

A Window on School Guidance Counselling

Survey Results

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Abstract

Following decentralisation of education, decisions about the distribution of resources for the provision of guidance counselling have been made within individual secondary schools. This situation has led to increasing disparity in the provision of guidance counselling, and in employment conditions. A School Guidance Counsellors' Advisory Group was established to assess the situation and provide directions for future action. This group initiated an online survey of school guidance counsellors. The survey's purpose was to contribute to an assessment of the overall situation in order to inform future directions for the group's activities, and thus for the profession of school guidance counselling. Results indicate that the school guidance counsellor workforce is an increasingly experienced one. Most school guidance counsellors have postgraduate qualifications in counselling, and all reported participating in supervision. Most respondents were teacher-qualified; 70% held management units. Most respondents (84%) were NZAC members, and 73% were PPTA members. However, such survey profiles paint only part of the picture of school guidance counselling. The authors suggest that a range of evidence of the contributions of school guidance counsellors to schools and to student wellbeing is a next step for research in this area.

Keywords: school guidance counselling, survey results, School Guidance Counsellors' Advisory Group

Amid an increasing emphasis on researching young people, and their mental health and learning needs, little recent attention has been paid to researching the interests and professional practice of school guidance counselling. School guidance counsellors are a relatively small professional group, both within education and within the counselling

profession. They have limited access to research resources. This article reports on a small survey study undertaken by the School Guidance Counsellors' Advisory Group to address professional and employment concerns.

School guidance counselling in Aotearoa/New Zealand grew out of concern for the emotional and social wellbeing of young people—youth mental health—as well as for young people's academic and vocational development. At the same time as a concern about delinquency focused on services that would provide a “remedial function” (Webb, 1980, p. 313), there was also a strong developmental and educational emphasis. As guidance and counselling took shape in the 1970s guidance counsellors, as qualified teachers, were assigned leadership responsibilities for and within the wider guidance network within each school.

By the 1990s, following a survey of counsellors in Christchurch schools, it was suggested that school counsellors were doing more counselling and counselling-related work than in the 1980s (Miller, Manthei, & Gilmore, 1993). By that time, too, these authors reported, most school guidance counsellors had undertaken professional counsellor education in a university, and were participating in professional supervision.

A survey by Manthei (1999), undertaken about a decade after the introduction of a regime of self-management in schools, indicated that “counsellors are dealing with a wide range of client problems, often under less than optimal conditions” (p. 45), with “expanded” workloads and diminishing resources. A sense of job satisfaction was still possible because of both pre-service and in-service professional education, and supervision. The reduction of support and resources for guidance and counselling that followed the self-management of schools was also noted by Hughes (1996), Crowe (2006) and Webb (2008). Professional concerns became explicitly political, as school guidance counsellors increasingly took up advocacy not only for young people, but also for their profession.

Yet this advocacy was not without challenges. In 1991 the professional association changed its name from the New Zealand Counselling and Guidance Association to the New Zealand Association of Counsellors (NZAC), including a wider range of counsellors at a time of increasing opportunities for community and health-based counselling services. As a result, school guidance counsellors were no longer the largest group of professional counsellors in New Zealand. NZAC came to represent a much wider constituency, producing some points of tension for those who might prefer a professional association dedicated to the interests of school guidance counselling, or a greater focus within NZAC on school guidance counselling. Succeeding members of NZAC's

National Executive have overseen the school guidance counselling portfolio, actively advocating in many quarters for the interests of the members they represent—with benefits for school counsellors who are both members and non-members of NZAC, and for schools and students.

A further significant move for guidance counselling occurred during the 1990s. With decentralisation came changed appointment processes. School guidance counselling had a long tradition of being identified as an educational activity, and as requiring professional education in teaching as a prerequisite. School guidance counsellors, as experienced and qualified teachers, were expected to have “an intimate understanding of learning, teaching and schools” (Webb, 2008, p. 20). Teaching experience was seen as critical to the range of work school counsellors undertook, and to their credibility in the wider school community: “guidance counselling is a teaching role” (Alison, 2007, p. 16). Further, this alignment of school guidance counselling and education was reflected in the provision of counsellor education for school guidance counsellors within Faculties of Education in universities.

However, particularly during a period when registration of teachers was optional (1991–1996; see Alison, 2007), and since that time, some people without teaching qualifications have been appointed to school counselling positions. At times, some with other health or social service qualifications, but not counselling qualifications, have also been appointed to school counselling positions. Concerned that people without teaching backgrounds or counsellor education were being appointed to school guidance counselling positions, Webb (2008) argued that “too often those not trained in counselling end up performing largely case management roles, where the school system shapes them to troubleshoot, as a contribution to its over all smooth administrative functioning” (p. 21). This change introduced a sense of concern, unease and contest, which has been ongoing.

The concern was partly about the potential erosion of employment conditions, since counsellors without teacher registration are not covered by the collective employment contract, unless they hold a Limited Authority to Teach (LAT). Furthermore, there was concern that counsellors without eligibility for management positions would be excluded from leadership and influence in schools, thus reducing the effectiveness of guidance counsellors in providing services for young people.

One particular response to this situation, through collaboration between the professional counselling association (NZAC) and the secondary teacher union (PPTA), led to the revision and reissuing of an Appointment Kit, designed to guide Boards of

Trustees in the appointment of school guidance counsellors. A School Guidance Counsellor Appointment Kit had first been developed in the 1980s by the Guidance Advisory Service within the Auckland office of the Department of Education (personal communication, Margaret Agee, July 2, 2013). The PPTA/NZAC revision was particularly designed to offer briefing information otherwise not available in the changed conditions of Tomorrow's Schools. We note that this revision (see http://www.nzac.org.nz/school_guidance_counsellor_appointment_kit.cfm) refers only to *counselling* qualifications, affirming the argument for dual qualifications in *teaching* and *counselling*. Another PPTA strategy in support of school guidance counsellors was a 2004 survey (Post Primary Teachers Association, 2004); having advocacy as its underlying purpose, its focus was largely on employment conditions.

In 2009, Payne and Lang noted the “lack of comprehensive statistical information about counsellors in schools,” suggesting that this situation “would appear to be another example of the degree of marginalisation of this group of professionals by the Ministry of Education” (p. 47). While focused on the use of supervision by New Zealand school guidance counsellors, their survey also provided a brief demographic profile of this group. Their 2008 online survey of 213 school guidance counsellors reported that 94% of respondents had a counselling qualification or were working toward a qualification; most were affiliated with a professional body (69% NZAC members) or teacher union (62% PPTA members); most were women; more than half had more than ten years' experience in the profession; and the number of guidance counsellors who were registered teachers had declined.

Over the past two decades there has been little Ministry of Education policy development that would guide schools or counsellors on how the requirement of the Education Act (1989, No. 80, S.77), that principals of state schools “take all reasonable steps to ensure that...students get good guidance and counselling,” should be played out.

These moments in the history of school guidance counselling are relevant as the current state of the profession is under review. A wide-ranging Prime Minister's Youth Mental Health Task Force included, as one of nine strategies, tasking the Education Review Office with a review of the current provision of guidance and counselling in schools.² The Task Force/ERO review commenced in 2013. The survey on which this article focuses took place prior to this initiative, reporting on school guidance counsellors' professional and employment-related concerns in 2011.

Shaping the 2011 survey of school guidance counsellors

The School Guidance Counsellors' Advisory Group has taken initiatives both in collaboration with NZAC and on its own behalf. This group became a meeting point where the professional and employment interests of school guidance counselling could be marked out. This has been a difficult task, given the diversity and the multiple and competing interests and purposes of the group's membership. While there was a shared overall interest in advocating for school guidance counselling, the means to achieve this end were disputed.

Questions arose whether this group should work within NZAC, should represent all school counsellors and therefore not be limited by NZAC connections, or whether a separate school guidance counsellor association should be formed. The opinions of school guidance counsellors were canvassed and a vote was held across the regions. The outcome was that the group came under the umbrella of NZAC, becoming an advisory group to the School Counselling portfolio holder on the National Executive. There were also differences of opinion about whether or not teacher registration should be compulsory. How the group should be selected/elected, and who its members should be remained unclear.

One of the purposes of the survey reported on in this article was to reach clarification on the question of representation. Hooker (2011) noted that these differing professional backgrounds and qualifications had produced considerable debate and tension, both within NZAC and within the wider school counsellor group: serious employment and professional concerns are at the heart of the matter for both teacher-qualified and non-teacher-qualified counsellors.

This online survey of school guidance counsellors, undertaken in November–December 2011, was a significant collaborative endeavour by NZAC and the School Guidance Counsellors' Advisory Group. At the time the Advisory Group comprised six members from across the regions—two from Auckland, and one each from Wellington, Hawke's Bay, Christchurch, and Otago. It included four teacher-qualified counsellors and two counsellors without teaching qualifications. Members contributed on a voluntary basis. Interests in advocacy for school guidance counselling shaped most questions in the survey: this is the point of commonality with the 2004 PPTA survey, and where some comparisons might be made. The survey inquired, for example, about job title (Question 1); length of time in the role (Question 2); level of responsibility (Question 6); professional and union membership (Questions 7, 12); teacher qualification (Questions 9, 10); salary source (Question 11); and counselling/teaching workload (Questions 17, 18, 19).

A series of questions (Questions 32–36) inquired about respondents' preferences for the make-up of the Advisory Group. These included questions such as: the term of the then-current group; the number of members the group should have; whether representation should be based on region, gender, ethnicity, and type of school, and whether members should be teacher-trained counsellors.

The survey information was sent directly to guidance counsellors in secondary schools. By this time the Advisory Group was officially part of NZAC, therefore only members listed on the NZAC database as school guidance counsellors were sent the official link to the survey. NZAC was supportive of the survey material being made available to all school counsellors but, as Payne and Lang (2009) noted, there are no direct means of accessing all school counsellors. Due to access difficulties, it is not possible to report the number of potential respondents to the current survey. The response rate is therefore unknown.

NZAC funded access to Survey Monkey,³ the online survey platform that was employed. Coming directly out of the Advisory Group's take on the then-current concerns of school guidance counsellors, the survey items were not designed to provide comparison with earlier surveys; nor were items constructed via the significant consultation, with the professional association or with other school guidance counsellors, employed in preparation for school guidance counsellor surveys such as that of Manthei (1999) or Miller, Manthei, and Gilmore (1993).

Participants

There were 138 respondents to this 2011 survey, in contrast to 256 respondents in the 2004 PPTA survey and approximately 200 in 2009 (Payne & Lang, 2009, p. 50). This lower number may reflect the limited resources available in this study to provide access to potential participants, as well as to follow-up strategies (see Harlow, 2010). Sample size is a limitation of the study.

Data analysis

Survey Monkey software provides descriptive statistical analysis (e.g. frequency of category responses). Initial results from this study have been circulated by the Advisory Group and NZAC. This current report develops these initial analyses, complementing them with qualitative data generated by the survey, with further statistical analysis using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (IBM SPSS Statistics 20), and providing comparison, where possible, with earlier surveys.

Table 1: Ethnicity of respondents

Ethnic identification	N	%
British	1	
Fijian	1	
Greek	1	
Middle Eastern	1	
New Zealander of Fijian Indian and Pākehā descent	1	
NZ/Irish	1	
Pacific Island*	1	
Persian	1	
Australian	2	
European	3	
Indian*	3	
Asian*	4	
Māori*	10	8
New Zealand European*	120	95

* Denotes categories used by the survey.

Results

Job title

The largest group of respondents (70%) were employed as a “school guidance counsellor,” the title that has traditionally been used. Similarly, of the rest the largest proportion (20%) were “school counsellors.” The former title invokes the traditionally wider roles of both guidance and counselling while the latter is a more recent usage, focusing on the specialist professional functions performed by the counsellor alone. Other titles named by respondents included: Head of Guidance; Director of Student Support; Director of Pastoral Care and Counselling; Student Support Counsellor, and Chaplain.

Demographic information

Respondents were asked their ethnic identification and gender. As can be seen in Table 1, the majority of respondents identified as “New Zealand European” (note that the total count exceeds 138 because participants were able to tick all the ethnicities they

Figure 1: Percentage of respondents with varying lengths of service as a guidance counsellor

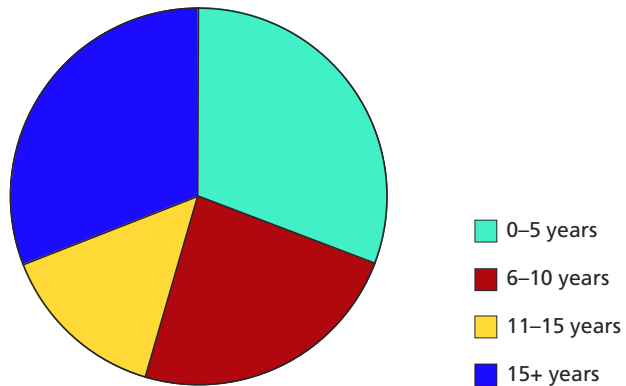


Table 2: Comparison of experience between respondents in 2011 survey and 1999 survey

	Current survey (2011)	Manthei (1999)
0-5 years	31%	39%
6-10	24%	35%
11-15	15%	11%
15+	31%	16%

identified with). It is perhaps notable that a higher proportion of respondents were Māori than in Manthei's (1999) survey (3.8%) (see p. 27), but there is still significant ground to make to increase the number of Māori counsellors in schools.

Table 2 shows that the most notable difference over time is in a larger long-serving group in the current survey. This trend mirrors the wider situation in secondary schools, where there is currently strong retention of very experienced teachers. At the same time as the profession and schools have the benefits offered by experienced staff, we note that there are fewer spaces for new school counsellors to enter the profession.

Qualifications

Because the survey allowed multiple responses to the question about qualifications, it is possible to comment only in general terms on this point. The largest group of

respondents held MCouns qualifications (45%), with the next largest group holding a PGDipCouns (31.6%). Of the 25 (18.4%) respondents who responded to the “other” category, two noted doctoral qualifications, one in psychology and one an EdD, and others had postgraduate qualifications in psychotherapy, special education, education, fine arts, social science, psychology, supervision, education, and health sciences. Others reported undergraduate qualifications in social work, drug and alcohol studies, criminology, and theology. This wide range of professional qualifications, including undergraduate (only), and many not in the fields of education and counselling, is another product of the self-managing schools era. The diversity of professional qualifications and identities contribute to school guidance counsellors being an increasingly disparate professional group.

Professional membership

Most respondents held membership of NZAC, as Table 3 shows.

The proportion of counsellors belonging to NZAC (94%) is higher than in the 2004 PPTA survey (66%) and in Manthei’s (1999) study (approximately 70%). This difference may be due to the current study being generated by NZAC: members of NZAC were more likely to respond to the survey than non-members. Alternatively, it is possible that a professional climate of increasing accountability and potential counsellor registration has encouraged membership (see Manthei, 1999, p. 27). One respondent commented: “I feel strongly about my membership of NZAC and its voice in promoting ethical and professional practices.” However, this position was not held by all participants, as elaborated later in this report.

Other professional associations of which respondents held membership included: Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (2); New Zealand Psychological Society/New Zealand Psychologists Board (1); National Association of Loss and Grief (1); Addiction Practitioners’ Association of Aotearoa New Zealand (2); New Zealand Christian Counsellors’ Association (1); New Zealand Association for Research in

Table 3: Percentage of respondents who are in different categories of NZAC membership

Membership of NZAC	%
Member	84
Provisional member	10
Not a member	7

Education (1); EAGALA (Equine Assisted Psychotherapy; 1), and New Zealand Sport Psychology Collective (1).

Seventy-three per cent of the survey respondents were members of PPTA. As a comparison, about 92% of secondary school teachers are members of PPTA (Rob Willetts, personal communication, February 22, 2013). Other unions named by respondents were New Zealand Education Institute (3), Public Service Association (3), “support staff” (1), and “school-based local assn” (1).

Only three respondents had no professional or union membership of any kind—all of them were the sole counsellors in their schools. Some aspects of their profiles are described in Table 4.

Newly appointed Counsellor B has a teaching background, a postgraduate counselling qualification, status in her (smaller) school in the form of management units and allowance and in being paid through staffing entitlement, and engages in regular supervision. Counsellor A, in contrast, is outside entitlement staffing, has no formal management position in her (larger) school, no teacher registration or LAT, has an undergraduate qualification in counselling, and engages in supervision only monthly. Questions arise in this situation about professional isolation, and responsible employment conditions and processes, including salary, budgets for supervision and professional counsellor association membership, and student–counsellor ratio.

Table 4: Profile of counsellors with no professional or union membership

	Counsellor A	Counsellor B	Counsellor C
Length of service	6–10 years	0–1 year	2–5 years
Ethnicity (Gender)	European (F)	NZ European (F)	Asian/NZ European (F)
Qualification	BCouns	PGDipCouns	PGDipTching
Trained teacher	No + No LAT	Yes	Yes
Payment	Individual contract	Entitlement	Individual contract
Position of responsibility	No	1 MU+1 MMA*	1 MU
Size of school	1000–1500	400–700	Under 400
How many counsellors?	Sole counsellor	Sole counsellor	Sole counsellor
Supervision	Monthly	Fortnightly	Fortnightly

* Terms employed in the Secondary Teachers’ Collective Agreement (see PPTA.org.nz):
MU = Management Unit; MMA = Middle Management Allowance

Salary source

Over recent years PPTA has actively advocated in the interests of its guidance counsellor members. Relevant to the protection of the teacher status of school guidance counsellors is salary source. The majority (91%) of the respondents who were PPTA members were paid out of entitlement staffing; 6% of the PPTA members did not know their salary source, and 3% of PPTA members were on individual contracts. Figure 2 shows salary sources for the entire sample.

Figure 2: Percentage of respondents paid through entitlement staffing and other sources



It is not clear how many of those counsellors on individual contracts are additional counsellors paid out of the wider school budget. However, with 25% of respondents either on individual contracts or unsure about their employment status, it would be of some concern if a quarter of New Zealand secondary schools were not using the salary resource (entitlement staffing) that originates from central government for the provision of guidance counselling. This situation would have potential implications for schools' responsibility to provide students with good guidance and counselling, as required by the Education Act, and for school guidance counselling as a profession.

Teacher registration and teaching

While most respondents (106; 77%) in this survey were qualified teachers,⁴ anecdotal evidence suggests that a recent development is for trained counsellors to subsequently undertake teacher education in order to practise as school guidance counsellors. However, only two survey respondents were in this group, suggesting that this practice is not extensive.

One significant finding offered by further statistical analysis was that those respondents who were qualified teachers were more likely to have postgraduate

counselling qualifications: 91% of those with postgraduate diplomas and 87% of those with masters degrees were qualified teachers, $\chi^2(1) = 28.49$, $p < 0.001$, and $\chi^2(1) = 34.13$, $p < 0.001$ respectively. Only 38% of those with undergraduate diplomas were qualified teachers, $p > 0.05$.

Related to the question of teacher registration is the matter of the extent and limits of counsellors' contributions to classroom teaching, both in traditional subject areas and in guidance-related programmes. Seventy-five per cent of the respondents did not teach in the classroom, but reported contributing through "specific short-term targeted programmes," "bullying, social skills," and "intermittent, related to counselling work, at MY discretion and at MY request." One respondent emphasised that "COUNSELLORS SHOULD NOT TEACH CURRICULUM." Respondents who were responsible for both counselling and classroom teaching nominated traditional subject curriculum areas, such as Health (79%), Social Studies (24%), and English (17%).

The survey included a question on school size: cross-tabulation of *size of school* with *teaching* suggests that counsellors in schools with fewer than 400 students were more likely to be involved in subject area teaching, and those in schools with more than 2000 students less likely, $\chi^2(5) = 11.12$, $p = 0.05$. In schools with between 400 and 2000 students there were no statistically significant patterns in terms of whether or not counsellors teach. The survey also asked about the presence of other members of the student support team: cross-tabulation of this variable with the *teaching* variable suggests that the presence of other support workers does not increase the likelihood of counsellors teaching.

Numbers of counsellors

The number of counsellors who worked in respondents' schools ranged from one (45% of respondents) to seven. In terms of full-time equivalence (FTE), the range was from a school with a 0.25 position to one with 4.4 guidance counselling positions. Of the 100 respondents who answered the FTE question, nine were in schools with three or more full-time equivalent counsellors,⁵ and 18 were in schools with less than one full-time equivalent counsellor. The study's design did not allow further analysis of these data, for example correlating *size of school* with *counsellor FTE*, useful data provided by the 2004 PPTA survey; it would be helpful if the design of any future survey made such analysis possible. As noted earlier by Manthei (1999), questions of workload are important if counsellors are to sustain their practice amid the pressure of the position, and if they are to maintain the standards and integrity of professional practice.

Supervision

All 136 responses to the question of whether counsellors engage in regular supervision were in the affirmative, echoing the findings of Payne and Lang's (2009) investigation of school counsellors' use of professional supervision. Payne and Lang suggested that school guidance counsellors were "accessing supervision in a professionally responsible manner, providing them with an essential source of support" (p. 58).

Asked in the current survey about frequency of supervision, one respondent noted 20 sessions a year. This appeared to be the upper end of the range, with two sessions a term (two respondents) at the lower end. Most respondents engaged in fortnightly supervision, the next largest group used monthly supervision, and most of the rest of the respondents engaged in three-weekly supervision. Schools paid the supervision fee for 95% of respondents. Following research in Australian schools, McMahon and Patton (2000) claimed:

the adequate provision of clinical supervision is a means of strengthening the practice of individual guidance officers and the school counselling profession. In turn, it is likely that client welfare and the quality of service to clients is enhanced.
(p. 349)

In the light of this comment, it is encouraging to note that for respondents in this survey, supervision is for the most part regular, and paid for by schools.

The Advisory Group and general comments

Open questions that invited comment on the Advisory Group, its composition and means of representation, and general comment, brought a range of responses. There were expressions of gratitude to the group members for the work they were doing: "this group is doing a great job;" "this work is important;" "keep up the good work!" A number of responses were about representation in general on the group: "the more diverse the better;" "mixture of school backgrounds and geographical areas;" "just so long as they report back;" "I would argue strongly for consultation with all school counsellors." Others were concerned with cultural representation in particular: "include Maori and Pacific representation;" "Maori SGC[s] need to be identified;" "there is no mention of the group make-up, e.g. cultural representation."

Some respondents expressed wider concerns about the positioning of school guidance counsellors, and the importance of advocacy, including by the Advisory Group:

*really appreciate their [Advisory Group's] hard work—we are struggling out here!
I think we are a vulnerable, isolated group in the school community...*

The resourcing of SGCs seems to have disintegrated in recent years.

I have had to fight to keep a counselling presence in my school.

In my experience MOE [Ministry of Education] is naïve about the specialist nature of counselling.

The current government talks about concerns about NZ's high suicide rate. Surely therefore they should be looking at putting pressure on all schools to have adequate counselling services.

Other responses, both about the Advisory Group and in general, reflected the ongoing tensions and debate—about the relevance and value of NZAC membership to school counsellors, and about the effects of the requirement for teacher registration—discussed above. The following excerpts show the range of views expressed.

I have only done it [applied for full membership of NZAC] because the school required it of me. It felt less than realistic, pertinent or respectful. Since doing this I have not felt very participatory of NZAC.

We need NZAC and need to keep up to date with the wider issues.

I have long felt that NZAC has been “overtaken” by counsellors who do not work in schools.

People do not require other services [beyond the Advisory Group] of the Association.

I think it's important that we school counsellors have representation within NZAC. As a counsellor I appreciate the PD [professional development] and the voice that NZAC gives our profession. However, we differ in our practice from those counsellors who work in agencies or privately. I feel akin to other school counsellors...

I feel strongly about my membership of NZAC and its voice in promoting ethical and professional practices.

[I am] committed to the school guidance counsellor model. I see us as specialist teachers with broad based counselling skills designed for an educational setting—part teacher, part social worker, part psychologist, part mental health assessor and case manager, part facilitator and mentor, part careers counsellor, part educational tester, part family counsellor, part behaviour analyst. Essentially general practitioners in an educational setting.

I have a sense of a split amongst school guidance counsellors and as a non-teacher-trained counsellor do experience my position as somewhat more marginal... when compared with my teacher-trained colleagues.

It feels very lonely out here fighting my own battles especially around pay rates and contract negotiations. Some sort of a support system is vital especially for those of us who are not teacher trained.

I hope that a collaborative working group, PPTA, NZAC, and government, can revisit this position [of non-teacher-trained counsellors]... and ensure that students and their families are served well. This position is not intended to belittle the role of effective counsellors who do not have teacher training but schools are educational environments and need to have staff who are able to promote academic learning and have a clear understanding of curriculum and assessment.

Our training [as teachers] gives us the ability and credibility to work with staff, as the primary role of school counselling is to remove barriers to learning through negotiating a learning path with staff and working across the whole school to create a safe space for academic inquiry and achievement.

The tensions expressed here are not surprising; these matters are complex and not readily resolved. It is some years since Evans-Love (2007) argued for the importance of the professional contributions made by non-teachers as school guidance counsellors, and under the same conditions as counsellors with teaching backgrounds. Webb (2008), in response, argued for the educational and strategic importance of school guidance counsellors being qualified teachers. Hooker (2008), in a further response, argued that both teacher-qualified counsellors and non-teacher-qualified counsellors have much to contribute in schools.

It seems that all perspectives offer both limitations and possibilities for schools, for counsellors, for student clients, and for whānau. It is an inevitability of professionalisation that qualifications and professional experience are prerequisites to professional positions, and to membership of professional organisations. While these employment and membership processes provide a monitoring of professional standards on behalf of the community, at the same time they exclude some from professional opportunity and membership. Without professional counselling qualifications, school guidance counsellors cannot become members of NZAC, for example. School guidance counselling occurs at the intersection of two professions: counselling and education. This intersection provides rich opportunities to shape the profession of school guidance

counselling in Aotearoa/New Zealand, taking account of the hopes expressed in the excerpts above, in the interests of students, schools, and communities.

Discussion

The rhetoric of the decentralisation that came with neo-liberal reform in education was that schools and their communities would have greater decisionmaking responsibilities: they would be self-managing and responsive to local situations. This devolution of decisionmaking has led to significant differences between secondary schools in the provision of guidance counselling, summed up in one succinct survey comment: “the current picture of SGC in NZ seems ad hoc and inconsistent in provision.”

On one hand, differences and inconsistencies might mean that school guidance counselling is fashioned in each school community to respond particularly to the needs of that unique community. There is good evidence to suggest that such opportunities have been taken up effectively: see, for example, accounts such as Ferguson’s (2012) description of her practice at a large multicultural Auckland school; Winslade and Monk’s (2007) accounts of the narrative practices of a number of school counsellors; Kecskemeti’s (2011, 2013) development of a counsellor-led approach to restorative relationship practices in classrooms, in a multicultural Porirua school; or Williams’ (in Winslade & Williams, 2012) school-wide initiatives toward “safe and peaceful schools.”

However, such initiatives have not been possible in all schools: it is not the case that all school guidance counsellors have access to the resources that made possible initiatives such as the examples cited here. Difference and inconsistency also mean that the availability of quality guidance counselling services for young people, their families, and their communities varies from school to school, and some are less well served than others. The ERO review that is currently in progress is likely to offer a description and discussion of the range of guidance and counselling services. It will then be important that the wider profession is involved in responses to this review.

The current study has already contributed to discussion about how the School Guidance Counsellors’ Advisory Group and NZAC might continue to work effectively to promote ethical and effective school guidance counselling practice, in a culture alive with the differential effects of “ad hoc and inconsistent” service provision. That a national survey of this kind was undertaken voluntarily by a semi-formal group of school guidance counsellors, with support from NZAC, is perhaps an indication of the effects of the decentralising of educational administration associated with self-

managing schools. There has been no centralised leadership of guidance and counselling beyond that offered by voluntary groups of counsellors, professional associations, and professional unions. For example, as Crowe (2006) noted, the Ministry of Education no longer offers systems of professional leadership in the area of guidance counselling; School Support funding arrangements no longer carry the possibility of positions akin to the former “guidance advisor” positions; funding for guidance counsellor education is made more by administrative than by professional decision, and the needs of particular schools for professional education of counsellors may not be included in these decisions. Further, despite the current focus on youth mental health and significant funding of such research, there has been little recent research on school guidance counselling in particular, and few funding sources available for such research.

The results of this study paint a picture of a field that is diverse, contested, and complex. We note that the results reported here are based on a sample that is made up of fewer respondents than other more recent surveys, such as that of the PPTA (2004) or Payne and Lang (2009), limiting the generality of the claims. Nevertheless, results suggest that most counsellors in schools are known as “school guidance counsellors” or “counsellors;” the workforce is increasingly feminised; almost a third of school counsellors have more than 15 years’ experience; most have teaching qualifications and postgraduate counselling qualifications, and most belong to both NZAC and PPTA. In giving a broad overview of school guidance counselling demographics, employment and qualification status, professional membership, and inclusion or exclusion from teacher registration, this study leaves unanswered the question of how well differences and inconsistencies in the provision of school guidance and counselling serve young people, their schools, and their communities. It would seem that this is a question in urgent need of investigation.

The survey was not intended to and therefore does not attend to what is perhaps the most pressing matter for school guidance counselling, that is, to study practice itself for sound evidence of the contribution of school guidance counselling to student wellbeing. This gap in the study of practice itself is a matter of some concern in an era when allocation of resources is increasingly based on research evidence. Perhaps it is time to give research attention to the study of our contemporary school guidance counselling practice for evidence of its efficacy. While counsellors see such evidence in our daily practice, there is more that could be done to produce systematic research evidence, using a wide range of research methods appropriate to the field of counselling.

Such research will of course require further resources: as Harlow (2010) notes, all forms of research, including surveys, require complex and purposeful design and analysis. A current study funded by the Teaching and Learning Research Initiative (see <http://www.tlri.org.nz/tlri-research/research-progress/school-sector/key-competencies-how-school-guidance-counsellors>) is one step toward this end, in its inquiry into the contribution of school guidance counsellors to student learning. The study, based in three eastern Bay of Plenty schools, investigates counselling practices for their potential to contribute to students strengthening and using key competencies (see Ministry of Education, 2007) within the particular context of the counselling room and relationship (see Hughes, Burke, Graham, Crocket, & Kotzé, 2013). Nonetheless, there is much more to be done to highlight the significance of the contributions of school guidance counsellors to the wellbeing of young people: it is surely time to turn research attention to studying school counselling practice, both its processes and its outcomes.

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Endnotes

1. Kathryn, in consultation with the School Guidance Counsellors' Advisory Group, set up, designed, and ran the survey. Second-stage data analysis was done by Kathie, Elmarie, and Mira; this article was written by Kathie and Elmarie. Membership of the Advisory Group changed over the time of the project. Correspondence concerning the article should be addressed to Kathie Crocket: kcrocket@waikato.ac.nz
2. The Prime Minister's Mental Health Task Force emerged in response to the Gluckman Report, *Improving the transition: Reducing social and psychological morbidity during adolescence* (see <http://www.pmsa.org.nz/improving-the-transition/>), discussion of which is beyond the scope of this article.
3. See <http://www.surveymonkey.com/>
4. Question 9 asked respondents to indicate whether or not they were a "trained teacher." A significant number (31; 23%) were not. Of this latter group, 12 had access to Limited Authority to Teach (LAT), "an authority for a specified person to teach in a specified school/centre in a temporary capacity" (see <http://www.teacherscouncil.govt.nz/prof/lat.stm>)
5. It is not known if these respondents came from different schools.

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