counselling programmes in many countries have gone through changes, from focusing on dissemination of career information to the planning and implementation of guidance and counselling programs influenced by wider educational contexts (Gysbers, 2001). School counselling is an integral support structure in education because it attends to the personal, social and emotional needs of students and the various influences that might interfere with their learning (Kok, 2013). Hence, efficient and successful guidance and counselling programs are imperative for student wellbeing and require school counsellors to play a vital role.

Support from school leaders is likely to serve as a motivating factor for teachers and school counsellors to implement reforms. For instance, US teacher counsellors who received higher support from school administration reported a higher quality of implementation in contrast to those who had no support (Ransford, Greenberg, Domitrovich, Small & Jacobson, 2009). Ultimately, effective implementation of school counselling programmes requires the acceptance of stakeholders who are equipped with the required knowledge and skills to change (Fullan, 2005). School counsellors in Bhutan often work in isolation, which is not an effective practice for programme implementation. The need for collaborative relationships between school administrators and teachers is important when applying school counselling programs (Fagan & Wise, 2007). Yet, there is reluctance from administrators and teachers to promote school counselling as a whole school approach as it is either considered not their responsibility or outside of their scope of practice (Lam & Hui, 2010).

**Stigmatisation**

Stigmatisation is one main determinant in why counselling services among students remain unpopular, creating a roadblock for programme implementation, particularly in non-Western contexts. It is a serious problem faced by counsellors in Malaysia. In Low et al.’s (2013) study, about 70% of 88 Malaysian school counsellors felt stigmatisation was one of the main difficulties that restricted students and parents for seeking services. Counselling was considered as a service for students 'who have a problem' and some Malaysian and Chinese parents in Macao/Macau fear stigmatisation (Low et al., 2013; van Schalkwyk, 2011). Similarly, Okocha and Alika (2012) found that one of the challenges faced in Nigeria was the uncooperative and negative constructions of students and parents about counselling. Their findings are supported by Alutu’s (2005) study, finding that most secondary school students refused
counselling because they did not recognise its usefulness.

Ambiguous Roles and Responsibilities of School Counsellors

The ongoing debate over role definition is the most significant challenge discussed in school counselling literatures (Paisley & McMahon, 2001). It is evident that, for many years, the school counselling profession experienced functional uncertainty (Borders, 2002), role ambiguity, conflict (Lambie, 2007) and role confusion (Burnham & Jackson, 2000). Over the last decade, research has increased our understanding that unclear roles of school counsellors can lead to their work often being derived from priorities determined by the principal and other stakeholders rather than from a set of professional goals and definitions directed toward the needs of students (House & Hayes, 2002; Shimoni & Greenberger, 2014). This situation is also reflected in Lambie and Williamson's (2004) historical study, which found that counsellors performed functions outside the definition of the profession.

Studies show a problematic gap between the actual involvement of counsellors at school and the desired involvement of counsellors in their professional domains. While some studies in the USA found that school counsellors were involved in domains in line with American School Counselling Association (ASCA) policy (e.g., House & Hayes, 2002), other studies have found that school counsellors are extensively involved in non-counselling activities (Chata & Loesch, 2007; Foster, Young, & Hermann, 2005). Incongruence between what is advocated and the actual duties of counsellors has cultivated role ambiguity and conflict, increasing occupational stress in school counsellors (Lambie, 2007). Furthermore, school administrators, teachers, parents, and other groups have divergent perspectives on school counsellors’ roles (Burnham & Jackson, 2000).

Role ambiguity is an on-going concern and school counsellors themselves can struggle with priorities and competing demands due to a myriad of responsibilities.

School counsellors are often involved in non-counselling related administrative and disciplinary tasks, requiring inordinate periods that could have been spent on appropriate counselling sessions (Burnham & Jackson, 2000). For instance, Malaysian school counsellors had to check students' uniforms and nametags, and deal with fighting problems and other disciplinary cases in addition to their services (Low et al., 2013). Likewise, Jamtsho (2015) argued that in Bhutan, school counselling is positioned as a disciplinary and punitive measure in the school. Having to meet huge expectations from various stakeholders to perform non-school counselling related tasks can often lead to burnout (Gysbers & Henderson, 2014).

Burnout Concerns

Role strain leading to burnout is also a major concern. Burnout is the condition caused by overwork stress, which leads to emotional depletion and feelings of incompetency followed by an increase in work inefficiency and dissatisfaction (Moyer, 2011; Schaufeli, Leiter, & Maslach, 2009). Lambie (2007) found that almost 39% of all mental health counsellors experience burnout. This can be due to lack of skills and time constraints (Lam & Hui, 2010), workload (Wilkerson, 2009), exceptional levels of job stress (Wilkerson & Bellini, 2006), lack of clinical supervision (Brewer & Clippard, 2002), large caseloads and role ambiguity (Moyer, 2011).

Pressures to perform additional tasks outside of counselling and high counsellor-to-student ratios are also concerns relating to school counsellor burnout. Moyer (2011) found that over 50% of school counsellor participants spend 10 or more hours per week on unrelated duties. Spending an overwhelming amount of time on activities outside of counselling, along with large caseloads, continue to plague the profession, and often do not allow school counsellors from providing quality services to students in need (Brown, Dahlbeck, & Sparkman-Barnes, 2006).

Supervision Challenges

It can be extremely challenging for school counsellors to have the range of
knowledge and skills to provide adequate and effective counselling services for the diverse counselling issues and student groups represented in their schools (Paisley & McMahon, 2001). Their constantly changing roles need ongoing professional supervision, which is essential to improve skills, develop new competencies, and provide needed support (Borders, 2002; Evans, Zambrano, Cook, Moyer, & Duffey, 2011; Gysbers & Henderson, 2014; Herlihy, Gray, & McCollum, 2002).

Although school counsellors recognise supervision needs, they receive it only occasionally (Evans et al., 2011). Few school counsellors have supervision opportunities from a trained school counsellor (Page, Pietrzak, & Sutton, 2001). For instance, Page et al., (2001) in their national US survey, found that barely 13% of school counsellors received individual clinical supervision and almost 10% received group clinical supervision. Such results impact on the counsellor’s professional development and student support. It is quite likely that these percentages are even lower or do not exist for school counsellors in most Asian countries where school counselling has been dominated by paraprofessionals (Page et al., 2001).

The need for school counselling, challenges in programme implementation, the ambiguity of roles and responsibilities, challenges in supervision and professional development, and the potential for burnout tell a broad story of complexities and challenges in school counselling. With the dearth of research on how these experiences specifically relate to Bhutan, I (Kuenga) formed two specific research aims: 1) to understand the storied roles and responsibilities of school counsellors in Bhutan, and 2) to identify the challenges and opportunities of implementing school guidance and counselling programmes.

**Research Design**

**Theoretical Orientation and Methodology**

Bhutan is a predominantly Buddhist country where Buddhism mostly influences the unique Bhutanese cultural and traditional values and beliefs. For generations, Bhutanese communities have used media such as art and stories to transmit these beliefs and values in their community practices. Narrative inquiry was therefore the chosen methodology in this research. As the researcher, I (Kuenga) used narrative inquiry to pave new ways to understand and enhance the knowledge and practices of school counsellors in Bhutan. This chosen methodology made sense to me because I come from a culture where we always tell stories, we believe and make sense through stories, and stories are an integral part of who we are. Narratives not only enable us to make sense of who we are; they are constitutive of our realities (J. Bruner, 1986). Therefore, we used social constructionism and critical theory to understand the constitutive power of participant storytelling.

Social constructionism is a philosophical position that regards experience and meaning as constructed by culture and the action orientation of language (Burr, 2015). People understand their world through discursive and social processes from various contexts (Donaldson, Christie, & Mark, 2009). Rather than a neutral expression, language has a constitutive action as it incites people to react and take up positions on matters (Gergen, 2001).

Narrative approaches are infused by a social constructionist stance to understand how people (re)produce language, history, and culture as told through storying (Riessman, 2008). Narrative inquiry assumes that we come to understand, enact and give meaning to our lives through story (Andrews, Squire & Tamboukou, 2013). Stories are valuable in studying lived experiences and can give rich and subtle understandings of life situations (Riessman, 1993). Thus, this approach is deemed most appropriate and valuable to hear the complexities of Bhutanese school counselling roles. Consequently, this research enables a school counsellor’s standpoint through storying the experiences of power relations (Andrews et al., 2013) within the Bhutanese school community.

Stories can represent social realities as
texts, and as social constructions located within various power structures and social milieus they have potential for empowerment and transformation (White & Epston, 1990). Narratives, as units of power, can recreate people’s identities, enabling a platform of change from where they are to where they can be (E. Bruner, 1986). In line with these possibilities, we employ critical theory from poststructuralist influences (Lyotard, 1984; Foucault, 1977) as a suitable theoretical orientation for this narrative research.

Critical theory emphasises the need to develop a critical consciousness of power relations (Crotty, 1998) for transformative practices. We have developed a critical narrative inquiry to enable marginalised voices to be heard (Pitre, Kushner, Raine, & Hegadoren, 2013) and to bring to light the complexities of the power relations in the school counsellor narratives. This invites a dialogue on how to improve the systems and relations school counsellors face. Employing a critical narrative inquiry, we focus on two important types of narratives that contribute to these complexities: metanarratives and counternarratives. Metanarratives are encompassing and prescriptive (and often oversimplified) ideas that are self-legitimising tellings due to their dominance/authority (Lyotard, 1984). Due to their universalising effects, Lyotard (1984) argued that all metanarratives must be questioned and challenged. This can be done through finding counternarratives. Tellings that are counter or resistant to other narratives, including metanarratives, are counternarratives (Bamberg, 2004). Locating counternarratives can enable not only marginalised voices but generate a potential consciousness raising of a more complex picture of power between the repressive and productive effects of metanarratives and counternarratives.

**Methods of Sampling, Data Collection and Analyses**

Using purposive sampling, four school counsellors were recruited as participants with approval from the University of Notre Dame Human Research Ethics Committee (Reference Number: 016121F). An email with information asking to interview school guidance counsellors was sent to the Chief of the CECD. Once approval was granted, an email was sent to six chosen school guidance counsellors for interview (four participated). The sample of counsellors were selected for their extensive counselling experience. Counsellors were provided with a participant information sheet that outlined the study. Recruitment involved three men and one woman who were 25-45 years old and had similar backgrounds. (Pseudonyms were used: Wangchuk, a teacher counsellor who had trained to be a fully fledged school counsellor; Sonam and Pem, both teachers who also trained to be a school counsellor; and Tashi, a school counsellor who wanted to do more than just teaching and trained in school counselling following a psychology degree.) They were based at different high schools in Bhutan and all were from the same generation of school counsellor training.

A semi-structured narrative interview was employed through Skype conversations, except for one face-to-face interview, and all were audio recorded. Jovechelovitch and Bauer's (2000) narrative interviewing technique was adapted and we included a focus on a retelling that involved a remembering/history of events, occasions and experiences to fit with a narrative approach (see Appendix). The adaption of Jovechelovitch and Bauer's technique involved four phases: initiation (asking the key interview questions focused on events, occasions and experiences), main narration (minimal responses and encouraging elaboration), a later questioning phase (shifting the narrative to focus on solutions) and a concluding talk phase that involved switching off the audio recorder, using small talk to shift the conversation to a more relaxed dynamic and then concluding the conversations.

To provide a rich description and in-depth illustration of the complexities and challenges, we focus on a case narrative of one participant. As narrative analysis is case-centred and theorised primarily from within a
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Wangchuk's story as a detailed thematic narrative analysis of his experiences as a school counsellor. Data triangulation, comparing Wangchuk's account with descriptions from the other school counsellor participants, was also used to gain a fuller understanding of Wangchuk's case narrative.

A critical thematic narrative analysis (TNA) was used to honour and deconstruct participant voice. TNA “takes as its object of investigation the story itself” (Riessman, 1993, p.1) through analysing how the story is told, focusing on the content of narrative, and the events and experiences told (Riessman, 2008). Analysis involved familiarisation of content to find key issues and themes and then connecting to a wider cultural context through the interpretations of events, experiences and assumptions (Riessman, 2008). The analysis involved reading the transcripts multiple times and generating themes through inductive latent coding (Braun & Clarke, 2016). Associated with each theme, we also identified core narrative arguments as statements of conduct and authority (Lyotard, 1984) and located their social tensions (Foucault, 1977). This critical addition to TNA focussed on the identification of metanarratives as dominant cultural ideas and practices that are assumed normative experiences, and identification of counter-narratives as resistances to, and always in tension with, those dominant culturally available told ideas and practices (Andrews, 2004). Thematic arguments from Wangchuk's case narrative were presented with reference to meta- and counter-narratives and triangulated with descriptions from the other participants.

Findings and Interpretation

What follows is an analytical telling of Wangchuk's story in relation to the complexity and challenges of school counsellors. We note that the narrative exemplars provided are of a different 'grammar' to Australian English due to English used as a secondary language to the Bhutanese language of Dzongkha. Rather than 'correcting' the narratives, we have kept them intact to honour representation and voice.

Wangchuk started working as a teacher counsellor after taking a basic course in counselling and went on to join one of the first cohorts of full time guidance counsellors in Bhutan through pursuing a postgraduate diploma in counselling. He was passionate about becoming a full-fledged counsellor after working with children with various problems. Wangchuk experienced a paradigm shift from being an “advice giver” to a “full time counsellor,” which involved valuing a broader and more complex understanding of counselling.

The Metanarrative: Counselling as Simply Advice Giving

'Advice giving' was storied among the school community (teachers in particular) as a metanarrative that simplified understandings of counselling. Wangchuk narrated that teachers resisted the school guidance and counselling programme because they were highly sceptical that it would work. They described counselling as 'advice giving', viewed as a deeply rooted aspect of Bhutanese culture where advice is given to the younger generation and an increase of this, through counselling, was an indulgent activity that would spoil the child. This played into an assumption that counselling was a redundant profession that often did not work to solve rising youth issues.

Many of my colleagues had that deeply rooted notion, which I had few years ago, that counselling was advice giving, which was, in fact, culturally inherent in our society. Since time immemorial, our forefathers were into giving advice. So, this was one of the most common mediums which was used by our teachers and parents to help younger people or anyone overcome their problem. Often especially teachers have that notion that advice giving is something that
doesn’t work with modern children and when I came up with a counselling knowledge and a new identity as counsellor in the same school system, where I worked as teacher before, was challenging. Counselling was viewed with skepticism; such as “it is advice giving”, and “they have been doing that”, “it doesn’t work”, “kids would be pampered or spoiled by counselling”. It was very difficult for me to get in and convince my principal and colleagues - and, in fact, convince a system as whole.

The dominant influence of the metanarrative of counselling as simply advice giving can be seen in/through the language of Wangchuk's story. The metanarrative contains denotative language such as "it is advice giving", "was in fact culturally inherent", and "it doesn't work". The use of such factually constructed terms denotes that counselling had a literal, factual and authoritative meaning to Wangchuk. Denotative language is used in metanarratives to (re)produce its legitimacy but it also forms (meta)prescriptive rules on what is legitimate behaviour (Lyotard, 1984). As the teachers were telling Wangchuk that counselling is advice giving, this was also prescribing how he should conduct his job as a counsellor. Those who tell the metanarrative are teaching staff (including administration and management), or what Lyotard (1984, p. 9) argues as the sender, "invested with the authority to make such a statement" to the addressee, the school counsellor. If counselling is advice giving, the school counsellor is expected to adhere to it. Paradoxically, as it is believed that additional advice giving "doesn't work", a school counsellor's professional status is seen with scepticism and this constructs an implied expectation that excessive advice giving should be avoided. Otherwise, it would have negative consequences (spoiling the child or having no impact).

Narratives can prescribe what is real and just through reference to a moral order that enables and constrains the subjects the narrative constitutes and positions (Coombes, 2000; Coombes & Morgan, 2004). Through the metanarrative, advice giving is constituted as the reality of school counselling and yet the application of it is constructed as unjust because the child would be "spoiled by counselling" or "it doesn't work". These paradoxical prescriptions that "school counsellors should stick to advice-giving and are therefore redundant" produces a complex moral ordering of counsellors that creates challenges for convincing teachers of their value.

Similar themes on the redundancy of the school counselling profession through the metanarrative of advice giving were expressed by other participants. Another counsellor, Pem, retold that one principal assumed, "all teachers are counsellors and counsellors are no different to teachers". Sonam, another counsellor, stated that counselling was also viewed as advice giving by teachers, including the principal who argued, "we give counselling to students every day, there is no use doing that, it's better they are dealt with school disciplinary policy than softer measure". In Pem's retelling, the use of "are" creates a denotative argument where it is stated as if it is a fact that counsellors and teachers are no different. Sonam's account is a reference to a prescriptive argument that positions teachers as more effective with students than counsellors, who are positioned as soft on students, with the potential to pamper and spoil them. These paradoxical arguments of counsellors as no different to teachers but redundant due to their perceived softer measures in contrast to teachers shows the complex metanarrative, which Wangchuk storied, retold as the realities of other school counsellors. Such statements are indicative of a moral ordering that delegitimises the professional status of school counsellors. Counselling as an Ancillary and Marginal Programme

Narratives enable the authority of a speaker's position to be (re- or de-) legitimated as they are connected with a specific moral ordering of social power.
relations (Busch & Coombes, 2008; Coombes, 2000; Coombes & Morgan, 2004). Through the metanarrative of advice giving that positions counselling staff as the same or redundant to teachers, teaching staff are able to (re)inforce an asymmetrical power relationship between counselling and teaching staff where counsellor legitimacy is challenged. When Wangchuk retold how counselling programmes were scheduled, he argued that school counselling was marginalised by administrators during times when he thought counselling programmes would be useful.

Whenever I have program, well planned and put it in schedule like in school calendar, the moment other programs come up, then they would shift guidance and counselling programs and replace it with other programs and they would say like ‘this can be done even at the end of the year, when we don’t have other programs’...

So, I feel it is being viewed as a secondary or ancillary program to academic or other programs.

Another participant, Sonam, reported a similar experience of being marginalised. When he conducted his first presentation to convince teaching staff of the importance of school counselling, "they were not keen to know", he was rushed by staff and had "only one hour" to present. Teaching staff kept referring to school counselling as "your [his] program", and "it was not really welcomed", which made him feel isolated. Both Sonam’s and Wangchuk’s accounts constructed a moral positioning of counselling as marginal rather than integral to the school experience.

**Challenges of Convincing Staff and Students**

Wangchuk realised there were discursive barriers making it difficult to convince the school community that counselling needed to be an integral component. Schoolchildren reproduced the metanarrative of counsellors in that they were positioned as advice givers and therefore were seen and valued the same as teachers. This meant that they were also positioned as disciplinarians through the metanarrative, which created a barrier for student trust and disclosure. Likewise, Pem revealed that "students think it [counselling] is a disciplinary measure even after many orientation programmes", reinforcing the counsellor as a disciplinarian metanarrative. Wangchuk found it challenging to convince the students that school counsellors could be trusted and not feared.

Students still didn’t find any difference between a teacher and counsellor in the school. They were sceptical about entrusting their problem stories to a counsellor who seemed a disciplinarian figure to them, they feared that all teachers in the school would know their stories, if they shared with me, as I am also one of the staff members. So I had to spend lot of time again in advocating the counselling program and only towards the end of my first year, as a result of my vigorous advocacy programs, the number of my client intake increased. However, it was still a challenge in my school, because students have to wait for the right time to avail services, as I am not allowed to take them away during the academic instructional hours, this was a big issue. Teachers despise that.

The above example shows resistance from Wangchuk through advocating the counselling programme vigorously but also the barriers he faced despite the advocacy. The prescriptive utterance of "not allowed" to encroach on academic instructional hours again produces a moral and temporal ordering of school counselling as marginal rather than integral to the school community.

This treatment is indicative of a normalising judgement, a form of disciplinary power that enables people to check if others (or themselves) are meeting a required standard in how they should be behaving according to their position within an institution (Foucault, 1977). Normalising judgements enable dividing practices, a
strategy of marginalising or excluding people within a community who are seen as a threat (Foucault 1982). Such judgements may be indicative of a language game (Lytard, 1984), a game of social power relations with a set of rules that authorise and govern the style and purpose of talk (Coombes & Morgan, 2004), which turns into a truth game, determining how valid something is, yet limited by its epistemic bounds (Foucault, 1997). The metanarrative of counsellor as simply advice giver and therefore 'no different to teacher' and disciplinarian is a game that involves a set of assumed 'truths' and rules that reproduce denotative statements to determine what is a school counsellor and therefore how a school counsellor should conduct themselves. In other words, Wangchuk reported that he was judged and expected to behave like a disciplinarian in his school community and conform to the idea that counselling was not a core component of the school. However, his (counter-)narrative resists this metanarrative through a different set of values, ideas and meanings about school counselling. Through not playing 'the game' of the metanarrative, his decision to have appointments with students during instructional hours was despised and disliked by teaching staff. Consequently, Wangchuk found it harder to convince staff the relevance of his programs.

High Expectations
Although the counselling programme was considered secondary to other programs, teaching staff had high expectations of Wangchuk. There was pressure to bring immediate changes in students seeking counselling support within a short time span. They have huge expectations that change should happen within short span of time, they do not have time, they cannot afford to have students with disciplinary problem running in conflict with school rules for longer period of time, that can have ripple effects on others students, because of which the expectations is very high, time is very limited and because of which I was not able to deliver that expectations... they feel that counselling doesn’t have the capacity to address such disciplinary issues. So, in that sense, gradually, I saw that there was a division in the system, one group that strongly supports and the other group that doesn’t support counselling program.

As well as being divided from others, Foucault (1982) argued that an internal dividing practice of/within the self can also occur. Perhaps due to the social pressure to conform to teaching staff expectations, as well as being the only counsellor in the school, Wangchuk's self-positioning fluctuated between a division/binary of competence and incompetence. He described feeling this fluctuation less over time but still internalised guilt from how others positioned him.

I was put in an expert shoes especially due to the fact that I was the only counsellor placed in my school, well, I guess I was an expert in my own rights except the pressure of my expertise was too heavy to bear. In the beginning my being viewed, as an expert did not really go well with the kind of services that I provided but over the period of time after my advance training and experiences, I began to feel more competent and my level of confidence began to increase. Hence, in my own small rights, I think I fitted well with me being viewed as an expert by those around me though I still had internal guilt of proclaiming myself as an expert and saviour when I was not.

High Workloads and Burnout
Despite being considered as an expert or the saviour in the school, Wangchuk often experienced intense burnout due to limited knowledge and competence to work with complex issues. This was due to a lack of available support structures and no supervision, resulting in helplessness.
I get burn out sometimes, since I was a lone counsellor placed in a school with over one thousand three hundred students, where I was viewed as an expert counsellor despite my limited skills and competence, the burnout was something I predicted ... it was more intense whenever I came across a situation where problem of the client seem beyond my capacity or comprehension. In such time I remained helpless, as I did not have any other expert counsellors for consultation nor supervision and undermined the quality of my service to the clients ... they don’t care whether you are overloaded or not and if there are 10 cases you have to take care of 10 cases in a day ... one after another and you have to deal with it ... You can’t afford to have any delays. So in such situations you totally become tired, burned out, it’s difficult, it demotivates you and you start questioning yourself...

Wangchuk's telling challenges the assumptions that counsellors are not needed for the running of the school programme and counters a metanarrative that assumes school counsellors have much time on their hands to do their duties. Wangchuk found it challenging to see students during teaching time. Another participant, Pem, found it challenging as well, attending to clients "during break times, after school, during games sessions as there is no extra time allocated for counselling", often working within her personal time as a consequence. Marginality, time poverty and a lack of support resulted in stress.

Nelson and Prilleltensky (2010) argue that marginalisation may deprive people of resources, limit opportunities for them to contribute and, consequently, increase isolation as well as lower self-confidence and self-esteem. Wangchuk narrated that he was burnt out while he had a lack of support/care, high workload, and inadequate training. These experiences seem to be contingent with the processes and effects of marginalisation in that the metanarrative of school counselling as advice giving reproduces a discourse that school counselling should be marginal.

"I had nowhere to turn to": A Need for Supervision and Professional Development

Wangchuk also recognised the need for strategies to deal with burnout, as the availability of supervision was limited due to a scarcity of professionals to provide such services. He reflected on how he was blamed for not being able to meet the expectations of the school system and how he was exposed to risky situations and vulnerabilities without support mechanisms in place.

Counsellors are actually placed in different schools in different parts of the countries and once they are placed in the school they are on their own ... if things go wrong then you would be blamed and you would be blamed because people failed to understand counselling program, there is total dearth of support mechanism in place ... so we are exposed to high risk, huge vulnerabilities, these events actually makes my position very challenging ... I didn’t realize when these things went wrong because even if I knew something was wrong I had nowhere to turn to.

Wangchuk felt inadequate with the challenging issues confronting him in his position. Other participants told of similar experiences. Pem stated, "when the case is complicated, I don't know what to do, I get lost", Tashi expressed, "I urgently feel the need for supervision" and Sonam argued, "we need more training in working with various rising youth issues and mental health concerns". Wangchuk felt that if had there been constant supervision and professional development, he would not be blamed for being unable to save some students’ lives. If I share some experiences, which I wish I could bury them forever along with my past, there were few cases of suicide, which I felt I could have done more, I still live
with that wish and regret for not able to save those two beautiful lives, which happened in the school where I began my first year of my novice-counselling career. I regret every day of my life reflecting on what went wrong and what could have saved their lives. When I think of such incident I feel very incompetent and quite stupid to call myself a counsellor who is viewed as an expert to solve people’s problems while I was not able to manage my own stress and guilt of not able to do much. There were times when I thought many times about quitting my job simply because I was not able to do much to help those who needed my help.

Wangchuk's narrative reveals a lived experience of the consequences of inadequate supervision and professional development where he internalised responsibility and accountability, feeling "he could have done more", and pathologised himself as "incompetent", "stupid" and "not able". These self-positionings are internalised dividing practices (Foucault, 1982) serving to self-marginalise as Wangchuk "thought many times about quitting" due to believing he was incompetent.

Importantly, these self-positionings are contingent with a wider social context of devaluing and marginalising school counsellors through the advice giver metanarrative. The denotative discourse of school counselling ("it is advice giving"; "it doesn't work"), constructed through the advice giver metanarrative, produces a prescriptive normalising judgement (i.e., if it is assumed that "it is advice giving", it should be practised as advice giving and if it is believed that "it doesn't work", it must not be effective and therefore valued). If school counsellors are expected to only be advice givers and disciplinarians, and are seen as not integral to the effective development of the student or functioning of the school, supervision and further professional training may be assumed as unnecessary through such a metanarrative. Wangchuk described not being able to manage his own stress and guilt. Yet, without adequate supervision, professional and social support, the ability to self-care and be an effective counsellor may suffer.

Successful Transformations - Past and Future

Despite all challenges and roadblocks, Wangchuk managed to make a difference to his school, supporting students, parents and teachers. His counter-narrative challenges the advice-giving metanarrative that positions school counsellors as redundant, noting his achievements and successes. This included transforming the way teachers related with their students, with teachers adopting a less punitive disciplinary approach.

Wangchuk also reflected on what was needed for successful outcomes in the future. He recommended a need to define clearly roles and responsibilities in the school system to ensure that the school counsellors are not overburdened, and argued that school principals and teachers have a clear understanding of counselling so that they can educate other colleagues and support the
The need to have at least two additional counsellors to reduce caseloads and the likelihood of burnout.

**Further Discussion**

Wangchuk's narrative highlights the importance of a critical narrative inquiry for understanding the storied positionings of school counsellors to expose the complexities and challenges of the systems they work within. This paper aimed to honour the voice of Wangchuk by presenting his narrative to gain an in-depth understanding of the largely unspoken experiences and power struggles of a school counsellor.

While focusing on a single case narrative might be viewed as restrictive, it enabled a specific and rich insight and a fuller contextual picture of the power relationships in Bhutanese school counselling was enabled through comparisons with other participant data. Wangchuk's thematic concerns of the advice-giving and disciplinary metanarrative, marginalisation, challenges of convincing non-counsellors, workloads and burnout, and a lack of supervision and professional development were validated by other participants.

Wangchuk's story represents a discursive mapping of the territorial complexities of school counsellors in Bhutan. Though he faced resistance in the beginning, the school community gradually accepted him as an expert and as a saviour of youth. This was at a cost. School counselling programmes were trivialised and subordinated. School counsellors were meta-narrated as advice givers who were no different to teachers, and as redundant, to negate the domain of the counsellor in fear of intrusion among the disciplinary purview of teachers. Consequently, Wangchuk felt the brunt of the high expectations imposed on him, he struggled with a lack of expertise in working with complex issues, and he was blamed when he could not meet expectations. He felt overloaded and burnt out on many occasions without support mechanisms for supervision and professional development.

Initial resistances to school counselling could be explained as a misunderstanding due to different epistemic views. Scepticism from school principals, teachers, and students posed challenges for Wangchuk and the other participants to develop counselling programmes. Wangchuk narrated that they conflated counselling with disciplinary domains. In many respects, there are similarities between school counselling in Malaysia and Bhutan. Low et al. (2013) revealed that there was a “lack of understanding about the nature of the school counselling services” (p. 193) in Malaysian schools. Counselling services were constructed as a part of the disciplinary system. Students who attended counselling services were stigmatised as counselling services were constructed as only for students with problems (Low et al., 2013). Jamtsho’s (2015) study also found that school counselling was constructed as a disciplinary and punitive measure. This misunderstanding creates barriers to define the roles and responsibilities of school counsellors clearly.

Furthermore, Wangchuk and other participants felt that counselling was considered as an “ancillary program” rather than a “necessary component”, which not only complicated their positions and programmes but also displaced them through a reproduction of non-support. Parallel to this finding, school counsellors in Malaysia battle for time to run counselling programmes during school hours, as teachers refuse to give time for the counselling programmes and thus counsellors are not given a fixed timetable (Low et al., 2013).

Moreover, Wangchuk told how it was challenging to meet the high expectations of the principal and teachers in bringing immediate change in the students within a short timeframe. The lack of support from the assistant principal and national language (Dzongkha) teachers stifled programme implementation. This power struggle occurred because “Dzongkha teachers are educated in traditional systems where physical punishment used to be a norm” (Jamtsho, 2015, p. 160). This is a
complex situation in Bhutan as there is a need for interventions to cater to the rising youth issues and yet there is resistance to such counselling programmes for fear of intrusion into beliefs and traditions.

The misunderstood concept of counselling through the metanarrative of advice giving resulted in an excessive workload and burnout for Wangchuk and the other participants. These experiences are supported through research that confirms that role ambiguity and role conflict in combination with job overload may lead to school counsellor burnout (Wilkerson & Bellini, 2006). Moyer (2011) found large school counsellor caseloads as one of the main causes of burnout.

An important finding from Wangchuk's narrative was the need for clinical supervision. Lack of sufficient supervisory support increases stress and intensifies immense workloads, which often makes counsellors less effective to provide meaningful support to their students and thus contributes to burnout and role dissatisfaction (Borders, 2002; Page et al., 2001). Wangchuk and other participants argued that the impact of not having clinical supervision and the majority of the experiences described by the participants inhibited their professional development profoundly.

As Wangchuk revealed, he worked based on instinct and though he made mistakes, there was no one to follow up with him. School counsellors are often placed alone to socialise themselves into the profession without appropriate guidance or supervision to safeguard ethical practice (McMahon, 2005). Hence, the need for supervision is obvious to ensure the welfare of students with increasingly complex needs is protected together with counsellor encouragement and support (Borders, 2002; Herlihy et al., 2002). With this important means of support and development, school counsellors are more likely to reflect adequately on their knowledge and skills to strengthen their professional development (Paisley & McMahon, 2001) and develop a school-integrated approach to counselling rather than a subjugated and divided practice.

This critical narrative inquiry enables a starting point into examining the broader contextual influences from the discursive, relational and structural constraints this study exposed. Wangchuk’s concerns, shared by the other counsellors, mirrored many of Kuenga’s experiences that motivated her to understand their storied experience. Marginalisation, teacher resistance, challenging workloads, burnout, a lack of supervisory and professional development support were common experiences that may warrant further research into education policy alignment with school practices. Further research could explore to what extent ‘Western’ approaches would be congruent with Bhutanese values and culture to support school counsellors. A promising example is a wellness approach where self-determination and health is promoted, maintained and restored at various levels of influence from a respect for diversity, participation and collaboration to a broader collective valuing of social justice and support for community structures (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2003). However, care is needed in incorporating Western frameworks and we are also conscious that even though our narrative approach may fit with Bhutanese values of storytelling, it is also limited through its Western European theoretical and epistemic influences.

Conclusion

This research revealed the influence of a metanarrative that contributed to a misunderstanding of school counselling, which created structural constraints and barriers to counselling in Wangchuk's school. These constraints exposed him to vulnerabilities, leading to limited knowledge and skills, and minimal supervision. Wangchuk was struggling with high workload that led to burnout, which impeded his practice. These concerns were validated by other school counsellors.

The challenges found in this critical narrative research can provide avenues to develop guidance and counselling programs in schools, if school guidance counsellors’ voices are heard and considered by relevant
stakeholders. This study calls on various stakeholders – the educators, students, families and government – to assess the current reality of school counsellors in Bhutan in how they are positioned in the school. Attending to such needs would help the successful implementation of guidance and counselling programmes and enable further inclusivity and integration of counselling within the fabric of school communities.

References


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**Appendix: Semi-structured Narrative Interview Technique**

(adapted from Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000)

**Phase 1: Initiation**

I am curious to hear your story of your experience as school guidance counsellor. I would like you to recall the events that have shaped your experience up until now, starting from the beginning of your position.

i. In recalling these events, I would like you to explore what it means and feels to be a school guidance counsellor in Bhutan. *(move to Main Narration)*

ii. How did you feel about the way guidance and counselling programmes were going in your school? What occasion(s) do you remember contributing to these experiences? *(move to Main Narration)*

iii. How did your position fit in school during your time here? Tell me what led you to think/feel this way. *(move to Main Narration)*

iv. What events made your position challenging and why? *(move to Main Narration)*

**Phase 2: Main Narration**

*Use of minimal responses (e.g., “Hmm”, “Yes”, “I see”)*

i. “What happened next?”

ii. *At signs of concluding the story: “Is there anything else you would like to say or recall on this question?”* *(move to the next question in Phase 1. Otherwise, move to Phase 3)*

**Phase 3: Questioning Phase**

i. “What happened before/after/then?” *(Questions refer only to events in the story)*

ii. What support system would you envisage putting in place for yourself within the school and outside of the school?

**Phase 4: Concluding Talk**

*(Stop recording, continue the conversation with small talk and conclude)*