SPEAKING UP FOR GUIDANCE:
VIRTUAL DUOETHNOGRAPHY AS COUNTER-NARRATIVE
TO A DISCIPLINARY ACTIVATION DISCOURSE

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Abstract
This enquiry examines arguably one of the most significant changes in Irish manpower policy in the half-century since its inception, namely the reassignment of Irish Public Employment Service (PES) provision to a Civil Service Welfare Department, after fifty years of delivery via dedicated agencies. Set against a policy backdrop of labour market activation and economic austerity, it focuses on the impact on the availability of client-centred adult vocational guidance to unemployed people given its repositioning within a domain characterised by a conditional, regulatory philosophy.

This autoethnographic study takes the reader on concurrent personal, political and policy journeys. Using career guidance theories as a theoretical framework, a disruptive personal experience is interrogated, providing a first-person account of career transition and incongruence. A creative approach of virtual duoethnography is employed to explore, from a unique insider perspective, the social and political contexts in which these experiences occurred. This technique utilises dialogue between two fictional characters to illuminate and critically reflect on a paradoxical state of “conditional unconditionality” brought about by the polar opposite objectives of supportive guidance policy and punitive activation policy.

The enquiry identifies not alone how the issue of unemployment is a common denominator in the development of labour market policy, but furthermore establishes how guidance counselling, in particular lifelong guidance, is consistently viewed as key to successful achievement of labour market policy goals. Noting the discernment at EU level of the loss of guidance counselling since the transition of PES, the argument is ultimately made for an alternative discourse, open dialogue and the restoration of guidance counselling for unemployed people.
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Chapter 1 ~ My Feet Taken From Under Me

Stop Asking Why!

The words are ringing in my ears. I’m in a meeting with my manager and two colleagues. My pursuit to comprehend the underlying rationale for a course of action upon which we are about to embark is the root cause of this adamant instruction. The same treatment is meted out to a similarly interrogative colleague, inadvertently drawing attention to the elephant in the room. Stop asking why! I’m reeling from the shock. Imagine trying to shut me up like I was five years old. Come to think of it, you wouldn’t say that to a child. We foster curiosity in children, actively encouraging them to converse and query (Piaget 1989; Vygotsky 1962; Vygotsky 1978). You’d be afraid, by stemming the flow of questions, of impairing their cognitive development and construction of knowledge. No such fear exists here, where angels fear to tread. I’m merely trying to fill a gap in my knowledge. Information provision is strictly on a need-to-know basis, with someone else determining whether a need exists. This is prohibition.

Unbidden, a past image of an event involving my son comes to mind. He is little, lacking the vocabulary to negotiate and is displeased about whatever it is I’m asking him to do. He looks sternly at me from under his hair, little hand aloft like a policeman stopping traffic, best baby frown wrinkling his forehead, little mouth pursed. “Mom, don’t be saying!” he admonishes, raised hand acting as a tangible barrier between him and my unwanted words. I’m smiling inwardly. Seeing a comparable hand waving in front of my face to-day, I’m not smiling now ...
Journal extract: Stop Asking Why
Fieldnotes of formal meeting with colleagues and manager, September 2015
Plus informal meeting over coffee afterwards with one colleague.

Ow! I've been metaphorically slapped in the face. I've just been told “stop asking why!” Rather sharply too. A rather childish retort, in my opinion, to my reasoned search for rationale. A frustrated attempt to stop my perfectly logical questioning. Too logical perhaps?

Why isn't he asking himself why, I'm wondering in the back of my mind? He's in denial, that's why. He can see the lack of logic behind the action he's asking, sorry telling, us to take, and he can't handle it. He can only survive by not asking why, and I am putting it up to him.

I'm looking over at equally stunned colleague, M****** who can't believe what she's hearing (confides later over coffee that she felt so belittled and dismissed). The Hand, waving our concerns away. Pooh-poohing them like some Oscar Wilde character in a play.

I've been “shushed” like a prattling child. I've been told to “PES Off!” (PES = Public Employment Service, just my little joke, haha). None of your questions now ... just do what you are told, like a good civil servant.

My “why” is an inconvenient truth about the lack of reason, thus my holding up a metaphorical mirror is equally problematic, emphasising the dearth of critical reflection. It's okay for those who are used to just doing what they're told. Stop asking, stop thinking ... no higher-order, evaluative thinking at any rate. Blind obedience is the order of the day. No critical thinkers need apply. Of course, I
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*didn’t* apply. I was dropped in, like an erratic; and just like an erratic, I’m asynchronous with the indigenous material.

My Dad, in response to my many, typical teenage whys, used to assert his authority in three words, “that’s the why”. I’m not in an adult-child situation to-day; we’re deliberating professional to professional. Representing the Department of Social Protection confers on us a duty, a responsibility to citizens, to ensure they access supports and services to which they are entitled. Citizen engagements with our organisation tend to occur principally in the context of a loss, for instance of a job or source of income, hence skewing the balance of power, rendering our obligation all the more onerous. Citizens rely on us to have their welfare at heart, to be their voices, entrusting us with the brief to challenge and question on their behalf where required. Unemployed citizens in particular, starting out from a position of relative disadvantage, are even more dependent on our principles and integrity.

Considering my client-centred professional perspective, purposefully occupied for almost three decades, I feel such accountability keenly, espousing it in earnest. In view of that, to be silenced in the context of advocating on behalf of the citizen, to be told stop asking why, offended my sensibilities all the more. Over and above a denial of my own voice, I view it as an effective silencing of the unemployed.

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1 “Erratic” is a phenomenon in geology whereby rock, which differs from the native rock type, is carried often hundreds of kilometres by glacial flow and “dropped” in another location

2 The Department of Social Protection is responsible for the formulation of social protection policies and administration of a range of social insurance and social assistance income supports including unemployment, illness, maternity and state pension
Heart and Mind

This is where I enter the picture. Unemployed clients are a central concern of a Public Employment Service and its Guidance Counsellors. As a former Public Service Adult Guidance Counsellor myself for many years, I approach this research with insight, hence my heart as much as my mind. It tells my story, providing a first-person account of my lived experience, investigating the impact on my professional identity and congruence in a work environment where questioning and critical thinking are not permitted. Riessmann (2008) signals the certain centrality of narrative in situations such as this, where personal lives and social institutions intersect in the ruling regimes of workplaces.

The research furthermore interrogates the social and political contexts in which these experiences occurred. Riessman (2008) additionally draws attention to the significance of context, highlighting how storytelling occurs at an historical moment with its circulating discourses. The discourse of Irish manpower policy (now commonly referred to as labour market policy), in these contexts, is of particular interest here. Ireland has been on a 50-year journey since the definition and inception of such policy, with a swing from supportive to punitive, from a focus on career guidance to a focus on activation, encompassing a relocation of policy and service provision by a dedicated agency to within a civil service department. This enquiry, therefore, also relates the story of that journey, illuminating and critically reflecting on it. As an employee of both organisations,
first the agency (FÁS) and now the civil service department (Social Protection: DSP), my social situatedness perspective of insider allows me to bring unique understanding (Oakley 2000; Robson 1993; Vygotsky 1962). I travel this policy journey in Chapter 4 but prior to that I open with a critical reflection on my experience of activation; how it was for me.

Happy New Year: The Redundant Career Counsellor

On the first day of January 2012, I was formally and mandatorily assigned to the Department of Social Protection (DSP). Happy New Year! It was not a surprise. News of the event had been announced well in advance, with the Government signalling in Budget 2011 the intention to dissolve with FÁS and transfer of the Community and Employment Services functions, programmes and staff to DSP. The formal letter arrived some months later, July 2011 to be exact, confirming my assignment, and providing assurances of my full involvement in the process of change. Ha Ha! This letter, complete with those empty promises, remains filed for posterity in the Lever-Arch of my Life. After two years of semi-paralysis in the organisation, D-Day finally arrived and the formalities commenced. This was followed summarily by a brusque reassignment (in the name of integration) to an incongruent new role requiring me to enable the implementation of policies which I find inconsistent with my client-centred counselling belief system. I have

3 FÁS (An Foras Áiseanna Saothair) was Ireland’s Public Employment Service from 1 January 1988 to 31 December 2011. It was established under the Labour Services Act 1987 “to provide, or arrange for the provision of, whether for reward or otherwise, services consisting of the provision of guidance, advice and information in respect of choice of career and employment and to assist (whether financially or otherwise) in, and coordinate, the provision of such services by others”. Statutory Instrument S.I. No. 703 of 2011 amended section 4 of the Labour Services Act 1987 to remove functions of FÁS relating to employment and community services and amended the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 to transfer these functions to the Minister for Social Protection from 1 January 2012.

4 Some might see comic irony in the fact that these assurances originated from the same source which was instrumental not only in my insensitive and unsympathetic reassignment merely weeks after the transfer, but also in the removal of guidance from the Case Officer role. I explore these events in more detail in dialogues in Chapters 3 & 4.
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a proud history in Adult Guidance Counselling and enjoyed many years as a practitioner, followed by seven most fulfilling years in the management of public service guidance. My current personal experience of today is that of occupying a paradoxical space.

At a personal level, over the last four years, I have had a profoundly emotional response to the changes which have taken place around the occupation I esteemed. Such events included the effective eradication of my hitherto secure, cherished vocational identity, coupled with the devaluation of my expertise leading to an effective erasure of my established professional reputation. I have known disempowerment in the face of the deconstruction of FÁS and shame at what I believe to be its unwarranted denigration in discourse. I felt similar helplessness bearing witness to the deprofessionalisation of the Adult Guidance Counsellor role and its genericisation as Case Officer. The ultimate affront, however, concerned the corporate discrediting and official elimination of vocational guidance from the Case Officer role, despite the fact that the fundamental right to vocational guidance, as enshrined in the European Social Charter, was ratified by Ireland over half a century ago and the centrality of the role it has occupied since the 1960s. Wholly unsurprising in the context, but compounding the loss nonetheless, was the removal that followed of the support

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5 I was on the inaugural H/Dip in Adult Guidance & Counselling in NUI Maynooth in 1997

6 The European Social Charter is a Council of Europe Treaty, signed in 1961, guaranteeing social and economic human rights. Article 9 obliges member states to provide free vocational guidance services and to ensure that training programmes are designed to give everyone access to the labour market. The Council of Europe is a political organisation, founded to defend the principles of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Ireland was one of the ten states which founded the Council of Europe on 5th May 1949. As a signatory to the Charter, Ireland has agreed to accept as the aim of its policies the attainment of conditions in which certain rights and principles may be effectively realised. Each signatory undertakes to consider themselves bound by the obligations laid down in individual articles.
structure and care provided for guidance counsellors through professional supervision.

Allied to my overall sense of incongruence has been an engulfing sense of isolation, heightened by the strategic dismantling of the former FÁS management network. I have keenly felt the absence of that network. In this disorienting void, I have effectively been both denied a voice and deprived of much-needed occasions of support, positive regard and empathy. In an effort to recreate, establish connections, reclaim a reflexive dialogic space, a setting where my silenced voice and the muted adult guidance voice can be honoured, I persist on my personal journey.

Transition: A Personal Journey
As my research has been informed principally by my personal experience of involuntary career transition and resultant fracturing of my vocational identity, an exploration into this felt experience serves as the next stage of my meaning-making journey.

Approaching my fiftieth birthday this year, I find myself in a position where, from a vocational perspective, all I held dear and understood as sacred, in the career I built from the time FÁS opened its doors in 1988, ceases to exist, like FÁS itself. The manner in which I experienced my forced career transition four years ago took me completely unawares. At a conceptual level I understood it best as disequilibrium. At a psychological level, however, I found myself struggling to get to grips with the profound feelings of uncertainty. I had not anticipated such an
emotional response. The professional in me had an appreciation, a theoretical awareness, of the potential for growth and learning that can result from such situations. My personal side, on the other hand, lacked objectivity, so dispirited as to be entirely unable to even think about the experience, even less have the ability to verbalise it, no question whatsoever of embracing it. It was so bewildering I completely doubted my ability to make sense of my experiences and learn from them. It was as if all my professional training had disappeared along with my job.

I was not conscious of having triggered survival mode, numbing and burying the sensations of disempowerment and devaluation, due to simply being overwhelmed by them. While the redundant career counsellor is in itself an undoubted irony, it seems doubly ironic for that career counsellor to fail to apply, even fail to recognise, the tools of her own trade. I appeared to have forgotten the means at my disposal, techniques, processes and methods I had used with clients over the years. I had disconnected so completely, I found it hard to engage with my own emotions. Eventually however, summertime 2015 to be precise, I began to remember who I was. Painfully, slowly, I allowed myself to begin to reflect; a first step on my journey to understanding. Beranek (2015) likens writing to an interior camera, advising that sometimes, a life experience has to be lived before a person can find the words to articulate the journey. So I took a long look inside, reached deep down to my emotional core to try to locate the words, and started to write.
Finding my Feet and my Voice

I used a variety of methods to structure my thoughts and writing, which I conceive of as a roadmap for my journey. I introduce them briefly here and outline in full detail in the next chapter.

After four years of pain and self-censorship, I found recourse to deal with and ground my emotion by containing it first in a reflective journal, and subsequently in a constructed ad hoc dialogic space which is named “Two Vodkas ’n Coke”. This dialogic space is inhabited by two fictional characters, who probed and dissected my actual lived experiences in DSP. Clough (2002) asserts how fictionalisation such as this offers an opportunity to import fragments of data from real events, thus preserving the “rawness” of real happenings. In my occupational environment where my point of view was not alone deemed valueless and actively impeded, but also the expressing of it placed me in potential professional peril, my dialogic others served to hold my personal, alternative view of the desirability and efficacy of conditional activation policy. In their critique of policies, they bore and interwove the political with the personal, allowing me to clear an area in my head where I could later advance to an analysis of events comprising my experience and a critique of policy developments.

Fundamentally, vesting in my fictional characters conjointly humorous and critical personal and political voice, lessens my isolation, normalises my alien emotions and serves as a reflexive space enabling insight and knowledge to emerge. Having achieved this frame of mind, I am empowered to step into my inner world.
Before we do that, let us step momentarily into a piece of dialogue, providing a glimpse into the world that tells me to stop asking why:

Two Vodkas ‘n Coke: “Workin’ Towards the Minister”

~ There y’are …
~ How’s yourself?
~ Same old, same old – an’ you, all well in the client-centred world o’ the Social?7
~ Minister-Centred, yeh mean
~ How’s tha’?
~ Well … the stated Number One Objective is to have the client at the centre of services an’ policies8 …
~ You’re givin’ me the distinct impression tha’ the situation is otherwise …
~ Yep. While, policy might appear to be made from the ground up, it’s invariably formulated on the basis of what’ll be acceptable to the Minister
~ What’ll “fly politically” yeh mean?
~ Exactly. For instance, at the budget proposal9 meetin’ just there, they were congratulatin’ themselves … “ah, we got away with tha’ one” … the policy like
~ Like they got lucky - caught the Minister on a good day sorta?
~ Yeah. I felt very sad down deep inside, let me tell yeh. I honestly believed I’d been invited onto tha’ group because o’ the subject matter expertise I was bringin’. God love me innocence.
~ Ah, naïveté combined with optimism did for ya … it’s fatal … yeh can’t be the only one caught in this bind, but …
~ Don’t think so. There hasta be other sincere, socially-minded policy-makin’ civil servants …

7 The Department of Social Protection is colloquially referred to as “the Labour”, “the Social” and “the Welfare”
9 Fieldnotes November 2015
Keepin’ the old heads well down then, aren’t they?

It’s a conspiracy o’ silence. Not tha’ it’d be any use talkin’ … there’s only one correct answer

Bit o’ the Henry Ford, wha’ … any colour so long as it’s black?

Well, yeh know me. I expressed me philosophical point o’ view, naturally … me usual logic an’ rationale … wastin’ me time. All to no avail.

The Minister has spoken!

Get with the programme, I told meself

Yer in the army now …

It’s not fair, but, it’s not right!

Like a Black Man’s Left Leg, as me Da says …

Do y’know what me other half said when I told him? He said: "Workin’ Towards the Führer"

Hitler, like?

The very fella

What did he mean by tha’?

Well, it’s an historical theory tha’ s used to explain how the Third Reich actually functioned¹⁰ … the crux of it is tha’ the system operated from below rather than from the top down

Y’mean the orders an’ policies didn’t come directly from Hitler then?

Sure he couldn’t be everywhere … he devolved power to his appointed men

An’ they were all runnin’ their own little fiefdoms?

Yep … relyin’ mainly on their own initiative an’ interpretin’ Hitler’s visionary aims … his Weltanschauung. They weren’t actually policies, but …

So the lads formulated their own policies?

An’ crucially, they did this accordin’ to wha’ they thought Hitler would’ve wanted

So they were workin’ towards him!

In a nutshell, yeah. They call it “anticipation o’ presumed wishes an’ intentions”¹¹

In tha’ case, the Social is “Workin’ towards the Minister”

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¹⁰ Kershaw 2008
¹¹ Kershaw 2008, p42
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~ Anticipatin’ like nobody’s business! God, I hang me head in shame

~ Ah, don’t be so rough on yer self ... it’s just yer official persona who hasta do tha’

~ Bu’ me real persona feels the shame. I wanta get rid o’ me official self. I hate her. She’s Despicable Me

~ What was it tha’ Hélène Cixous said abou’ killin’ tha’ false woman12 …

~ The one preventin’ the live one from breathin’ …?

~ That’s our mission so ... should we choose to accept it …

~ It’s a long journey to travel, but ...

~ How are ye gonna approach it then?

~ Tha’s comin’ up in me next Chapter. Get the vodkas ’n coke in, an’ yeh can read all abou’ it …

12 Cixous 1976
Chapter 2 ~ Roadmap and Footwear for the Journey:  
Use of Autoethnography to Understand Transition

Snape & Spencer (2003) classify research methodology as concurrently a theoretical perspective on how knowledge building should ensue and a bridge from this philosophical standpoint to the chosen means of amassing information. Accordingly, methodology can be understood as the overarching design framework for an enquiry. I conceive of it as a central axle on which an enquiry pivots, simultaneously providing stability yet enabling movement and change of direction.

Written techniques and methods of enquiry abound across the qualitative vista, including narrative enquiry, which itself is denoted as an umbrella term, capturing personal and human dimensions of experience over time, and taking account of the relationship between individual experience and cultural context (Clandinin & Connelly 2000). In the context of my belief that an exploration of my past journey and experiences will lead me to knowledge, along with examining the connection between my experiences and the context in which they took place, narrative enquiry represents an appropriate methodology. Freeman (2009) terms narratives sense-making tools, maintaining that profound insight is possible through purposeful, rather than nostalgic, retrospective reflection on past episodes of our ongoing life story. Narrative enquiry, as an inclusive designation, incorporates various data sources including, inter alia, journals, autobiography, stories, fieldnotes, life experience and conversations (Clandinin & Connelly 2000), with
Oakley (2000) correspondingly distinguishing autobiography and fiction as ways of knowing.

**Autoethnography**

Rich and thick (Ryle 1949), although strongly suggestive of dessert, are nonetheless terms regularly applied to descriptions contained in written enquiries. While applied initially to the broader field of qualitative enquiry, particularly concerning data credibility and validity (Denzin 1989; Creswell & Miller 2000; Lincoln & Guba 1985; St. Pierre 2005; Rossman & Rallis 1998), the terms subsequently became closely associated with ethnography (Geertz 1973) and latterly autoethnography (Ellis, Adams & Bochner 2011; St. Pierre 2014; Snape & Spencer 2003). Autoethnography, a facet of narrative enquiry, is designated by Ellis, Adams & Bochner (2011) as an approach to research and writing that provides a description and analysis of personal experience in order to understand cultural experience, with Ellis & Bochner (2000) opining moreover that autoethnography has become the term of choice for academic work that links the personal to the cultural. Reese & Speedy (2014) furthermore suggest that there are some social experiences which can only ever adequately be understood via an interlacing of the contextual and the autobiographical which is afforded by autoethnography. Holt (2003) and Riessman (2008) additionally draw attention to the significance of context, highlighting how storytelling occurs at a historical moment with its circulating discourses. As a study of my own life, in context, my enquiry accords with the foregoing characteristics of autoethnography, similarly depicted by Holman Jones (2005).
Use of narrative is strongly linked to identity construction by Riessmann (2008), while Freeman (2009) avers that insight gained into one’s life-space through retrospective reflective writing provides prospects to restructure one’s future life on the basis of such hindsight. It is precisely such moments of hindsight, which Ellis & Bochner (2000) uphold comprise autoethnographic data. This framework of hope and agency appeals greatly to me in my circumstance of anticipating an unknown future, against a background of previous vocational identity loss and straddling some unseen bridge to my, as yet unforged, new identity (Behar 1996). My decision to undertake a depthful writing of my personal narrative about my experience of transition as a route to personal meaning seems substantiated. It is further assured by Clandinin & Connelly’s description of a person’s story of who they are as a “portal” (2000, p373) through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful, added to Riessman’s assertion that narrative writing offers a window into an essential self by “transforming a lived experience into language” (2008, p3).

Showing the Way

Envisioning this enquiry as a journey through and around my life, I accordingly reflect this with a feet and stepping-related theme in my chapter titles. I do not carry this through to the heading titles within each chapter, however. Quite aside from the fact there is a finite number of foot-based metaphors (even for a metaphor-lover such as myself), I consider Wegener’s (2014) reflection that life does not come with headings, hence favour a more intuitive type of signposting to guide a reader through this enquiry.
Why?

Research, by its nature, is a purposeful activity. So, what can be said of the purpose of this particular enquiry and its genesis? Earlier, I spoke of my silencing, “redundancy” and incongruity. In emotional pain, in a fog of unknowing, I am replete with half-understandings. I am left with a compelling need to take a meaning-making journey, with the dual objective of constructing knowledge around events which have left me feeling destabilised, together with re-orientating myself back on course. As a woman who thrives on clarity and precision, partial insights are never going to satiate me. I brim with uncertainties, of which I yearn to make sense. Some are at a distinctly personal level, what I term inner-space, namely why do I feel so disrupted by an event which, on the face of it, appears to be a simple career transition? Why has the loss of vocational identity hit me so hard? Why do I feel so incongruent in my new environment? Other ambiguities exist in the wider realm, what I call outer-space, specifically the political and social context of the experience and how this influenced it. As a consequence of events, I am now a component of a system of client supervision and surveillance which conflicts directly with my professional identity of client-centred adult guidance counsellor. Not alone that, I am obliged besides to operate in a work setting that does not value my critical thinking proclivity, one where I am told to stop asking why!

Beginning Again

Reece & Speedy (2014) outline how the primary motivation for writing may be established as frustration or lack of acknowledgement, while Heywood (2014) affirms how autoethnographic writing, as a method, is characterised by an explicit
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acknowledgement of researcher motivation, particularly emotional motivation. Adams, Holman Jones & Ellis (2014) furthermore describe how auto-ethnographers embrace the vulnerability of asking and answering questions about experiences, with a view to understanding the emotions they generate. I initially imagine that if I understand the bigger picture, the knowledge at personal level will follow, so I enthusiastically begin researching this sphere through documentary analysis. I am mistaken. The emotional impact does not want to be glossed over. If anything it begins to be magnified as I vicariously re-experience events through the literature. My story of disruption needs telling, and not from any midpoint either, it requires revisiting its roots to restore the disconnect.

I resist at first, partly denial and fear, partly feeling it is a retrograde step. However, the prefix “re” in re-visiting, seemingly holding adverse connotations of regression, likewise signifies restoration and constructive returning anew. I am additionally encouraged by Bochner (2007), who, appreciating the benefit of such a strategy, counsels how telling stories facilitates gathering knowledge from the past, not necessarily knowledge about the past. On a favourite soundtrack of my 1980s youth, Billy Joel sings of going back to the start to find out where the heartache began. So, armed with my enquiring mind and a pen, I embark. In my journal, I begin wording my wounded world into written existence. My mission, having chosen to accept it, is to give a first-person account, to interrogate and understand my experience of derailment, take a personal journey through transition into incongruence and explore the social and political contexts in which these experiences occurred. On the way, I will illuminate and critically reflect on

13 Lyrics from “An Innocent Man” Billy Joel (1983), Columbia Records
Ireland’s journey, with particular focus on an activation policy transition from enabling to regulatory, which change I view as arguably the most significant in Irish manpower policy in the 50 years since it came into being. All this, I approach from a unique, insider perspective.

I can explain how I got here by pinpointing the birth of my story, or certainly the birth of the urge to tell it. Heywood (2014) maintains a story appears because something tells you the time is right. The provenance of my story emerged during the summer of 2015 when I suddenly “knew” I wanted to do my MEd in Adult Guidance and Counselling. That readiness – I heard it in my head, like a voice I had been listening out for. I recollect the occasion as an almost inexplicable lightbulb moment, like my mind had made itself up, then a tremendous, almost panicky, urge to act on the knowledge instantly. I re-live this pleasurable moment in my journal, as the following extract shows:
When we return to Ireland, I submit my application. Months later, in the depths of winter, and the depths of journaling, the penny drops fully into the slot. I look up from my notebook. Where has my head been at? I reasoned that doing the MEd has triggered my ability to think, talk and tell my story whereas my readiness itself to think, talk and tell my story actually served as the trigger for the MEd. At a subliminal level, my mind had actually prevailed upon itself to undertake the MEd in order, in some oxymoronic fashion, to emancipate me from my story by connecting me with it. This recognition establishes clear associations with Holt’s (2003) ideas of story-as-scholarship and Sparkes’ (2000) of self-as-data.
A Scrutiny of Subjectivity

I enter this field of enquiry with the vocational training and identity of an Adult Guidance Counsellor, with a client-centred philosophy. In broader terms, in respect of my ontological and epistemological positions, I offer the following standpoints. I believe meanings are constructed through my experiences and identity, which themselves developed in a broader context. Born into a world of context, I see a need to also understand the broader context and backdrop to the events I am exploring, namely those in which personal and policy changes occurred. In research terms, I consider I am producing findings by interacting with myself and my experience. Moreover, I deem an exploration of historical events and documents necessary, given that social and economic policies and the language of spoken and written discourse likewise influence social construction.

I, as a social researcher, am concerned with the social world, believing natural or physical existence, namely the presence of an independent physical (natural) world outside my personal experience, to be vastly different to social existence. Snape & Spencer (2003) outline how assumptions about what constitutes social reality are brought by a researcher to the research endeavour. I do not subscribe to the notion of a single shared social reality, rather diverse alternative social constructions. I am operating on the assumption that the social world is created through the beliefs and understandings of individuals, formed from their experience, which itself is historically, personally and socially situated and constructed from it in that context. While there may appear to be some collective
social understandings at a surface level, I do not equate this to an external reality independent of this meaning. Snape & Spencer (2003) do not share this opinion, holding a subtle realism perspective that there is a social world which exists independently of an individual’s subjective understanding. While their qualitative stance fully accommodates the possibility of accessing understanding only via research participants’ understandings, they maintain however that diverse perspectives do not negate the existence of a diverse external reality. Given my underlying beliefs that people experience the social world in different ways, hence construct individual meanings of reality, allied to my assumptions that economic and political conditions influence beliefs and behaviours, hence the situatedness of meaning making, Snape & Spencer’s (2003) contention of idealist/relativistic ontological stance holds true in my case. In terms of my epistemology, my conviction in relation to how is it possible to know about this social world, my philosophy is that understanding is arrived at not just by having experiences, but by thinking about them. In common with Wiebe (2008), I think in writing.

Language: Gateway or Gatekeeper?

Creswell (2003) indicates how the social world differs from that natural world in that it is open to subjective interpretation, noting that individuals develop varied and multiple subjective meanings of their experiences. The concept of language opening a door to the construction of meaning is well documented, with Richardson (2005) asserting that meanings are made according to the available discourses, noting thus that language, rather than reflecting social reality constructs it. Such comprehension likewise accounts for the agentic power attributed to personal metaphor creation and analysis (Deshler 1990). Derrida
conceives of language as a “thought-sound” (1976, p31) characterising writing as an exterior representation of language, with Vygotsky (1978) besides viewing both language and writing as culturally produced sign systems, noting how their internalisation gives rise to behavioural transformation along with individual development. St. Pierre (2014), however, holds an opposing view of language as closing the door on meaning making, challenging contemporary understanding of language, by extension contesting assumptions about the nature of enquiry and how to critique using practices enabled by language. She also disagrees strongly with a view of written language as inferior to spoken language, deeming a phonocentric perspective such as Derrida’s, namely that writing is merely a derived method of capturing spoken sounds or speech, to be a limitation of conventional humanistic qualitative methodology.

In essence, St. Pierre (2014) appears, at a fundamental level, to be disillusioned with traditional humanist qualitative research methodology, believing it to have lost its way (she refers to it as “monolithic and stifling” p3) and longing for it once again to be considered radical. Given the existence of competing discourses, Richardson (2005) furthermore expressly recommends language as a site of exploration, upholding moreover that language, as a way of giving meaning, thereby constructs a person’s subjectivity.
Evidencing my World View

A research fundamental involves revealing one’s ontology and epistemology. Some people may have obscure values, or attempt to conceal, but I tend to wear things on my sleeve, living my life authentically to my true self: “wysiwyg:” as they used to say in the 1980s computer programming land of my schooldays. I consider it a bit of a family trait, but enjoy having it reinforced again recently, on the day of the General Election, hence capture it in my journal:

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**Journal extract, face-to-face conversation in car with son plus SMS text exchange with siblings, 26 Feb 2016:**

My son E****, 10 years old, accompanying me to the polling station, wants to know why children cannot vote “seeing as the issues and decisions affect my life too!”

I share this anecdote, by text message, with my siblings. One of my younger sisters, by profession both a chemist and scientific researcher, shares a contrasting experience she has with her own son that same day. Upon inviting him to come with her to vote, he turns to her explaining in a tolerant but indulgent voice, as if she were the six-year-old, “I’m not old enough to vote, Mom”.

This story provides the opportunity for one of my deadpan younger brothers to quip, in two successive text messages:

1st text message: “E**** the idealist, B***** the pragmatist”

2nd text message: “… like their parents”

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WYSIWYG: A 1982 computer programmer’s acronym from “What You See Is What You Get”. It referred to a word-processing or desktop publishing system in which text was displayed on a monitor exactly as it would print.
In light of the nature of the subjective knowledge I am seeking to construct, I adopt a qualitative approach to this enquiry as it incorporates subjectivity (Bochner 2000). In general, qualitative researchers seek meaning, with the focus on the social meaning people assign to their experiences and situations and an examination of how these meanings shape attitudes and social realities (Snape & Spencer 2003). How people feel and see the world are deemed worthy of research, characterised by Oakley as “really important forms of truth” (2000, p17), with Richardson (2005) furthermore positioning qualitative writers as situated speakers, engaged in knowing/telling about the world as they perceive it. St. Pierre (2014), likewise, acknowledges the value of qualitative research as a methodology to capture subjugated ways of knowing, such as lived experience. Bochner (2000), highlighting a virtual dismissal of the notion of research as objective, recognises the inextricable link between methodology and researcher subjectivity, while consciousness of researcher-as-subject in personal narrative is noted by Hammersly & Atkinson (2007). All in all, qualitative research is presented as a stimulating interdisciplinary landscape, where the knowledge-building process itself occupies centre stage (Snape & Spencer 2003).

Writing Myself into Knowing

Reflecting on one’s actions and experiences in order to construct learning is widely advocated (Freeman 2009; Kolb 1984; Mezirow 1990; Richardson 2005; Schön 1991). Mezirow (1990) refers to the interpretation of experiences as making meaning, which is converted into learning when such interpretations are used to shape future actions or decisions. Kolb (1984), meanwhile, maintains the most
effective learning is based on the dynamic interaction between thought and experience, which he conceptualises in his Experiential Learning Cycle. Reece & Speedy (2014) claim that writing as a form of creative enquiry is now a well-established form of qualitative research. While criticisms of written enquiry may equate advocacy of such an approach as intention to displace or replace other genera, Reece & Speedy (2014) position it as an extension to the existing repertoire of approaches. Richardson (2005) categorises writing itself as a creative process, rather than writing after thinking has been done, with Wiebe (2008) expressing how she thought in writing. My adventures in writing aid me both to think and facilitate my achievement of a state of knowing.

From the outset, I utilise writing to document my experience of transition and all it entailed, initially through a reflective journal. Cixous (1997) emphasises writing as a particular method of constructing knowledge, duly supported by Richardson (2005) who classifies writing as a method of enquiring into felt experiences. I find writing not only cathartic, but a means of bringing my submerged thoughts out into the open, to clarify and order them. Peters (1990) subscribes to this concept of drawing out and scrutinising, observing how providing a description of an experience makes explicit the dialectic of person and situation. Richardson reinforces the sense of catharsis and liberation afforded through writing one’s story, describing a “release” (2005, p965), alluding to therapeutic opportunities to construct oneself anew. For me, it is a place of exploration filled with “aha” moments (DeMello 1990). It is all a little out of control at first as the dam breaks. My fingers fairly fly across the keyboard, hardly able to keep pace with the flow of thoughts and emotions. I write staccato style, short, ungrammatical sentences,
bullet points, tangents. My thoughts are disjointed, random, jostling for space on the page. My emotions oscillate, crowding each other out. I persist, in a thinking-writing loop. Gradually insight begins to emerge.

In respect of some events, the recollected, re-lived appear more intense, more detailed than the original lived experience. In the liberating process of writing, forgotten, even unnoticed, features and aspects of those events are revealed. Perhaps I had been too stunned to absorb them at the time. For instance, my journaling about the episode involving my reassignment evokes, for some reason, a memory of a photo I took of my six-year-old son and his younger cousins earlier that same day (all gap-toothed, little faces peeping through the rack of bowling balls in the alley), preceding the bad news. As a happy moment juxtaposed with a sorrowful one, I consider it a vital element in the totality of that experience. Despite this, I have no recollection of taking that photo. Until I write it in the journal, this missing piece of my story is unthought, pre-reflective (Peters 1990). In relation to my desire to make sense of these painful past experiences, I find harmony with the premium placed by both Wiebe (2008) and Heywood (2014) on writing as a mechanism of bringing already well-known events to the surface for exploration and with Riessman (2008) who elucidates how telling stories about difficult times in our lives both creates order and contains emotions. I identify in particular with Heywood, who characterised his autoethnography as the telling of a story which had “already assembled itself at a subconscious level” (2014, p61).

Reliving those experiences, excavating unbearable memories (Riessman 2008), brings anguish but writing them down puts them out there somehow, imbues
them with order, hence demystifying them (Riessman 2008), breaking their spell and the power they had over me. I consider this an achievement, having been in their thrall for several years. Such ex-post-facto reflection as a method of attaining understanding is advocated by Freeman (2009) and Schön (1991). Richardson likewise speaks of the agency and empowering force of writing, referring particularly to how writing about painful historic events in her own life “loosened their shadow hold on me” (2005, p965). In due course, I find that writing my journal entries begins to counterbalance my disequilibrium.

Reece & Speedy (2014) draw attention to a noteworthy characteristic of writing as a mode of exploration, namely how it can trouble with time. They describe how, particularly in autoethnographic pieces, actual time and autobiographical time do not necessarily synchronise, instancing how revelatory occurrences can be extended into drawn-out accounts, while elongated stretches of chronological time can be condensed. This reflects my own sense of time standing still, how I have almost been “on pause” since the fateful phonecall reassigning me. Yet, the actual phonecall, which was no more than a couple of minutes in real, linear time, felt like an eternity. I still sometimes expect to wake up and find the last four years have all been a bad dream.

While I enjoy writing my journal, in fact rely upon it, I cannot describe it as an unproblematic process. In order to grow and learn, I intentionally explore my most disquieting experiences taking Cixous’ (1997) advice to engage particularly with my stop-in-my-tracks experiences. Being plucked from FÂS and plonked into DSP certainly fits that description. Kennedy, equally, is in favour of engaging with
“breakthrough” (1990, p101) events, which cause us to question what we have accepted as normal up to now, with DeMello (1990) too advocating to make problematic what we think we know. Understandably, I view my own experiences as normal, but Richardson (2005) reminds us that as we approach the world from our own unique perspective, all experiences are distinctly personal. Furthermore, she outlines how when we experience the same events as others, even at the same time, we refract them through our own characteristics and aspects, for example our professions. This strikes a chord with me, leading me to consider that my guidance counselling professional identity, with its integral client-centred approach, may be a source of my uneasiness with my new world.

I gather the data of my own life, past and present, capturing memories in my head and on paper, writing reflexively in my journal, constantly alert, taking note/account of events, informal meetings such as conversations in the lift or corridor. Denzin & Lincoln (2000) expound how interpretive practices make the world visible by turning it into a series of representations such as conversations, fieldnotes and memos to self. Thus, through my notes and journals, I am seeing and showing my world. Riessman (2008), Clandinin & Connelly (2000) and Clough (2002), maintain that such activities constitute data gathering for research purposes. Coffey likewise incorporates headnotes, memories joining with journals and diaries, terming ethnography an “act of memory” (1999 p127). Memory, however, is equally indicated as problematic, with Richardson (2000) cautioning that concrete details are required if the method is to have credibility, and Walford (2004) harbouring doubts about whether things are presented as they really happened or whether it’s more the imagination or invention of the author. It is
clear to me how not just meetings, but my memories of meetings, shape the notes and the text, likewise not just my experiences, but my impression of my experiences. I use all these mechanisms to give myself voice, counteracting its denial elsewhere, endorsing Richardson’s (2005) contention that ethnographies honour, and give a clear commitment to, individual voices.

Thinking Aloud: Virtual Voices

There comes a point when journaling alone becomes too introspective. The desire grows to focus outwards in some structured fashion. I am discontent merely exploring the emotions associated with the events, ready to move on to some critical analysis of the events giving rise to the emotions. I need to respond creatively. I’m temporarily at a loss, feeling I have much to say, but with nowhere safe enough to have a conversation and no one to address in any event. So, I create both, starting in my own head. Early each morning, while out on my run, I have a conversation with myself, passing ideas back and forth, questioning, querying, commenting, and responding. In the stillness and obscurity of the early-morning blackness, my feet pounding along the sea-front, my ideas grow. The conversations get louder, more animated. I find it hard to contain them as they outgrow the space in my head. Then I start to lose the insights, the fine detail disappearing with the dawn. I have to let them out, capture them elsewhere. Back onto the page I go, but not a journal, I need voices. The solution presents itself in story form. I credit my research journal as a foundation for this creativity, supported in my thinking by Kara (2015) who indicates how the kind of reflective writing required to keep a journal actually promotes creativity. I commence a written dialogue, in the style of Roddy Doyle’s Two Pints (Doyle 2012), between
two Dublin women having their Vodkas 'n Coke. They are free to discuss the forbidden and mock the sacred cows, while simultaneously providing a critical narrative on events. Wiebe (2008) pinpoints this capacity for uncensored reflection accorded by writing. This echoes with me as I feel the restrictions imposed on my spoken words dissipate in the freedom and safety of my written endeavours. No one is telling me to stop asking why.

At first nameless, the two women give me a space to be analytical, attempt to understand what underlies my feelings. They are irreverent, uncompromising, black humour diffusing the pain as they identify and create pithy metaphors to unpack and critically reflect on events. Deshler (1990) proposes the creation of personal metaphors for experiences in order to more fully understand them and make sense of the implied meaning. I find how vesting the power in my characters to generate caustic metaphors for certain tin gods in the organisation domain (Deshler 1990) completely divests them of supremacy. Mezirow (1990) describes how such metaphor creations, as acts of naming, are actually acts of power. Thus, my dialogue provides a space, in turn, to disempower the events that have disempowered me, providing agency by verbalising what at one stage I was even unable to think (Richardson 2005).

Many theorists suggest creative representation of episodes (Clough 2002; Denzin 1989; Richardson 2005) with Clough (2002) proposing a storying methodology, arguing how reporting research through fictional narrative is a powerful way of understanding the human condition. While my Vodka-drinking characters are fictional, hence the event of them having a conversation is fictional, their dialogue
is otherwise entirely factual. The topics and events under “discussion” are a faithful outline of events as I lived them and are completely authentic, presented in my own voice, with no embellishments or poetic licence. Kara (2015) indicates how the problem of how some truths and perspectives cannot be made available in a non-fiction realm, can be solved by using fictional accounts, portraying actual but anonymised experiences. As such, Bernie and Teresa (abbreviated to B&T), as they become known, solve that problem by acting as mouthpieces, presenting a counter to the master-narrative. Vygotsky (1962) maintains that humans find meaning in the world by exploring it in their own language. Through taking on the mantle of my silenced voice, exploring for me in my own language, B&T enable me find meaning in an incongruous world (Riessman 2008).

Having suppressed my feelings and my voice for so long, it is a joyful release to let B&T talk unconstrained. Their conferred ability to speak for me is similar to a technique used by children, locating sensations such as hunger or fear in a doll or a teddy when they feel powerless to express their own feelings directly (Winnicott 1971). While I might harbour reluctance, B&T have no such qualms, pointing out directly that the emperor has no clothes. They keep no timetable, always hanging around, speaking to me whenever they feel like it, planting the seeds of their ideas, usually at most inopportune moments. Wegener (2014), who entered into a similar collaborative writing strategy with a fictional character, asserts that co-writers are always present, even when you might feel that you are writing all alone. I keep a pen with me, jotting down bullet points and key words, capturing the bones of the event in question and B&T’s unique take on it. I sketch in more detail on my way home on the train, sometimes chuckling to myself, sometimes
shocked at their candour. I finally round out and refine the dialogue in that ever-dwindling interval between the chaos of hurling, swimming, karate, homework and bedtime routine. Accomplishing a depthful piece of writing is a compound process, not a single session, according to Van Manen (1990). In these multiple sessions, I ultimately externalise the inner conversation, constructing a further narrative (Riessman 2008). B&T, in turn, externalise this narrative, speaking and re-presenting it, inviting readers to listen-in on their conversation, thereby entering my perspective (Reece & Speedy 2014; Richardson 2005; Riessman 2008).

Ellis & Bochner (2000) meanwhile convey how autobiographical genres of writing and research connect the personal to the cultural. In order to gain insight, I write about events from the viewpoint of how I lived them. As such, this provision of my lived, first-person account and furnishing of my insider perspective conforms to several constituents of an autobiographical account. Fetterman (2010) alerts to not only autoethnographers’ interest in understanding and describing events from an insider perspective, but also the quality of both stories and science this produces, with Oakley likewise articulating how autobiography can provide a “startling insider view” (2000, p8). My enquiry focuses on telling the story of dual aspects of my experience, internal and external, portraying it as a series of steps on a meaning-making journey: I first look inward, revealing a vulnerable self, (contained in the next Chapter where I “step in”), I then look outward to present the social and cultural contexts (provided in the following Chapter where I “step out”). Restorying such as this, according to Ellis & Bochner (2000), constitutes autoethnography.
Multiple Voices for Multiple Selves: Creative Representation

Heywood (2014) and Richardson (2005) conceptualise the fragmented self, the multiple facets of self, each with an individual identity and perspective, each one interacting with the story and the experience. Heywood, indeed, credits the act of writing itself with alerting him to the existence of a range of selves apart from his researcher self. I am highly aware of my manifold selves, now more than ever. Prior to my transition, my various selves (for instance mother, guidance counsellor) blended, whereas now they have differentiated, becoming discordant. I believe this to be because not all of my current facets are authentic with my self-concept (Gottfredson 1981; Herr & Cramer 1996; Holland 1997). I certainly don’t feel my obligatorily assumed civil-servant-self is genuine, and ascribe this as part cause of my distress. In addition, as I already mentioned, certain of my diverse selves (particularly the critically reflective ones) are not valued, not welcome to speak, in certain contexts. In order to cut through this silence, I perceive a need to permit multiple voices to speak in my enquiry, although I comprehend them as a composite of fragments of myself, echoes of my facets, rather than distinct or detached entities. While the voices can be broadly grouped into Personal, Critical and Silenced, there are moreover integral and cross-cutting thoughtful, angry, reflective, humorous and hurt voices. So, while I distinguish them, they are not disconnected but dialoguing with each other, hence with me. Internally the voices blend, but externally they don ad hoc discrete hats. This demands a creative response on my part.

Heywood (2014) conceptualised his “whole” self as a dialogue between his various fragments, so employed a technique of multiple voices in his narrative, separated with a physical signification (a series of three asterisks) of disjunction.
Richardson (2005) highlights the growth of creative analytical practices as ways of knowing, indicating how the ethnographic genre has evolved in order to adapt to changing audiences and an uncertain social and political world. She conceptualises non-conventional (in social scientific terms) writing formats as “CAP (creative analytical processes) ethnographies” (2005, p962), suggesting that such formats may be the most desirable given their capacity to invite people in and open currently unavailable spaces for thinking. Ellis & Bochner (1996) likewise identify the emergence of CAP ethnographies as signalling a paradigm shift. Many theorists suggest creative representation of episodes (Clough 2002; Denzin 1989; Richardson 2005). Creativity can additionally be achieved through the provision of layered autoethnographic accounts, which focus on the author’s experience alongside data, abstract analysis, and relevant literature (Ellis, Adams & Bochner 2011). Ellis (1991) furthermore details how layered accounts consist of the author looking within, soul searching, providing vignettes, extracts, descriptions of events and episodes, and using reflexivity and multiple voices. Richardson specifically suggests layered texts as a CAP practice, describing such as “a strategy for putting oneself into the text” (2005, p974) and putting the text into the literature and traditions of social science.

To meet the challenge of a portrayal of my “selves” and to enable access to their voices, I provide a layered account using three visual representations: For the elements of the more formal researcher self, I use traditional text/paragraphs of descriptive writing based on journals and thoughts, interwoven with theoretical explorations using formal in-text citations. To give a glimpse into facets of my private self, thoughts and events, I scatter direct extracts from my journal
throughout the enquiry in text boxes, simulating handwritten "post-it notes" stuck on the page. Finally, to “hold” my critically reflective, silenced self, contain my “forbidden” emotion, and present alternatives to the master-discourse swirling about me, I alter my authorial voice (Ellis, Adams & Bochner 2011), creating fictional dialogic others as co-writers (Wegener 2014). This novel and innovative research device comprises B&T the two women I described earlier, who are chatting over their vodkas and coke. I weave this “Two Vodkas ‘n Coke” dialogue throughout the enquiry, linking sections, often saying what cannot be said. I present it like the script for a two-character play. The voices speak in sequence, differentiated by italic and standard font. Names are not provided. The dialogue is heralded, each occasion on which it is used, by a distinctive logo in a parody of the Keep Calm and Carry On poster. Theory and analysis weaves through the conversation, with the citations placed in footnotes to preserve the flow, but fully referenced in the bibliography. I similarly deploy a “post-it notes” technique in the dialogue where a theory, superficially mentioned in the conversation, requires expansion. My production of a text of a dialogic format, with B&T as fictional characters, exemplifies an approach which has been conceptualised as virtual duoethnography.

Zazkis & Koichu (2015) outline how such diverse narrative approaches are gaining wide appreciation in social science, delineating virtual duoethnography as an amalgamation of both duoethnography and virtual monologue. Duoethnography consists of real researchers collaboratively producing a dialogic

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16 Slocombe 2012, p6: Keep Calm and Carry On was one of a series of motivational posters produced in 1939 by the British Ministry of Information to raise the morale of the British public, in advance of predicted air attacks
text in their own voices, whereas virtual monologues are works of fiction where researchers reproduce their subjective perspective as a text in monologic format. As a composite of both the foregoing approaches, Zazkis & Koichu (2015) clarify how the dialogue of fictional characters in a virtual duoethnography allows a researcher to explore and represent experiences from various different perspectives, incorporating both primary and secondary data sources. My virtual vodka-drinkers impart both, expressing my personal reflections in addition to representing the theoretical perspectives of noted authors on the subject under consideration. B&T also throw light on subjects, possessing educational worth in the sense that their explorations of a topic serve equally as explanations to anyone unfamiliar with the concept under discussion. According to Wegener (2014), B&T serve as collaborators, an additional voice in my dialogue with my data.

My dialogic others, my fictional co-writers, through my creation and literal placing of words into their mouths, think what I cannot think, say what I cannot say. Such reflexive learning enables insight, knowledge and emotional balance to emerge. Narrative enquiry has been hypothesised as the creation of a space of resistance: either to think both within and against a given context (Lather & St. Pierre 2013) or to counter dominant discourses (Ellis & Bochner 2000). Due to my systematic denial of a feeling, thinking, questioning space, I create one so my characters can explore the story of my experiences and provide a counter-narrative to the dominant activation discourse of fraud, scamming and indolence. Wiebe (2014) focuses on this potential of character use in order to create emotional distance in narrative research. Likewise, Clandinin & Connelly propose the use of literary
characters within narrative inquiry to reach a state of “cool observation” (2000, p82).

Heywood (2014) perceives dialogue such as mine as performance space, occupied by critical voices as performers with readers as audience, while Wiebe (2008) indicates how narrative researchers borrow literary conventions such as plot and dialogue, labelling them as techniques that show rather than tell. A wide variety of purposes are indicated for the use of literary techniques in research. Reece & Speedy (2014) allude to the potential to amuse, conceding this as a rarity in academic research. While not its principal intent, my Two Vodkas dialogue has, I believe, capacity to entertain even as it conveys critique of substance and profound sentiment. Richardson (2005), referring to the capacity to invite readers in, recommends different formats for different audiences. In the Two Vodkas ‘n Coke setting, I visualise the entry of the reader as eavesdroppers on the conversation. B&T in turn term this “earwigging”. Riessman (2008) highlights the facility for such character use in the containing of emotions, while Wiebe (2014) moreover establishes an abundance of uses for literary characters within narrative enquiry, including inter alia, identity protection, accessing a fresh set of eyes through which to consider a topic, and the creation of a context where an author can become an “other”. Zazkis & Koichu (2015), meanwhile, highlight the reflexive potential, viewing the use of characters in virtual duoethnography as an opportunity for readers to engage with their own stories to query and validate them.
Reflexivity and the Reader

A distinguishing attribute of narrative enquiry overall, and principally my approach of writing and dialoguing, is its facilitation of not only my conscious introspective reflexivity, but also the attendant purposeful establishment of reflexive learning opportunities for readers of same. Many maintain the genre extends an implicit invitation to enter the perspective of the narrator (Richardson 2005; Riessman 2008) particularly through the spaces created by the text (Reece & Speedy 2014). Richardson (2005) favours presenting events in creative formats or addressing one’s writing to different audiences, while others argue for reflexive forms of research to be made more commonplace (Finlay 2011; Foley 2002), with Finlay in particular calling for forms that are powerful, unsettling and captivating, evoking lived experience, thereby turning reading such research into a compelling experience in itself.

My enquiry draws readers directly into my emotional space, providing vignettes via journal extracts, and tuning them in to “hear” B&T talking, hopefully fulfilling Finlay’s entreaty for compulsive and absorbing modes. Heywood (2014), in an extension of his theme of critical voices as performers with readers as audience, draws attention to reflexive outcomes whereby the performance changes the audience. Readers, therefore, cannot be considered passive recipients of my story or B&T’s dialogue. My experiences are no longer the same when I put them out there to be part of a shared experience. Narrative can be considered most effective when an account goes beyond the personal, with Finlay (2011) opining that reflexive revelations have greatest value when one’s own experiences shed light on others’ experiences. Ellis & Bochner (2006), meanwhile, purport that
personal stories allow readers to witness, while Holman Jones (2005) furthermore indicates the reflexive potential of narrative whereby the researcher sets the scene, weaves connections, then sets it free ... so readers can attend to the words in the context of their own lives.

Carrying through Holman Jones’ (2005) notion of “releasing” a narrative, I now, in the context of B&T’s compound existence as co-writer, critical voice and reflexive space, liberate them to speak, inviting you the reader to “earwig” as they reflect and ask why, interrogating and critiquing the autoethnographic genre:

**Two Vodkas ‘n Coke: “Virtual Duoethnography”**

~ *We’re doin’ an awful lotta talkin’* …

~ *Why?*

~ *Always the why! We’re one of a range o’ perspectives from which to explore events. We’re dialoguin’ with the data*¹⁷, *dontcha know?*

~ *Askin’ questions is how I learn stuff … what data is that then?*

~ *“Our”¹⁸ *life for starters, our personal narrative*¹⁹, *we’re thinkin’ about it in its social an’ political contexts. Tha’s called situatedness o’ self, an’ it’s highly significant y’know. Events an’ contexts are inextricably linked, an’ shape our understandin’ o’ the world*

~ *Oh, like in tha’ ethno-somethin’ or other?*

~ *Autoethnography, yeh muppet, itsa kinda philosophy*²⁰, *an’ as a method o’ research it’s both a process and a product*²¹

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¹⁷ Wegener 2014; Zazkis & Koichu 2015

¹⁸ As B&T represent one of my selves, references to “our” (e.g. life) can be understood as my own

¹⁹ Hammersly & Atkinson 2007

²⁰ Wall 2006

²¹ Ellis 2004; Fetterman 2010
Speaking Up for Guidance: virtual duoethnography as counter-narrative to a disciplinary activation discourse

~ Get you! This data, to dialogue with like, where do we get it then?

~ There’s loadsa sources: journals, stories, autobiography, fieldnotes, memos, memories, moments o’ hindsight, conversations … they’re all representations o’ the world²²

~ Conversations? Our oul’ chats are data? Wha’ use are they, but, all th’ reflectin’ on our experiences, describin’ an’ systematically analysin’ them²³?

~ To create knowledge, for ourselves … an’ our readers, who can view what we’re sayin’ in the context of their own circumstances²⁴. Personal stories transmit knowledge an’ understandin’ - an’ we can reach and engage ordinary people in a way tha’ traditional research mightn’t²⁵

~ Ordinary Joes wouldn’ be attracted to readin’ all tha’ aul’ academic stuff … there’s a big gap between “us an’ them” …

~ Narrative practices like this might bridge tha’ gap so … a good argument for reflexive stuff to be made more commonplace²⁶, wha?

~ Look I’m still stuck on me “why”! No’ why are we talkin’ generally, why are talkin’ abou’ our experiences?

~ First up, we’re no’ just talkin’, we’re performin’ narrative analysis pertainin’ to ourselves as intimately related to a particular phenomenon²⁷ … we’re drawin’ on our experiences, to extend sociological understanding²⁸

~ Wha’ good is tha’ doin’?

~ Well, we can bring up stuff tha’s not talked about about … tha’ means our research is sensitisin’ readers to experiences tha’ are shrouded in silence²⁹ It’s engagin’ with them knock-ye-for-a-loop³⁰ events tha’ bring growth after all…

²² Denzin & Lincoln 2000
²³ Ellis 2004; Holman Jones 2005
²⁴ Ellis & Bohner 2006; Fetterman 2010; Finlay 2011; Heywood 2014; Holman Jones 2005; Richardson 2005; Zazkis & Koichu 2015
²⁵ Bohner 1997; Ellis 1995
²⁶ Foley 2002
²⁷ McIlveen 2008
²⁸ Sparkes 2000, p21
²⁹ Ellis & Bohner 2000
³⁰ Ellis 2004
Not much learnin’ outta good times, wha’? So are we uncoverin’ truths tha’ can’t otherwise be told.

Yeah, spillin’ the beans, recountin’ unwilled, unwished-for events.

Like you bein’ shoved into the Social, yeh mean? Yeh didn’t wish for tha’!

Exactly. We’re like a camera, capturin’ events and an’ an interior camera, contemplatin’ emotions but also creatin’ some objectivity around ‘em.

Does tha’ no’ expose us, but? Puttin’ ourselves out there, fillin’ their mouths … we’ve no control over how it’ll be interpreted.

It’s critical tha’ we’re honest an’ authentic but, an’ say wha’ we really think. They’re important qualities in autoethnography.

Tell me more abou’ this auto-whatchamacallit ...

OK. For starters, the “auto” bit is us. Tha’ means we’re the subject of our own research as an approach autoethnography incorporates subjectivity rather than seekin’ to restrict it.

Very interestin’ … sounds like navel gazin’ to me but … all tha’ emotional presence.

Yeh wouldn’ be alone in thinkin’ tha’ it’s narcissistic … other criticisms are tha’ while there’s insufficient theory an’ analysis to be an ethnography, there’s likewise an inadequacy of emotion or written fluency to qualify as autobiography ...

Neither fish nor fowl, wha’? But sure, is tha’ not pittin’ art an’ science against each other …?

Yer righ’ … somethin’ tha’ autoethnography seeks to correct … to disorder tha’ dualism. All the same, we find it harder to be accepted than conventional research … even though wha’ we say is true, more store is set by stickin’ to orthodox ways o’ writin’.

Many decry the inward, self-focus of the autoethnographic approach: Atkinson 1997; Coffey 1999; Delamont 2009; Sparkes 2000. This claim of narcissism is challenged, however, by both Riessman (2008) who recalls that case-based studies in the field of psychology have generated theories of significance (e.g. Freud, Piaget, Erikson and Skinner) and by Ellis & Bochner (2006) who contend that the typification of author centrality in the text is actually at the core of the potency of the method.

31 Clough 2002
32 Riessman 2008
33 Ellis & Bochner 2000
34 Beranek 2015
35 Clandinin & Connelly 2000; Wiebe 2014
36 Ellis 1999
37 Bochner 2000
38 Hammersly & Atkinson 2007
39 Ellis, Adams & Bochner 2011
40 Richardson 2000
~ Are there different kinds of autoethnographies, but?

~ Sure ... there’s evocative autoethnography... that aims at our introspection so readers can make a connection with our feelings and experiences, and there’s analytic ethnography, that’s different in that it concentrates on developing theoretical explanations of broader social phenomena.

~ Are we not doing both ... exploring the feelings of not fitting into the Social and all that political stuff like breaking up the FÁS?

~ We are. And more. We’re therapeutic for the author... and emancipatory to boot.

~ That’s all well and good ... but self-praise is no praise, you know ...

~ We can’t just be telling stories, but ... you have to analyze them. If you’re only a storyteller, your goal is therapy.

~ Are you telling me that creative writing formats have to be creative and analytical?

~ For sure! I was thinking, but, given all that, it’s no really for the faint-hearted ...

~ A tough oul’ bird like yourself should be grand so, haha ...

~ Less of that ... I’m a spring chicken ...

~ An’ oul’ broiler more like ...

~ I’m ignorin’ yeh ...

~ Yeh do right ...

~ Seriously but ... to eschew those criticisms, considerable pressure comes to bear on autoethnographers to produce outstanding writing ...

~ Yeh’d have to ask then, why would yeh put yerself to so much trouble? Why no’ just do a nice bit of traditional research?

~ Well, we’re more desirable coz we invite in the reader and open up spaces for thinking ... bein’ creative doesn’t equate to bein’ experimental ... we’re valid.

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41 Ellingson & Ellis 2008
42 Ellingson & Ellis 2008
43 Richardson 2005
44 Spry 2001
45 Atkinson 1997; Ellis & Bochner 2000
46 Richardson 2005
47 Reece & Speedy 2014
48 Richardson 2005
I’m hearin’ defensiveness there ... are yeh tellin’ me creative formats have credibility issues?

They can. An’ we’re a bit more special ... we’re a virtual duoethnography\(^9\)

Virtual? In the sense tha’ we’re fictional?

Yeah, bu’ wha’ we talk abou’ is real. We’re collaborators\(^{50}\), co-writin’ this enquiry y’know. We’re sourcin’ primary an’ secondary data ... representin’ the perspective of our own author, as well as incorporatin’ all the literature ...

Her perspective? From her journals an’ all, yeh mean? I wonder wha’ the earwiggin’ readers’ll make of all tha’?

Ellis\(^{51}\) is big on tha’, readers bein’ the judge o’ the usefulness of a story I mean

Wha’ abou’ us lettin’ the readers be the judge o’ how useful our story is, then?

Yeah, I think we can just play our part ... representin’ the various perspectives ... readers can decide for themselves whether or no’ our story resonates wi’ their experiences. Y’know, it’s said tha’ reflexive revelations have greatest value when yer own experiences shed light on others’ experiences\(^{52}\)

Like someone coulda had an upsettin’ experience an’ understood it better from readin’ about it in our dialogue?

Tha’s known as constructin’ their own knowledge\(^{53}\) ... it’s hard work, but ... they can knock themselves ou’ ... I’m gain’ to have a vodka ...

Shame we’re only virtual, wha’?

Definitely no validity in virtual vodka, haha!

A Question of Validity

Despite Richardson’s (2005) assertions that ethnography as a creative writing format is both a creative and analytical practice, questions continued to be raised

\(^{49}\) Zaskis & Koichu 2015

\(^{50}\) Wegener 2014

\(^{51}\) Ellis 2004

\(^{52}\) Finlay 2011

\(^{53}\) Richardson 2005
about the validity of autoethnographic research and the associated issue of how to evaluate it. I reflect myself on why it should be considered necessary for a separate individual to capture my personal experience. If another person interviews me and I tell my story to be reported, incorporating that researcher’s inevitable subjectivity (Bochner 2000), it would be data. Why then treat it differently if I collect the data myself, through my thoughts, journals and notes, and represent it using my created voices?

Richardson (2005) calls for rigour, maintaining mere novelty value does not suffice, asking whether the story is plausible, credible to the reader, whether it is nearer fiction than truth. While I employ a literary device in virtual duoethnography, I do not use literary licence in that I tell a factual story using factual data, albeit using fictional characters to speak for me on occasion. I also use my first-person voice in the text and in the journal extracts, likewise recounting factual events and emotions. In terms of validity, Richardson (2005) also refers to both the substantive contribution and impact of the research, enquiring whether it deepens our understanding of social life, or whether it gets the reader feeling, thinking and acting. Ellis (2004), on the other hand, wants to be reminded of her own experience through the story, to be engrossed by it. Allied to this, Richardson (2005) considers the issue of reflexivity, probing whether an author demonstrates self-awareness and is explicit about subjectivity, the author’s impact on the enquiry and its impact on him/her. Therein she also draws attention to aesthetic merit as a factor, namely whether interpretive responses are invited by a well-written, artistic text. Reece & Speedy (2014) also focus on the compelling requirement for an author in this genre to exhibit literary competence.
There exists, however, some diversity in the field. Even as some commentators express concern about whether narrative enquiry is valid, others lament how conventional the qualitative genre has become. St. Pierre (2014) broaches her disillusionment with what she views as traditional humanist qualitative research methodology, depicting it as constraining and oppressive. She states her longing for new perspectives on knowing, perplexed as to why literature reviews are mainly still separated from collected data (findings, fieldnotes, etc). She seems to concede that old habits die hard, which view is substantiated by Richardson (2000) who opines that a premium is still placed on more established and mainstream ways of writing.

Ahead of embarking on my next phase of creative analysis, I give the last word to Riessman who declares that evaluations of case-centred models of research may hinge on whether they can generate knowledge which becomes the basis for others’ work, what she adjudges “the ultimate test” (2008, p13). Perhaps we can look forward to future citations from B&T, the virtual duoethnographers.
Chapter 3 ~ Stepping In: Inner Space, Up Close and Personal

Career Guidance Theories as a Theoretical Framework

While using writing as a mechanism to draw out and construct knowledge around my personal experience of career transition, I encounter a recurring theme of incongruence. In seeking a theoretical framework to understand this experience and make sense of the incongruent sensation, I find it entirely natural to reconnect with the career guidance theories which underpinned my guidance practice over the years. I find it reassuring to re-evaluate what brought me to choose a helping profession and what influenced that decision. I initially focus on career choice theories to understand the origin and formation of my vocational identity, followed by a deeper examination of career theories relating specifically to transition and congruence to make sense of my more recent experiences.

Vocational Choice and Identity

Gottfredson (1996) asserts that career choice is not only an option but also a responsibility, describing how individuals conceptualise vocational inclinations as a range of preferences. She goes on to outline how one’s ultimate choice is reached through a systematic elimination of negative preferences rather than a proactive selection of the most positive. Other theorists note how genetics, abilities and personality also contribute to career decision-making (Gottfredson 1981; Herr & Cramer 1996; Holland 1997; Mitchell, Jones & Krumboltz 1979). Krumboltz’s Social Learning Theory of Career Decision Making outlines how the perception of what constitutes realistic career options is influenced by a set of
conditions, namely Genetics and Abilities, Environment, Learning Experiences and Task Approach Skills. Each has varying consequences on the occupational choice of the individual (Mitchell, Jones & Krumboltz 1979), for example a person’s genetics and abilities result in the inclusion or exclusion of occupations by virtue of physical or mental endowment. Krumboltz places particular emphasis on learning experiences, both direct and vicarious, in not only shaping occupational interests, values and choices (Dawis 1992), but also informing what is considered appropriate for gender or social class (Lent, Brown & Hackett 1996).

Task Approach Skills also influence an individual's perception of realistic career options, in that the possession of developed or undeveloped task approach skills makes the difference between having a sense of control and proactivity in determining a career, or remaining passive. Mitchell, Jones & Krumboltz (1979) identify key task approach skills as the capability to clarify values, seek information, evaluate consequences of career options, choose a preferred option, and plan in order to achieve it. Bandura’s (1977) perspective on career decision making is also characterised by a social cognitive approach. He emphasises the impact of self-efficacy on career decision making, stating how levels of self-efficacy effect not only whether a task will be undertaken, and how much effort will be put in, but also how long the effort will be sustained in the face of obstacles.

Holland (1997) maintains that a person’s choice of vocation is an expression of personality, reinforced by Herr & Cramer (1996) who hold that career decision making is a way a person expresses personal identity in a choice. Gottfredson
(1981) concurs, declaring that people seek roles which are compatible with their personal, psychological selves. A complex combination of factors determines how persons decide on a career, from perceptions about themselves, to their values, preferences and interests from their actual abilities and motivation, to their environment and personal circumstances. There is broad agreement in the field that occupational interests and choice are significantly influenced by learning experiences in general and social learning experiences in particular (Bandura 1977; Bandura 1989; Lent, Brown & Hackett 1996; Mitchell, Jones & Krumboltz 1979; Teeling 1997).

**My Career Configuration**

No single factor influenced my decision to eliminate various options from my range of preferences and possibilities, ultimately choosing the guidance counselling profession. I learned at a relatively young age, when my personal identity began to be formed, that I felt confident in and derived much satisfaction from social situations and interactions. As I progressed through the various developmental stages, my personal identity strengthened as I internalised generalised learning about myself through observing and making comparisons between myself and those in my social environment. This learning related mainly to interests, values and task efficacy (Bandura 1977; Mitchell, Jones & Krumboltz 1979; Teeling 1997). I attended a private convent school from the age of seven onwards, where instilled in me were Christian values and ideals of selflessness, consideration, humility, respect and the sacredness of the individual, as they permeated my daily existence. My interests and abilities tended towards the academic, but not exclusively so. I enjoyed English and languages in general,
particularly studying and writing prose and poetry. Playing music and singing also appealed, but insufficiently supported by talent to the extent that I failed to actively consider them as anything other than a leisure time interest. I am also endowed with creative ability in the area of sewing, knitting and crochet. While this did not culminate in a career, it provides ongoing source of pleasure and a creative outlet for me as I make christening robes, communion dresses and the odd wedding dress. I found it was social activities that stimulated me most. Debating, contributing to discussions, reading aloud to groups (in class or at Mass) all held pleasure for me. Where I was most at ease, however, was in a one-to-one environment, conversing, listening, preferably in a caring or supportive context. Despite the sense of affirmation I felt, I doubt that I understood at the time that such learning was serving as the foundation and pre-cursor for a future occupation.

Krumboltz maintains that values define what motivates a person, namely what s/he deems important and unimportant (Mitchell, Jones & Krumboltz 1979). For some individuals it will be money, for others status. For some, it may simply be fulfilling a need to do a particular task, such as help people, or to be in a particular environment, for instance outdoors. As an adult I consciously retain the values I learned as a young girl, not simply still holding, but prizing them. They persistently motivate me to seek out the inherent capacity for positive self-development that I discovered in myself and I believe is vested in each individual. In mid secondary school, when proactive identification of career preferences commenced in earnest, I tended strongly towards variants of the helping professions, particularly social work and counselling, perceiving them to be highly compatible with the
kind of person I believed and understood myself to be. Gottfredson (1981) affirms how an orientation towards careers aligned with our self-concept is characteristic of this life stage. Subsequent psychometric tests placed me in a personality-type classification of “Social”, serving as confirmation rather than surprise. At this point, I was gaining a deeper understanding that my self-beliefs meant I would find gratification in helping and would value ethical activities (Holland 1997). Accordingly, I was predictably drawn to counselling and helping professions which would provide opportunities to use my social competencies and perform services I valued.

These perceptions of job-self compatibility focused my job search as I moved out of adolescence (Gottfredson 1981) and directly into the workplace. Needing both an income and a foot on the career ladder, I initially took a post in human resource administration. However, I proactively sought a move at the earliest opportunity to a post which would involve direct public contact. My luck was in. In 1988, when FÁS was established, I was in with an application and delighted beyond telling to secure a role working face-to-face with unemployed people in an advisory/helping role. I can say, with complete honesty, that from the first day my twenty-one year old self walked into the FÁS office in D’Olier House, I felt at home. My subsequent, progressive career trajectory within the FÁS organisation, namely adult guidance practice followed by management of employment services, were affirmations of the identity I had developed from insight into my self-characteristics and my personal view of the world (Herr & Cramer 1996).
My early practice was augmented initially by skills development through self-motivated education in the form of extra-mural Diploma courses in counselling skills. This was followed later by professional qualification as an Adult Guidance Counsellor with NUI Maynooth, which was characterised by an emphasis on a client-centred counselling approach to career guidance. I did not need any convincing to apply such an approach in practice as it sat very easily with my personal values and self-concept. In my inner-space, I was so happy and fulfilled. Events in the inner-space, however, are shaped by happenings in the outer-space. The 1990s heralded a golden era for the adult guidance counselling sector. As a practitioner in the field, it was an exciting time to be in that world. In brief, unemployment growth across Europe led to a reorientation of EU structural and social funding towards modernisation of employment and training systems. In Ireland, the centrepiece of the response comprised the establishment of a dedicated placement and guidance service in FÁS, with a client-centred focus (Government of Ireland 1994).

As a student on the inaugural Adult Guidance diploma, I embraced the client-centred counselling model (Ali & Graham 1996) which formed the cornerstone of our applied practice. This phase-based model afforded a highly practical structure to use with unemployed clients of the Employment Services, particularly in the context of a requirement to bring such clients through a process of developing and implementing personal action plans based on an assessment of their needs. Accordingly, the client-centred counselling approach to career guidance was adopted as operational policy by enlightened corporate

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54 A more comprehensive account of these developments is provided in the next Chapter.
management in FÁS, becoming the Public Employment Service vocational guidance model of choice.

I integrated this theoretical and practical approach with my natural interpersonal style and my genuine love of dealing with people, contentedly providing guidance to clients for many years, until my progression to Employment Services management when I enthusiastically supported the development of the next generation of guidance staff. Thus, my vocational identity originated, intensified and consolidated. I felt I had achieved the perfect fit.

Disruption
Life is neither constant nor uniform. Individuals invariably face transitions and changes, be they age-related, whereby a person progresses through the natural life span, or event-related where a person is required to navigate specific circumstances or losses in their lives, such as unemployment, bereavement, etcetera. Regardless of the nature of the change, there is consensus among theorists that such changes impinge significantly on the individual, initiating a reappraisal of values, self-concept and relationship to others (Adam, Hayes & Hopson 1976; Ali & Graham 1996; Herr & Cramer 1996; Super 1957).

Donald Super’s Life-Space Life-Span Theory, and Life-Career Rainbow, locates occupational events and decisions in five age-related stages throughout an individual’s life (Ali & Graham 1996). Super’s model has a time perspective, based on looking at when important decision points occur (Herr & Cramer 1996). The subsequent IT developments to support the guidance process involved the construction of a bespoke client caseload management system mirroring the phases of the model.
stages traverse the biological life journey, commencing with birth (Growth Stage), through Exploration, Establishment and Maintenance, culminating with Decline. The Maintenance Stage is said to occur between the ages of 45 and 64 and is distinguished by Super as either a period of fruition and self-fulfilment, if earlier career goals have been achieved, or frustration if satisfactory vocational identity has not been established (Herr & Cramer 1996). I entered this phase in a state of noteworthy personal self-fulfilment, markedly happy with the life and career goals I had achieved during the previous years of the Establishment phase, particularly the latter stages. For me, the period of my early forties represented an apogee of private and vocational contentment. Little did I know that within a relatively short time, my cherished career would have vanished and my established vocational identity along with it. Ali & Graham (1996) caution how this concept of a stable maintenance stage may require revision, underlining how people in middle years can encounter periods of disequilibrium. A state of imbalance and flux in midlife resonates entirely with me.

Adam, Hayes & Hopson (1976) advance an alternative model linked to turning points in a person's life which require a transition from one way of thinking, doing or being to another. A six-phase process, conceptualised as the Transition Cycle, has each stage in the cycle characterised by an individual's emotions and reactions, from paralysis and disbelief, to ultimately seeking to make sense of what happened and trying to see how it fits into one's life. The six stages are as follows: Immobilisation, Minimisation, Self-Doubt, Accepting Reality, Testing and Searching for Meaning. Ali & Graham (1996) alert that not only can significant life events occur at any point in a person's life, but also time spent working through
the process of accepting change and moving to the next stage will vary from individual to individual. Hence, no notion of duration or timeline is associated with either any of the discrete stages in the Transition Cycle, or the process in its entirety. Adam, Hayes & Hopson’s (1976) model represents the most authentic reflection of my personal experience of a transitional crisis in my working life. As I engage with the model, on this occasion in the role of client as opposed to practitioner, images of myself jump out at me. The various stages both exemplify the mental and emotional states through which I have passed and alert me to what I have yet to face. How strange to perceive my lived experience in the pages of my familiar old adult guidance textbooks. As practitioner and manager, I previously watched and supported clients and staff through these stages, but now, as my lived reality, they reverberate with new meaning.

Social research, particularly qualitative enquiry, is a mechanism to not only explore experiences, but to understand them and learn from them. There is much meaning to be made, by me and others, from my experience of disruption and transition. My Two Vodkas dialogue, as a creative form of written enquiry, serves as a meaning making tool. Reece & Speedy (2014) wish that what they consider to be a burgeoning attentiveness in general to the craft of writing, would likewise extend to social research concerning itself with engrossing forms of writing. I will now attempt to illustrate how that aspiration might be fulfilled, providing my perspective of disruption and transition through my Two Vodkas dialogue:
Two Vodkas ‘n Coke: “You’ve Been Reassigned”

~ Alrigh’?
~ Grand, you’vE a face like a wet weekend but...
~ Well, somethin’s after happenin’ to me ... I’ve been activated
~ Activated?
~ Yeah, right outta the FÁS
~ The one in the Industrial Estate? The Baldoyle?
~ Yeah, tha’ one. They’ve only gone and joined up with the Social ... they’re callin’ it the NEES
~ Jesus, a marriage
~ Shotgun weddin’, more like
~ Some couple, alrigh’ – on yeer “NEES”, haha
~ Just told me over the phone ... the FÁS-head ... nothin’ from the human resources or whatnot ...
~ Get away, no letter nor nothin’?
~ Not a bit of it, just phoned me up, dead impersonal like, and said “you’ve been reassigned”... on me Easter holidays an’ all .... I nearly got sick
~ That’s awful, a FÁS-head too, one o’ yer own?
~ Tha’ made it worse. Ye’d think they’d be lookin’ out for me
~ Ah, sure they all probably hadta ingratiate themselves wi’ the new head honchos ... make it look like they weren’t part o’ them dirty oul FÁS crowd, off on flights and gettin’ their hair done an’ all
~ Sure we’re gettin’ our just desserts now. They’ve banished us to the Social
~ Still but ... there’ll be good times to come, wha’? Yeh must have loads of ideas to share wi’ this new crowd. They’ll be dyin’ to hear them, you wi’ all yer qualifications an’ experience an’ tha’?

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56 Government of Ireland 2012: At the time of transition the working title for the service concept was the National Employment & Entitlement Service (NEES). It was subsequently branded and formally launched as INTREO.
Speaking Up for Guidance:  
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~ You’d think. Experience doesn’t seem to count for an’thin’ there. They jus’ have grades. “Generic”, they call it. Not a chance they’d listen to yer wan from the FÁS in anyway. They’re all rotten an’ corrupt, don’t ya know?

~ God no, sure yis were hurt as much as anyone by the scandals. Yis were gutted

~ I actually feel like I’ve lost me identity. How’s tha’ for a bit o’ self-pity then? Comparin’ meself to a refugee. I s’pose I mean me professional identity

~ Don’t be so hard on yerself. I dunno how yis processed all tha’ trauma. They don’t really believe tha’ everyone in the FÁS was dodgy, do they?

~ They act like they do. Paintin’ us all with the same brush. Operatin’ on the basis of out-group homogeneity. There’s fierce corporate out-group bias against the FÁS

~ What’s tha’ when it’s a’ home?

~ It’s when yeh classify people who aren’t in the in-group, the Social, as bein’ similar to one another – usin’ reference terms like “they’re all like that”. Yeh can’t mention where yeh worked before or who yeh really are. Bit like a Jew, wha’?

~ Like ye hafta be part o’ the in-crowd to get listened to? Some unenlightened attitude

~ Even to be let speak … Yeh better believe it. Sure, doesn’t it come right from the top … it’d hafta. If the top brass didn’t tolerate tha’ sorta carry-on, or repeat tha’ kinda stuff themselves, it couldn’t persist

~ Zero tolerance, yer only man!

~ I wish. It’s a funny thing, but … all the times I useta be givin’ the guidance, an’ usin’ tha’ Bereavement Cycle to try to understand how people felt about losin’ their jobs …. Now I’m mourning meself an’ no one’s supportin’ me.

~ I’m there for ya

~ O’ course y’are. No one supportin’ me in work I mean. Y’know some o’ me own’ve been as bad, if no’ worse. There I was, just tryin’ to operate in me new reality, when one of ‘em actually accused me o’ goin’ over to “the Dark Side”. Tha’ was some challenge to me integrity I can tell yeh 57 I’m no’ the better of it since

~ Ah, yer like an aul’ Brian Friel character

~ Ye wha’?

57 Fieldnotes: “Planning Games” to design IT system to support new business processes
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~ Yeah, tha’ Fintan O’Toole58 fella, him tha’ writes in The Irish Times, he said tha’ Friel’s best characters were *always* discoverin’ tha’ the world they thought was theirs had no place for them

~ *Maybe he worked in the FÁS, then?*

~ Not tha’ I know of, I think he just understood ordinary people

~ *Maybe he was unemployed…*

~ Speakin’ o’ out-groups, wha’? … “the unemployed”

~ O’ course, the “out-group” attitude isn’t saved just for the FÁS … the Social are always talkin’ abou’ “the unemployed” … as if they were an homogenous group

~ Well sure don’t the Government think none o’ them are bothered workin’… or else they’re on the “hey diddle diddle”? Always quotin’ fraud an’ abuse…

~ *Sure, isn’t tha’ wha’ all that “activation” discourse is abou’… “tacklin’ low-intensity jobsearch”59 … slappin’ on penalties … unemployed people no’ makin’ enough effort*60

~ Is it, but?

~ *For sure. All them “active labour market policies”. Regulatin’ people with tha’ “work-first, any work” approach. When they should be enablin’ them*

~ Enablin’?

~ Yeah, providin’ education, trainin’, an’ access to jobs an’ supports like childcare. Supportin’ people, like

~ Is it no’ better to get righ’ off the dole61, but? Isn’t any job better than none?

~ *That’s the discourse alrigh’, wha’ the Government keeps repeatin’. Bu’ some research revealed tha’ many benefit claimants were happier livin’ on benefits to takin’ jobs they found unappealin’62 even if their income was increased*

~ So a bad job could be worse than no job63. Nothin’ as bad as no’ bein’ happy in work, eh? Not fittin’ in like … no’ bein’ congruent … like yerself

~ *A square peg, stuck in a round hole: I’ve been activated, get me outta here!*

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58 O’Toole 2015
59 Government of Ireland 2015, p9
60 Anaf et al 2013
61 “the dole” is a colloquial expression for unemployment payments
62 Dunn 2014; Leach et al 2010
63 Leach et al 2010


**Congruence and Fit**

The significance of person-environment harmony is well recognised. The importance of an accurate “fit” or match has been accentuated by many theorists in relation not only to initial career choice and point of entry (Gottfredson 1996; Holland 1997), but also to subsequent job performance and satisfaction (Cable & Judge 1996; Caplan 1987; Dawis 1992; Holland 1997). Indeed, Furnham (2012) deems the direct relationship of satisfaction to the fit between demands of a job and characteristics of a person to be one of the oldest ideas in psychology.

Holland (1997) asserts that a choice of vocation is an expression of personality. His RIASEC Theory of Vocational Personalities and Work Environments is intended for use as a predictor of the outcome of person-environment interactions. He maintains that a given vocational personality type theoretically fits with a given type of work environment, asserting that persons feel comfortable in the “correct” environment. This does not signify, however, that person-job compatibility transpires by chance or is attributable to mere good fortune, as Holland (1997) contends that people instinctively pursue such fits, while Cable & Judge (1996) opine that individuals select environments that match their needs. Gottfredson (1996) and Holland (1997) enumerate these matching requirements as interests, personality type and self-concept, affirming how individuals search for environments which will enable them to exercise their skills and abilities, in addition to expressing their attitudes and values. Caplan (1987) and Holland (1997) observe additionally how people find such compatible environments reinforcing and satisfying, resulting in stability of behaviour. In contrast,

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64 Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional
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incongruence or incompatibility is said to occur when a personality type is required to interact with an environment that provides opportunities and rewards conflicting with the person's preferences and abilities. Holland (1997) notes how the greater the discrepancy between a person's personality pattern and the environmental pattern, the more dissatisfying and destructive the interactions become. Cable & Judge (1996) accentuate a direct correlation between mismatches and negative attitude, lack of commitment and high turnover, while Caplan (1987) furthermore emphasises the link between environmental incongruity and stress, level of personal well-being and behaviour.

Holland at Work: Applying Holland's RIASEC Theory to an Organisational Setting

Holland's RIASEC schematic represents psychological resemblances among six defined personality types and environments, plus their interactions. The six types are distinguished as follows: Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional. Each type is characterised by interests, competencies, life goals and values, vocational preferences, self-beliefs and problem-solving styles. A person's relationship to an environment can be assessed according to the degree of congruence or compatibility as defined by the model. Highest levels of congruence are said to occur in a situation where a personality type is in a matching (or adjacent) environment, for example a Realistic person in a Realistic or Conventional environment. Such persons in congruent environments are encouraged to express their favourite behaviour repertoires (Holland 1997) and are rewarded or reinforced for displaying their natural traits and values (Caplan 1987). By contrast, highest degrees of incongruence occur where a personality
type is in an opposite (or non-adjacent) environment, for example a Social person in Conventional or Realistic environments. In such cases, a person cannot flourish in the environment as it does not provide the type of opportunities and rewards needed by that personality type.

Holland’s methods of assessment categorise me as a Social personality type. This connotes my preference for social occupations and situations which provide opportunities to engage in helping, teaching, understanding, listening, human relations, counselling and also to associate with other people who share my beliefs and values. In addition, it classifies me as apt to be empathic, idealistic, patient, persuasive, tactful and understanding. Likewise, a Social environment is characterised by an atmosphere which fosters social competencies, encourages people to see themselves as understanding, co-operative and liking to help others. Critically, it rewards people for the display of social values and attitudes. FÁS Employment Services was, I contend, a predominantly Social environment, reinforcing and valuing social personality types who were client-centred and empathic and rewarding people for the display of social values and attitudes. Me and FÁS were, in a word, congruent.

Incongruence: A Square Peg in a Round Hole

The Social FÁS environment stands as a marked juxtaposition with the utmost Conventional environment that I argue constitutes the Civil Service in general and DSP in particular. According to Holland’s theory, Conventional environments foster conventional competencies and achievements, rewarding people for conformity and orderliness, encouraging people to see the world in simple,
stereotyped ways, and dealing with people in a controlling manner. I experience the environment as traditional, old-school, observing the reinforcement and rewarding of the following traits as indicated by Holland (1997): conforming, inflexible, obedient and closed to new beliefs or practices. Holland details how such an environment attracts Conventional personality types, who are predisposed to value conformity and obedience and like to work within the structure of an organisation or institution. He also identifies how Conventional environments, in the context of a population dominated by Conventional personality types, follow established rules, practices and procedures, look to authority for advice and have difficulty synthesising information from diverse sources. From both a theoretical and experiential perspective, there are clear indications of incongruence between me and my environment, due to lack of positive reinforcement for my beliefs, attitudes and values and dearth of opportunity to utilise my skills and abilities based on the low value placed on them. As a person with high autonomy needs and preferences, I find this environment, which fails to provide opportunity for participation in decisions, or to generate innovative responses to unemployment, very stressful (Caplan 1987; Holland 1987).

**Life Stage and Congruence**

Just as life stage played a part in my vocational development, having a bearing on my initial career choice and figuring largely in my later transition, so too it features in my current circumstances having relevance to congruence (Ali & Graham 1996; Herr & Cramer 1996; Holland 1997; Super 1957). Holland (1997) draws attention to the importance of the life stage, positing how, as people get
older, they seek increased coherence and integration between their values, interests, personalities and the work environment. Moreover, not alone do people seek a better fit, but their interests become more differentiated over the life span. This clarity he attributes to experience, resulting in older people having more definite occupational role preferences, understanding also that the coherence of a person’s work history increases with each decade. Holland (1997) further signals how the cumulative effect of a person’s work experience over the life course tends to lead to a stability of personality type, conceptualising such career continuity as “snowballing”, describing how it focuses a person’s self-view, hence their career, through selecting a series of jobs in compatible environments. This accords with Hall & Hall (1976) who outline how the reciprocal interaction of an individual with successive congruent environments, leads to a series of success-satisfaction cycles.

My own career has been largely uninterrupted over the past thirty-one years. Even my later university studies were completed in my own time while in full-time employment throughout. My one and only hiatus was a five-month maternity leave where I resumed full-time work immediately afterwards. This total duration, combined with the fact that it was almost entirely spent in what I experienced as the particularly satisfying, client-centred guidance environment of FÁS, while it

\[65\] Interestingly, from a gender perspective, Holland characterises homemaking as a vocational choice in itself, asserting that women with personality types and preferences consistent with the homemaking environment and role will experience congruence and fit and hence “career” satisfaction. He states, furthermore, that such individuals would have less work involvement and less job satisfaction outside the compatible environment, namely the home. While Holland does not refer to women switching between unpaid work in the home, and paid work outside the home, it appears the snowballing concept similarly applies. Therefore, once the person-environment fit is correct in each case, a combination of both vocational choices throughout the life course would be equally fulfilling.

\[66\] A four-year BA (Hons) Education & Training
served to firmly establish and consolidate my vocational identity, appears equally to be amplifying my current discontent. Holland (1997) submits that a congruent work environment encourages a person’s vocational satisfaction, their level of occupational achievement, and stabilises the direction of their vocational choice. My experience bears this out. Not only was I fulfilled in FÁS, but I sought and accomplished career advancement along a defined path that was Employment Services. This cumulative effect of my work experience, built up my professional reputation, reinforcing my identity over so many years, providing an environment where my abilities, dispositions and traits were both exercised and rewarded.

Reflecting on this, and constructing knowledge, contributes to my understanding about the levels of my present dissatisfaction, as my previous compatible environment contrasts so sharply with my present discordant one. It is quite apparent that the longer my career snowballed in a congruent environment, the more difficulty I would face changing jobs in any event, not to mind being landed unexpectedly in a different career, completely at odds with my self-perception. As a practitioner I had direct experience of such a situation, being one of a two-person project team who managed the collective redundancy in 1995 following the closure of the Irish Press. I and another practitioner in FÁS counselled the NUJ members, many of whom experienced and expressed emotions akin to bereavement, having been employed in the company for in excess of twenty years. As their careers had snowballed in a congruent environment, which had used traditional tools and methods, they found themselves out in a world which

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67 National Union of Journalists
did not require their skills and expertise and where they saw no place for themselves.

Fish Out of Water

Once again, the point I have reached in my life proves significant, as Ali & Graham (1996) identify life stage as one of the factors influencing a person's self-concept. I feel like a square peg in a round hole, perceiving myself as a guidance professional with an enabling, client-centred ethos yet finding myself in a position where regulation, control and punishment are promoted and valued. Certainly I did not choose, and would have refused had it been offered, such an option. Compounding the lack of choice is the matter of the job proper and its daily execution. The individual tasks demanded are not onerous, generic as they are, presenting little challenge from an expertise and competence perspective. That in itself is a source of dismay, and a cause of skill atrophy, lack of fulfilment and an intense wish for the availability of an alternative.

In addition to the lack of intellectual stimulus, another major difficulty I encounter is the sense of demotivation that consumes me in attempting to visualise myself as a generic Civil Servant. I am not that person. I don't want to be that person. I find myself substantiating Gottfredson's (1996) claim that occupations, even where congruent with personal abilities, will be rejected where they conflict with public self-concept. Correspondingly, Super's Life-Space Life-Span and theory of career development (Ali & Graham 1996; Herr & Cramer 1996) reinforces the direct relationship of self-concept to an individual's degree of occupational satisfaction, noting how a job which under-utilises perceived ability will likewise
lead to dissatisfaction. The deficiency of opportunity for cerebral exertion only exacerbates my prevailing fish out of water sensation.

The Philae Awakes

Where am I now? Derailed by my transition and grieving for the career I loved and lost, I perceive I became disconnected from knowing. This inspection of me and my journey, through the lens of career theories, serves somehow to reconnect me, framing my impression of ill fit, allied to deep frustration at my involuntary transition, as plausible and comprehensible. I feel like the Philae spacecraft that landed in shadow on a comet, going into hibernation when its solar-powered battery ran down. It “woke up” months later, when it encountered sunlight, gathered data, and suddenly started transmitting to Earth. I was similarly knocked off course by the meteor shower that was the deconstruction of FÁS, but I’m emerging from the dark shadow cast by my violent transition. I am constructing knowledge in preparation to transmit it.

Using Adam, Hayes & Hopson’s (1976) Transition Cycle, I track my laborious progress from incomprehension through despair and denial. As the ramifications of the events of the last few years finally begin to sink in, I’m grappling with my new, incongruous reality, struggling to accept it, identifying completely with Behar’s notion of “between identities” (1996, p162). Despite the fact that ahead of me is an as yet indeterminate occupational future, about which I am apprehensive, I am determined to advance and progress, with no desire to succumb to fatalism. While clear that I wish to take control, re-establish agency in
my vocational life and find a resolution to my incongruence, my path to resolution is, for the moment, less well-defined.

I comprehend disequilibrium as a natural consequence of living an incongruent existence. I am not going mad. Thus, as with my journaling, “running” internal dialogue and Vodka ‘n Coke dialogic others, my reactions and emotions are normalised, helping me to regain my lost balance. However, I have further to travel on this meaning making journey. Understanding my daily presence in what I experience as a paradoxical state to be the basis for my dissonance, does not adequately illuminate the flightpath co-ordinates of this voyage to paradox. Refracting the experience from a career guidance perspective once again, I see the fundamental conflict between the polar opposite constructs of supportive, client-centred manpower policies and regulatory, punitive activation policies at the crux of such a paradoxical state. For me, it’s a state of actuality, my “truth”, which I designate “conditional unconditionality”.

On a more established emotional footing and having reclaimed my voice, I feel equipped to take a wider-angle view of the situatedness of my passage to disharmony. My experiences have been framed by a social context of evolution of welfare and manpower policies, threaded through with guidance. My enquiry into my incidence of conditional unconditionality necessitates travelling that half-century policy journey. Accordingly we now step out of inner-space into the outer-space of the social and policy world.
Chapter 4 ~ Stepping Out: Outer Space, A Wide-Angle View

Unemployment: The Common Denominator

Unemployment, the universal problem of our time (Thatcher 1983), has long occupied the minds of citizens, policy-makers and Governments alike. Problematised, as unemployment so often is, or more often presented simply as a statistic, serves to diminish the significance of the human lives behind the percentage rates. For a person without a job, however, unemployment is much more than a phenomenon, a theoretical construct, or a dispassionate policy concern; it is highly personal and a lived reality (Hearne 2014). Keeping the personal dimension in sharp focus, Wilson (1971) famously declared that for an unemployed person the rate of unemployment is 100 percent.

Simultaneously a personal issue, a social concern and an important concept in economics, unemployment has undoubted political significance which has been widely acknowledged. Indeed, the popularity of many political parties has been fuelled by promises to resolve unemployment, or at least reduce it. Colourfully described by Odiorne as an “emotional gong, to be rung with resounding effects during a political campaign” (1964, p13), the problematic status and electoral salience (Murphy 2012) of unemployment continues to be documented, with Bond (1988) noting how, for the Government of the day, it is a problem by default. By contrast, some Governments downplay the scale of the problem, deflecting

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68 The growth in popularity of the Nazi Party was attributed substantially to its promise of a resolution to unemployment. Hitler: Germany’s Fatal Attraction. Discovery History Channel. Television Broadcast 1st January 2016 @ 23:00
criticism of their economic policies by ridiculing doubting or dissenting voices. In 1971, Sir John Eden decried the United Kingdom’s enormous obsession with unemployment (Evans & Taylor 1996), describing the ease with which one could talk oneself into a position of gloom and despondency, which sentiments were eerily echoed in Ireland thirty-five years later with accusations of doom merchant directed towards concerned commentators alleged to be talking down Ireland’s economic success (Ahern 2007). In a similar vein, only this year, Howlin (2016) levelled charges of crying wolf at those suggesting Ireland’s economy could encounter trouble in the years ahead.

In the broadest terms, unemployment rates are determined by the compared dynamics of labour demand and the proportion of the working-age population who wish to work. At its simplest, unemployment can be said to be unutilised labour (Piana 2001), with countries using different determinants to measure the rate. In Ireland, the Government uses the Live Register as the main short-term trend indicator of unemployment (CSO 2015). As such, exit statistics from the Live Register are the objective measures used by the Government to verify how effectively they are managing the unemployment issue. While Governments and policies may be concerned about the individuals who are unemployed, Herr & Cramer (1996) identify how macro concerns about the collective effects of

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69 Sir John Eden, UK Minister of State for Industry (Conservative), reportedly speaking in Sheffield. Quoted in Leader’s speech (Labour Party), Brighton 1971 by Harold Wilson. Available at http://www.britishpoliticalspeech.org/speech-archive.htm?speech=169 accessed 31/12/2015 @17:36

70 As primarily an administrative count (monthly series) of the numbers of people registering for specified statutory payments with the Department of Social Protection, the Live Register is not a specific measure of unemployment. Other labour market data, such as information on numbers in employment, various occupations, etc has been gathered and published since September 1997 via a Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS). Prior to this an annual Labour Force Survey (LFS) was conducted in April of each year. QNHS data is used to inform national and international economic and labour market policy (CSO 2015).
unemployment result in its reduction becoming a national priority. The Irish Government has been similarly concerned with unemployment reduction ever since active manpower policy was first defined in the 1960s with the aim of achieving full employment, enunciating a clear vision for the role of guidance counselling in the achievement of this objective (NIEC 1964). Similarly throughout the following decades, with growing unemployment in OECD countries, successive Irish Government policy responses focused on reforms to effect a “major assault” (Government of Ireland 1991, p7) on unemployment, with an increased emphasis placed on the role of guidance, in particular a client-centred approach.

The most recent series of Government policy statements on Labour Market Activation, commencing 2012, set a number of explicit goals in the management of unemployment, envisaging "the provision of appropriate career guidance support" (Government of Ireland 2012, p20) as part of the client engagement process and thus part of the solution, likewise the IMF Executive Board. Thus, not alone unemployment, but guidance, has featured as a common denominator.

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71 The National Industrial Economic Council (NIEC) was the predecessor to the NESC (National Economic & Social Council), established in 1973. It advises the Taoiseach on strategic policy issues relating to sustainable economic, social and environmental development in Ireland and produces reports with long-term analyses of key economic and social development issues. Its members are drawn from a range of representative organisations

72 Target of 75,000 long-term unemployed into employment by 2015

73 IMF 2013: In 2010 Ireland was approved for the EU-IMF three-year extended arrangement under the Extended Fund Facility (EFF) which necessitated entering into a fiscal programme and agreeing a national recovery plan. In 2013, Ireland exited the programme without requesting a successor programme and the Post-Programme Monitoring (PPM) process was initiated in accordance with Fund policy, providing for continued monitoring of Ireland’s policies. Even in approving Ireland’s exit from the EU-IMF fiscal programme, Ms. Christine Lagarde Managing Director and Chair of the IMF Executive Board prioritised reduction of unemployment referencing a requirement for improved employment services.
in the development of manpower policy since its foundation fifty years ago. We can now sit back and listen to B&T as they reflect on this historical journey:

Two Vodkas 'n Coke: “From Construction to Deconstruction”

~ “Welfare” … strange name for a system tha’ doesn’t seem to have yer welfare at heart …

~ It’s built on a foundation o’ moral judgement, tha’’s why … tha’ discourse o’ deservin’ an’ undeservin’ … goes back to the Poor Laws

~ I though’ we hafta thank Winston Churchill for labour exchanges an’ welfare …

~ From 1909 on, yeah … them exchanges were intended as an Employment Service bu’ ended up almost exclusively doin’ unemployment payments

~ Ah, the precursor to the oul’ “Social” …

~ … tha’ thread o’ suspicion … so deeply ingrained in the welfare psyche … policies predicated on a belief tha’ jobseekers are indolent or fraudulent … or both … support based on conditionality… ye’d be sick o’ tha’ discourse

~ Where yeh satisfy qualifyin’ conditions to get yer money, yeh mean? Wha’ abou’ welfare as an unconditional social right, based on citizenship?

~ Nah, forget rights … citizenship’s been commodified, it’s all abou’ social contracts, work first, an’ the active citizen

Many authors note the shift from a concept of social rights as unconditional to one based on obligations: Aasen et al 2014; Bothfeld & Betzelt 2013; Brodkin 2014; Dahlstedt 2013; Evers & Guillemand 2013; Handler 2003; LeGrand 2003; Lister 2011; Marston 2008; Powell 2002

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24 Relief provision under the UK Poor Laws of the 1800s differentiated between deserving (unable to find work) poor and undeserving (idle) poor.
25 Keenan 2006; p198; Keenan 2008, p194: Winston Churchill’s Labour Exchanges Act 1909 established a National Employment Service for employers to notify vacancies and unemployed persons to seek work. Around one hundred local Labour Exchanges were open in Ireland by March 1910
26 McCashin 2004, p20
27 Brodkin 2014
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~ Terms an’ conditions apply!

~ Tha’ principle o’ mandation conveys a belief tha’ welfare claimants are lackin’ in motivation to look for work ... need coercion\(^{78}\) ... can’t choose to act in their own interests \(^{79}\) ... an’ when tha’ emanates from the top down ... Taoiseach\(^{80}\) himself sayin’ he wants to stamp ou’ “unemployment DNA running through some households”\(^{81}\) ... how insultin’ ...

~ How judgemental! The conditionality o’ activation is the polar opposite o’ the client-centred approach where the client value isn’t dependent on “acceptable” behaviour

~ Tha’s why it’s called Unconditional Positive Regard\(^{82}\) ... look, the objectives o’ welfare an’ manpower policy have always been polarised! Wha’ abou’ an oul’ history lesson? ... ... it all started in the 1960s ...

~ Wha’? Flower Power?

~ No, Manpower... picture this ... it’s 1964 an’ the OECD is all interested in manpower policies ... gettin’ countries to set up an Employment Service to provide vocational guidance an’ occupational counsellin’\(^{83}\) ...

~ Wha’ did Ireland do?

~ Took notice straight away ... NIEC\(^{84}\) did a report for Government, recommended providin’ staff trained in up-to-date placement an’ guidance procedures, a single agency for all functions, an’ the dissociation o’ the Employment Service from the Dept. o’ Social Welfare ... because tha’ operation was so unsatisfactory ...

~ They took it out o’ the Social? We’ve come full circle in a half century ... constructin’ an’ Employment Service an’ deconstructin’ it again. Imagine puttin’ it back inta the Social, what made ‘em think the polar opposites would attract this time?

~ Corporate memory loss maybe? ... anyway, next comes the 1965 White Paper on Manpower Policy an’ the establishin’ o’ a new Dept. of Labour\(^{85}\) in 1966 to implement the manpower policy an’ develop\(^{86}\) the placement an’ guidance functions

~ They sure took the oul’ guidance seriously back then ... really seemed to care abou’ people ...

\(^{78}\) Anaf et al 2013  
\(^{79}\) Marston 2008  
\(^{80}\) “Taoiseach” is the Prime Minister of Ireland  
\(^{81}\) Kenny 2013  
\(^{82}\) Rogers 1951  
\(^{83}\) OECD 1964  
\(^{84}\) NIEC 1964  
\(^{85}\) The Department was established under Minister Patrick Hillery, a medical doctor. He was formerly Minister for Education, later the first Irish European Commissioner following Ireland’s successful entry to the European Economic Community, and later still served as 6th President of Ireland  
\(^{86}\) An Industrial Psychologist was appointed by the Minister for this purpose
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~ It’s characteristic o’ Ireland, well it useta be, to focus on the human angle ... a person-centred philosophy ... from day one o’ settin’ up an employment service Agnew\(^77\) said tha’ there would be no question o’ havin’ an impersonal, institutional approach towards manpower policy ... as its primary aim would be to enable workers to develop as individuals

~ There was a client-centred perspective, eh!

~ Wha’ a different discourse today ... anyway, next came a dedicated employment service agency, the National Manpower Service (NMS), wi’ an integral occupational guidance service\(^88\) (here’s a grea’ picture o’ the front window o’ the d’Olier St. Office in Dublin 1974)\(^89\)

~ An’ sure we joined the EEC soon after tha’ ...

~ Yeah, 1974 ... an’ could access tha’ European Social Fund (ESF) money ... then a series o’ reports were published on Manpower policy in OECD countries, includin’ Ireland\(^90\), an’ the Minister for Labour got the NESC\(^91\) to comment

~ Reports abou’ reports!

~ Well the NESC were really strong on how the economic an’ social dimensions o’ manpower policy were of equal importance \(^92\) ... an’ how the placement function wasn’t to overlay the vocational guidance role ... an’ again insistin’ tha’ the NMS would be an executive agency outside the control o’ the civil service ... couldn’t have ‘em workin’ towards the Minister, wha?

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\(^77\) Agnew 1967 Note: In 1968 An Chomhairle Oiliúna (AnCO) Industrial Training Authority was established to provide and promote provision of training to adults, apprentices, unemployed and redundant workers. John A. Agnew subsequently served as Director General of AnCO from 30 July 1970 to 31 October 1982

\(^88\) The National Manpower Service (NMS) was the predecessor to FÁS, and was established in 1970 under the then Department of Labour. A specialised role of Occupational Guidance Officer (OGO) existed in the service, a quite different role to the Placement Officers whose remit was to provide employees for industrial sectors. **Personal note:** When the last former OGO retired around 10 years ago (having transferred into FÁS), he gifted me one of his original textbooks from his OGO studies, knowing my abiding interest in the area. It is a bright pink volume from 1968 by Barrie Hopson & John Hayes entitled “The Theory and Practice of Vocational Guidance”. It remains proudly in my bookcase, a treasured possession.


\(^90\) OECD 1974

\(^91\) NESC 1975

\(^92\) NESC 1975, pp5, 7, 37
~ Definitely didn’t want the Social back in on the act … they saw how tha’ had gone the first time …

~ well the NMS certainly distanced themselves from the Social … a strategy o’ minimisin’ tha’ relationship, no compulsory registration wi’ NMS … meanwhile, back in Europe, unemployment levels are risin’ … discourse shiftin’ from passive payment o’ benefits to active approaches \(^\text{93}\) … an’ early intervention wi’ people who become unemployed

~ The YEA \(^\text{94}\) was set up aswell … they were good developments, but … plenty o’ people needin’ help an’ wantin’ a chance to participate in trainin’ or education opportunities. Active measures didn’t mean activation as we know it …

~ Unfortunately but, the policy discourse changed, an’ the enablin’ system o’ active measures morphed into a regulatory one o’ mutual obligations an’ people havin’ ta take up opportunities to keep qualifyin’ for unemployment benefits

~ Way to go! Turnin’ a positive inta a negative … Governments an’ policies seem to react in strange ways to unemployment rates …

~ Even Ireland was forced inta givin’ it a go eventually. The 1986 White Paper on Manpower Policy introduced a Direct Action Programme for long-term unemployed. Remember 1987 an’ JobSearch \(^\text{95}\)? People forced by the Social … the NMS dragged inta interviewin’ ‘em … an’ the AnCO runnin’ courses …

~ Same welfare discourse o’ lazy, scroungin’ jobseekers?

~ Always … Dr. Michael Woods, the then Minister for Social Welfare, said JobSearch’d identify those who weren’t genuinely seekin’ work \(^\text{96}\)

~ Did no one object to tha’ language, but?

~ Ryan said it wasn’t the happiest o’ language to use when talkin’ abou’ people who were the victims of the single greatest injustice in the country today, unemployment \(^\text{97}\) … an’ he agreed wi’ you …

~ In wha’ way?

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\(^\text{93}\) Based on provision of labour market programmes involving education, training or subsidised employment

\(^\text{94}\) The Youth Employment Agency (YEA) was set up in 1982 to deal specifically with unemployment in the under-25 age group

\(^\text{95}\) JobSearch was a Government directive that 150,000 people on the Live Register were to be put through the compulsory jobsearch process and “offered” scheme or jobsearch training opportunities (from 1 April to 31 December 1987)

\(^\text{96}\) Woods 1987

\(^\text{97}\) Ryan 1987
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~ Abou’ the potential for somethin’ positive bein’ turned into a negative ... though’ the terms o’ reference were very one-sided an’ judgemental for somethin’ tha’ oughta be enlightened an’ people-oriented

~ Go Senator!

~ An’ he doubted the underlyin’ motives ... said tha’ the positive philosophy presented as bein’ the motivatin’ force was lost in wha’ looked like a witch hunt for people who weren’t, get this, the deservin’ poor!

~ He saw the wolf in sheep’s clothin’ ... musta thought he’d landed back in the condemnatory days o’ the Poor Laws ...

~ An’ Stagg challenged tha’ it was harrassin’ people off the Live Register. Neither him nor Ryan advocated the “work-first” approach ... said it was fundamental tha’ people shouldn’ be forced inta jobs tha’ bore no relationship to their skills, trainin’ an’ aspirations

Criticisms of the “work-first” approach abound, including claims it: bumps lesser-qualified persons off the labour ladder (NESC 2011), doesn’t promote investment in human capital (Van Berkel 2010), equates to social discipline (Brodkin & Marston 2013), exempts employers from having to offer good conditions or competitive wages (Boland & Griffin 2015), overlooks the importance of psychosocial job quality (Zeach et al 2010), does not always represent the best response to long-term unemployment, hence should be balanced with other active labour market policies (e.g. a train-first approach) in a constrained labour market (European Commission 2013), and is anti-competitive, subordinating the development of the person to the development of the economy (Torfing & Triantafillou 2013)

~ Ireland musta forgot its client-centred beliefs, tha’ “work-first” approach conflicts directly

~ Ah, bu’ the JobSearch wasn’t a resoundin’ success ... a “blunt instrument” tha’ drew negative publicity due to the compulsion attached, an’ it didn’t achieve higher placements than would’ve occurred naturally

~ So, activation was shown not to work ... an’ they’re tryin’ it again ... isn’t tha’ the definition o’ madness ... doin’ the same thing an’ expectin’ a different result?

98 Stagg 1987
99 Bond 1988, p204
100 ESF Evaluation Unit 1996, p25
101 Origin unknown, although widely attributed to Albert Einstein
They tried doin’ somethin’ different the followin’ year, 1988. The FÁS was set up ... functions o’ three organisations\textsuperscript{102} ...

Guidance an’ placement o’ NMS/YEA an’ trainin’ o’ AnCO?

Yep, however still a backdrop o’ risin’ unemployment, an’ us headin’ into the 1990s ... so the European Council reoriented their fundin’ programmes\textsuperscript{103} to modernise employment, trainin’ an’ education systems so EU member states could develop active labour market policies

Ah, so instead o’ a programme-led response ...

... they recommended a client-centred approach ... developin’ a personal action plan based on a professional assessment o’ individual needs ...

Highly dependent on the competences o’ the counsellor o’ course ... so a renewed emphasis on guidance an’ Ireland reclaimin’ its client-centred identity!

The objective o’ the national development programme o’ the time was to ensure effective operation o’ active labour market policies an’ adopt a coherent Programme Framework to promote them ... includin’ counsellin’ an’ placement services\textsuperscript{104}

Did tha’ framework happen?

Yeah, the Dept of Enterprise & Employment\textsuperscript{105} developed it an’ announced tha’ increased operational effectiveness o’ the National Employment Service would form the centrepiece o’ the response ... tha’ meant establishin’ a dedicated guidance service in the FÁS ... an’ there was a clamour by NESF\textsuperscript{106} for supportive labour activation for long-term unemployed\textsuperscript{107}

So Local Employment Service Networks were set up in disadvantaged areas?

Didn’t think the FÁS could do supportive activation ...

Musta been confusin’ them wi’ the Social ...

\textsuperscript{102} FÁS Training & Employment Authority was established by the 1987 Labour Services Act, a merger of NMS, AnCO and YEA. It was given statutory responsibility for the functions of the previous 3 organisations

\textsuperscript{103} Prior to this EU structural fund initiatives had focused predominantly on measures like social employment schemes

\textsuperscript{104} Government of Ireland 1994,p37

\textsuperscript{105} under whose aegis FÁS operated

\textsuperscript{106} The National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) was a government-appointed social partnership body which provided advice on economic and social policies, especially those intended to achieve greater equality and social inclusion in Irish society. It was abolished in 2010 after sixteen years as part of a measure to reduce public service numbers and expenditure

\textsuperscript{107} NESF 1994
Then the 1997 White Paper on Human Resource Development reinforced that state training an’ human resource support for an individual would be based on agreed needs o’ the client.

The official mandate to adopt a client-centred approach ...

An’ the rest is history ... Professional Diploma in Adult Guidance an’ Counsellin’ developed by NUI Maynooth ... investment an’ growth continued ... White Paper on Adult Ed reaffirming that an effective service required trainin’ in front-line guidance an’ counsellin’ skills.

Wha’ a great time to be a practitioner ...

Fulfillin’ ... a great time for guidance, thought it would never end ... Europe is never far away, but ... in 1998 the EU requested each member state to report on a National Employment Action Plan (EAP) ... this meant implementin’ a preventive strategy o’ systematic engagement with people at an early stage o’ their unemployment.

How did that work?

State agencies collaboratin’ ... the Social selectin’ an’ refermin’ unemployed people to FÁS, mandatory but, an’ FÁS givin’ the guidance.

Sounds like that JobSearch to me ...

The FÁS didn’t like that mandatory aspect ... counsellors sayin’ they “wouldn’t be the police for the welfare” ... bu’ luckily the OECD were still all abou’ guidance ... doin’ reviews o’ fourteen member countries, includin’ Ireland ... examinin’ how guidance services could help advance public-policy objectives, lifelong learnin’ goals, an’ how career guidance could help in the implementation o’ active labour market policies.

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108 DEE 1997
109 The White Paper proposed the creation of the “National Employment Service” as a new subsidiary of FÁS to develop and improve guidance and placement service across the Republic and to negotiate with the providers of training. The outcome was that FÁS and the LES formed a dual-stranded National Employment Service.
110 DES 2000: this paper further provided for the establishment of a National Adult Guidance and Counselling Service with a provision of €45 million for staff development and support initiatives from 2000 - 2006.
111 The principle of early intervention is founded on the recognition that a person has high support and guidance needs during the initial stages of shock and immobilisation of the transition cycle (Adam, Hayes & Hopson 1976). Somehow this has transformed into compulsory and threatening activation of people within days of losing their job.
112 Fieldnotes: Conversation with former FÁS Employment Services Manager about operation of EAP.
113 OECD 2004
114 Fourteen OECD countries took part in the review: Australia; Austria; Canada; the Czech Republic; Denmark; Finland; Germany; Ireland; Korea; Luxembourg; the Netherlands; Norway; Spain; and the United Kingdom (England, Wales and Northern Ireland).
I remember tha’ Lisbon Agenda\textsuperscript{15}, tha’ lifelong\textsuperscript{16} guidance for lifelong learnin’ stuff ... an’ Ireland enterin’ the knowledge age ... ah 2004, still a Celtic Tiger\textsuperscript{17} then ... no one thought tha’ would end either ...

No’ tha’ we took proper advantage of it, mind ... loads o’ jobs goin’ spare ... bu’ no implementin’ active manpower policies ... labour shortages managed usin’ inward migration ... anyway, I digress ... tha’ OECD report was a catalyst for change ... tellin’ countries to develop lifelong guidance systems an’ revealin’ tha’ policy makers had long-standin’ expectations o’ career guidance servin’ labour market goals\textsuperscript{18}

\begin{quote}
The contribution of guidance provision to a range of public policy (labour market, economic and social) goals and outcomes is highlighted not only by OECD (2004), but also more recently by NESC (2011) and ELGPN (2015). Guidance has been identified as a way to improve labour market outcomes; improve mobility and labour supply; help prevent or reduce unemployment and reduce periods of job search; reduce individual dependency upon income support; helping to support the notion of a lifelong career as opposed to a lifelong job. NESC (2011) draw attention to the significant economic and social benefits that publicly funded job-placement and career guidance services provide and how they are cost-effective when compared to intensive activation, supported by ELGPN (2015) which credits guidance as one of the few active labour market measures that have an impact on labour market outcomes for citizens, namely participation in work; employability and job retention; income and salary potential; engagement, employer investment in employee skills development; workplace learning.
\end{quote}

Where did yeh say active employment policies fit in, but?

It wasn’t me actually, the report said tha’ active, mutual obligation approaches to welfare dependency require a career guidance input\textsuperscript{19}

Wi’ policy attention focused on guidance, they musta all been jumpin’ on tha’ bandwagon

\begin{footnotes}
\item[15] European Council 2000: This Special Council in Lisbon affirmed that a successful transition to a knowledge-based economy must be accompanied by a move towards lifelong learning. Achievement of Europe’s transition to a knowledge-based economy was a top priority for the EU during the decade 2000 - 2010 and Member States were charged with devising and implementing policies and practices over that ten-year period to support the transition and implement the lifelong learning vision. It is commonly referred to as “The Lisbon Agenda”
\item[16] Although Europe began to focus attention on a concept of lifelong guidance, adult guidance practitioners in particular would have awareness that career counselling had been recognised prior to this as a lifelong process that interacts dynamically with other life roles (Brown & Brooks 1991)
\item[17] The Celtic Tiger refers to the period 1995-2007 when the Irish economy experienced a rapid growth
\item[18] OECD 2004
\item[19] OECD 2004, p23
\end{footnotes}
Speaking Up for Guidance: virtual duoethnography as counter-narrative to a disciplinary activation discourse

~ Yep 2004 was a boom year for guidance, make no mistake ... Ireland had Presidency o’ the EU an’ two Ministers\textsuperscript{120} no less launched The National Guidance Forum\textsuperscript{121} ... one o’ their objectives was to ensure tha’ guidance became central to the public policy process in education an’ the labour market

~ Easy to have objectives ... did they achieve anythin’ but?

~ Yeah, plenty a’ tangible outputs ... a competence framework for practitioners; an’ a quality framework, part o’ an integrated framework for guidance\textsuperscript{122}

~ So they were advocatin’ an enablin’ model ... usin’ a lifelong learnin’ an’ guidance approach ... to do activation under EAP?

~ Exactly. Tha’ didn’t suit everyone, but ... the EAP was slated by an evaluation\textsuperscript{123} commissioned by the Social ... made ou’ tha’ there were better outcomes for people who weren’t selected ... recommendin’ a fully compulsory activation programme includin’ sanctions ...

~ The ol’ welfare discourse creepin’ back ... they got their wish alrigh’ ... hello INTREO

~ Big time ... but they couldn’t have known tha’ the FÁS would shoot itself in the foot\textsuperscript{124} just as the economy was collapsin’ an’ Ireland lost its sovereignty ...

~ Like Lemony Snicket, tha’ ... A Series of Unfortunate Events\textsuperscript{125} ... haha

~ Yeh messer! Yer puttin’ me off ... I was jus’ comin’ to 2010 an’ the bit abou’ the IMF\textsuperscript{126}

~ The crowd we begged the money off?

~ The very ones. We requested a 3-year Extended Arrangement ... Extended Fund Facility (EFF) under the exceptional access policy\textsuperscript{127} an’ the emergency financin’ mechanism

~ Musta been terms an’ conditions?

\textsuperscript{120} A joint initiative of Ministers for Education & Science and Enterprise, Trade & Employment
\textsuperscript{121} The National Guidance Forum operated between 2004 and 2006 bringing together policy-makers, trainers, delivery organisations and professional associations to develop frameworks that would underpin future developments
\textsuperscript{122} National Guidance Forum 2007
\textsuperscript{123} ESRI 2011
\textsuperscript{124} A series of revelations emerged during 2008/2009 about extravagant expenditure by FÁS senior executives and seemingly unrestrained expenses budgets, leading to the resignation of the Director General and precipitating a decision to break up the organisation. The timing was most inopportune. The demise of the Celtic Tiger and soaring unemployment rates meant public sympathy for those with “safe” jobs in public service in general (and FÁS in particular) was at an all-time low
\textsuperscript{125} “A Series of Unfortunate Events” is a series of 13 children’s novels by an American author Daniel Handler, under the pen name of Lemony Snicket
\textsuperscript{126} International Monetary Fund
\textsuperscript{127} The IMF applies four criteria in relation to granting under exceptional access policy, one of which is the strength of the policy reform programme and the political capacity to deliver it
Speaking Up for Guidance:
virtual duoethnography as counter-narrative to a disciplinary activation discourse

~ You bet ... a National Recovery Plan formed the basis o' the fiscal programme, indicatin' specifically savings tha' could be realised from welfare an' labour market reforms with the aim o' reducin' the unemployment rate.

~ Ah unemployment ... the common denominator.

~ The Government said it'd achieve them reforms through “an improvement in activation procedures to strengthen job search conditionality.”

~ Tha’ regulatory welfare discourse rearin’ its oul’ ugly head again ...

~ Hear this bu’ ... with the improvements to be delivered via “better identification of jobseekers’ needs and increased counseling activities at the beginning of the unemployment spell.”

~ Counsellin’? They saw MORE counsellin’ as the way to reduce unemployment an’ deliver us from the evil o’ the IMF loan?

~ They told the IMF as much ... better identification o’ client needs by the PES...

~ The structural reform involved mergin’ the PES an’ the Social, but ... no’ the first time tha’ idea had been floated.

~ Except, in 2012 the PES was subsumed into the Social ... no’ really a merger ... more a takeover ... no’ the way it was presented to the IMF.

~ The Social imported supportive practices an’ a client-centred philosophy into a regulatory environment ... unquestionin’ loyalty to the democratically elected Government ... musta forgot tha’ guidance an’ welfare aren’t birds of a feather.

~ Conditional Unconditionality, it’s an oxymoron ... another square peg in a round hole ... manpower policy back under the control o’ the Civil Service ...

~ Them head honchos think they’re leaders, bu’ it’s all centralised strategic direction ... like The Moonies ...
Speaking Up for Guidance:
virtual duoethnography as counter-narrative to a disciplinary activation discourse

~ ... job placement back in the employment exchange ... after all them reports an’ bad experiences ... them corporate memories sure are short ... NESC\textsuperscript{136} warned ‘em but ...

~ Policy reform isn’t jus’ abou’ formally changin’ the content, it’s operational\textsuperscript{137} too ... wasn’t there internal structural reconfiguration in the Social but, to support delivery o’ the shiny new service?

~ Oh yeah ... but tha’ was a deconstruction an’ all ... the PES policy unit wasn’t reproduced ... it was replaced by an Activation & Employment Policy Unit, reflectin’ the new activation/work-first approach ... tha’ made a big corporate statement tha’ guidance wasn’t seen as necessary

~ They spat out guidance ... like a body’s immune system rejectin’ a transplanted organ

~ If yer workin’ towards the Minister, yer workin’ away from the public ... immune to the needs o’ the client ... no place for guidance ... an’ by extension immune to the needs o’ the practitioner ... if yer no’ givin’ guidance, no need o’ professional supervision to reflect on yer practice an’ keep yer skills alive

~ So they discarded tha’ aswell?

Since its origins in 19th Century Social Work (Harkness & Poertner 1989), myriad purposes and benefits of professional supervision for those in counselling and helping professions have been recognised ~ skills maintenance (Nelson-Jones 1997; Yegdich 1999); reflective practice (Carroll & Holloway 1999; Inskipp & Proctor 1993; Proctor 1988; Žorga 2002); professional identity maintenance (Galloway 2000; Gothard et al 2001; Schön 1991; Wosket 1999); support from “the eyes of others” (McCormack & Ryan 2011, p9); a safe environment in which to feel doubt and process uncertainties (Hawkins & Shohet 1989; Page & Wosket 2001); deal with work culture, counsellors in Public Service context in particular face unique issues (Carroll & Holloway 1999; Towler 1999); prevent burnout, deal with the pressure of getting a result (Ali & Graham 1996; Cherniss 1995; Corey 1996; Fineman 1985; Nathan & Hill 1992; Wilkins 1997); meet increased support needs due to changing role of practitioners in a transforming society (Corey 1996; Gothard et al 2001; Wilkins 1997) and new career realities (McMahon & Patton 2000; Watts et al 1996); increase effectiveness in helping (Hess 1980); facilitate ongoing / lifelong learning (Egan 1998; McMahon & Patton 2000; Nathan & Hill 1992).

While Belardi (2002) cautions that supervision is not a universal remedy and will not compensate for lack of staff resources or poor administrative structures, Stevenson & Parsloe (1978) warn that those who work independently of supervision can pay a high price, namely lonely responsibility.

\textsuperscript{136} NESC 2011: In the context of establishment of NEES, NESC identified the challenge for guidance provision facing INTREO (as the new PES), noting that staff from even closely allied activities elsewhere in the public service would need significant further training to work as career guidance professionals, and that the PES would need to put in place appropriate institutional supports necessary for staff to provide quality guidance services

\textsuperscript{137} Van Berkel 2010
~ All changed, changed utterly\(^{138}\) ... an’thin’ related to the FÁS ... toxic to the Social, the Great White Hope ... paranoia ... hadta be crap if FÁS useta use it ... all tha’ “touchy-feely”

~ Janey. Who’s at the heart of it but?

~ Would ya believe, FÁS-heads ...

~ What’ve they got against the rest o’ yis then? Yeh’d think they’d be fightin’ yer corner

~ If they cared abou’ us ... tryin’ to dissociate from tha’ scandalous stuff ... savin’ their own necks, o’ course

~ Ran wi’ the hare, now huntin’ wi’ the hounds

~ Too righ’. Y’know, they’re actually FÁS’ biggest critics

~ As if there weren’t enough o’ them, wha’?

~ Still though, there’s no call for dissin’ the oul’ guidance an’ supervision

~ What would they even know abou’ them?

~ Nothin’ ... callin’ guidance “that oul’ Ali & Graham stuff” ... denyin’ us ...

~ Judas Iscariots!

~ Coverin’ arse ... wha’ abou’ us tha’ did nothin’ wrong, but? Who’s speakin’ up for us? Who’s speakin’ up for guidance at corporate level?

~ Sounds like no one ... reminds me o’ that Martin Niemöller bloke ...

~ Huh? Tha’ Pastor chap?

~ Yeah him ... Lutheran guy ... gave speeches an’ lectures an’ tha’, abou’ Nazi occupation ... lamentin’ tha’ he didn’t speak up when he oughta have, when he had the chance

~ Looked the other way, like?

~ Yeah, big time. There were serious consequences for stayin’ silent, but. Mostly for his conscience I think ...

~ Musta really got to him

~ It did. He wrote this poem abou’ it:

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\(^{138}\) “Easter 1916” by William Butler Yeats
Speaking Up for Guidance:
virtual duoethnography as counter-narrative to a disciplinary activation discourse

First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out
Because I was not a Socialist

Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out
Because I was not a Trade Unionist

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out
Because I was not a Jew

Then they came for me
And there was no one left to speak for me

~ Powerful stuff tha’ ... gave me a quare shiver

~ Yeah. Don’t know wha’ the FÁS-heads’ll do when they need someone to speak up for ‘em

~ When they “come for” them?

~ Yeah ... they’ll hafta examine their own conscience on tha’ one

~ Hope they can find it ...

~ Find wha’?

~ A conscience ...

~ ~ ~

Hearing Voices

B&T observe a form of wilderness years for adult vocational guidance since 2012. Significantly, they highlight not alone its virtual elimination in its new situation in a conditional welfare world, but also critically the lack of corporate voice speaking out for it. Curiously, corresponding deficits in the broader guidance profession have failed to occasion comparable corporate muteness. Gaps in guidance provision have indeed, of late, brought a clamour of voices. The hiatus in school guidance provision at second-level, particularly in disadvantaged areas, has resulted in emotive public discourse, referencing austerity cuts (IGC 2016) and
“damage inflicted on those at the bottom of the pile” (O’Brien 2016, p14). Likewise Adult Educational Guidance, where there has been formal acknowledgement of a fragmentation in nature and quality of delivery and a call for the remit of the service to be extended to Adult Guidance for the wider FET sector (SOLAS 2013, p113,114). This was followed by a commitment to empower learners to make informed choices, by engaging with NCGE to reform guidance systems and develop an integrated guidance strategy for the FET sector (SOLAS 2014, p31).

As I write, a framework for an Integrated FET Guidance Strategy is taking shape and recruitment for a national Guidance Programme Co-ordinator (FET) is underway. The emerging strategy indicates the fragmentation of adult guidance delivery and lack of adult guidance in (former FÁS) Training Centres since the establishment of INTREO, proposing to offer a service to the wider public (and on a drop-in basis) and pledging to start from the viewpoint of the end-user, i.e. take a client-centred approach. This reveals that voices representing lifelong guidance for learners are gaining attention, while voices for guidance for unemployed people remain absent from public discourse. In the context of an ongoing denial of guidance, it may also signify the persistence of a perception of unemployed people as undeserving.

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139 FET: Further Education and Training
141 National Centre for Guidance in Education: NCCE, which was established in 1995, is an agency of the Department of Education and Skills with responsibility to support and develop guidance practice in all areas of education and inform policy of the Department in the field of guidance
142 SOLAS 2014, p32: Notes also the requirement for a CPD framework for the FET workforce
143 Advertised in the Irish Times Newspaper Friday 13 May 2016
144 Fieldnotes: Conversation with SOLAS officials, May 2016
The “work-first” focus of the activation agenda suggests that not only have DSP consigned the concept of lifelong guidance to the bygone decade of the “Lisbon Agenda”\textsuperscript{145}, which concluded in 2010, but have also failed to appreciate the additional onus on them, as the PES, to actually set quality standards in lifelong guidance policy and provision\textsuperscript{146}. Far from fading from view, focus on lifelong guidance advanced from conception to implementation, with 2010 marking the launch of the current EU ten-year jobs and growth strategy, Europe 2020\textsuperscript{147}. In the context of employment rate targets\textsuperscript{148} set by this strategy, Borbély-Pecze & Watts consider not alone how lifelong guidance policies are key elements in making these targets a reality, but also emphasise the importance of PES as an integral part of national lifelong guidance strategies (2011, piii). In noting wide recognition of development of staff competencies as critical to the quality of PES services, they reference Ireland’s particularly strong model at that time (2011, p9). FÁS and its guidance counsellors were pivotal in Ireland’s national lifelong guidance strategy, making it all the more lamentable, in my view, that this resource is currently neither seen nor heard, and the investment in it unutilised and unvalued.

The Eyes and Ears of Europe

Just as it seemed that no one appeared to have noticed the absence of public service guidance, the eye of Europe fell upon us again. A benchmarking initiative

\textsuperscript{145} European Council 2000

\textsuperscript{146} While the Lisbon Council recognised that albeit in many member states guidance and counselling services had been wholly or partially privatised, it was adamant that it remained the responsibility of the Public Sector to set agreed minimum quality standards and to define entitlements

\textsuperscript{147} European Commission 2015: The aim of the Europe 2020 strategy is to create the conditions for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Five headline targets have been agreed for the EU to achieve by the end of 2020, including employment; education; social inclusion and poverty reduction. Progress towards the targets is monitored throughout the EU’s yearly cycle of economic and budgetary coordination

\textsuperscript{148} The Employment target is 75% of 20-64 year-olds to be employed. In March 2014, the Commission published an overview of progress on the targets. In relation to Employment targets, most Member States were reportedly a long way off. At the low end of the spectrum lay five countries, including Ireland, who had been affected by sharp falls in employment and still have low employment rates compared to the other Member States
was instigated by the European Network of PES\textsuperscript{149} to compare evidence-based qualitative and quantitative performance measures\textsuperscript{150} between all PES of the network. In October 2015, a team of external assessors\textsuperscript{151} duly arrived in Ireland to verify evidence, furnish an external performance rating and recommend improvements. The resultant report proposed a number of actions, two particularly noteworthy in the context of this enquiry. One recommended a greater emphasis on guidance and counselling to accompany the current focus on conditionality of benefit payments, while a second, albeit graciously stated, signified clear recognition of a deficiency in employment service provision. The EU assessors indicated their observed loss of elements of institutional memory from Employment Services as configured under FÁS since its reorganisation under DSP, recommending furthermore an audit of pre-2009 PES provision and strategy, plus an evaluation of same as a potentially useful input to policy development (EU Network of PES 2015, p10). Benchlearning is regarded as a chief driver for PES performance enhancement (EU Commission 2016, p19) so these constitute fundamental recommendations, in view of the forthcoming\textsuperscript{152} publication of the assessments by the EU Commission, and not least given the public testimonial by Ireland’s Head of PES on the invaluable benefit of mutual learning through the PES Network in implementing its ambitious reform (EU Commission 2016, p9). While granting that factors such as economic conditions

\textsuperscript{149} The European Network of Public Employment Services was established following a Decision in 2014 by the European Council and the European Parliament to maximise efficiency of public employment services. The network comprises all 28 EU countries, Norway, Iceland and the European Commission. It aims to, inter alia, compare PES performance through benchmarking, identify evidence-based good practices and foster mutual learning.

\textsuperscript{150} To this end each PES was required to complete an internal self-assessment, rating their performance against a range of centrally pre-agreed Performance Enablers.

\textsuperscript{151} The team of six external assessors comprised two peer PES staff (Belgian-Flemish and Estonian PES), two PES experts from the European Commission and two experts from ICON-Institute, the organisation contracted to support this initiative.

\textsuperscript{152} Results from first round assessments scheduled to come on stream from June 2016.
or institutional settings have a bearing on PES performance, the EU Commission is resolute nonetheless that strategic management decisions impact on the delivery of employment policy (EU Commission 2016, p17). The removal of guidance is a prime example of one such strategic management decision.

A further gaze is due to fall, in the form of assessment of our conformance with the European Social Charter. States which have ratified the Charter are required to report annually on how they implement provisions of same. These are ruled upon by ECSR which adopts decisions called Conclusions, which are published each year. Ireland submitted its 13th National Report to the Council of Europe declaring, in respect of implementation of Article 9 (Right to Vocational Guidance), INTREO Employment Service provides “assistance and advice” on employment (Council of Europe 2015, p18). When Conclusions 2016 on Ireland’s 13th report are published later this year, the eyes of Europe may determine whether non-provision of vocational guidance breaches fundamental rights. Appeals can also be made to the ears of Europe. In the event of violation, the State is asked to notify the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe of the measures taken or planned to bring the situation into conformity. Will the voice of unemployed be any more than an echo in the void of public service vocational guidance?

153 In the framework of this monitoring system, Member States submit a report on the implementation of the Charter in law and in practice. These reports are examined by the European Committee of Social Rights (ECSR), an independent expert body made up of 15 members, which determines and rules whether the national situations they describe comply with the Charter, i.e. whether States are in conformity. The ECSR adopts and publishes Conclusions in this regard. In Ireland, the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation has responsibility for coordinating Ireland’s reporting obligations.

154 European Committee of Social Rights

155 In addition to monitoring by ECSR, the Collective Complaints procedure, which was introduced in 1995, allows for social partners and non-governmental organisations such as Employers’ organisations and trade unions in the country concerned directly to apply to the ECSR for rulings on possible non-implementation of the Charter. A State may grant representative national non-governmental organisations (NGOs) within its jurisdiction the right to lodge complaints against it. Only Finland has granted this as yet
Turning a Corner

I have travelled quite a journey since embarking on this enquiry, making much meaning along the way. As I turn a corner and set my compass for the road ahead, I reflect on my passage: destabilisation, emotional shut-down, emergence from that shadow, encountering light, regaining equilibrium, revisiting my roots, reflecting, finding my feet and reclaiming my voice. I set out aiming to understand how a client-centred framework of manpower policy with integral vocational guidance transmuted into a disciplinary activation architecture (Boland & Griffin 2016), with public service vocational guidance a virtual non-entity. I discovered early on that, as a consequence of my derailment, my route to knowledge would be via the telling of my own story: a first-person account of my lived experience of transition and incongruence and an investigation of the impact on my personal and professional identity in a work environment that prohibits questioning and critical thinking.

Disconnected from myself, I looked inward in order to build capacity to look outward. Events had left me no space to talk, think or tell my story so I fashioned one in a reflective journal, where I made meaning in writing (Wiebe 2008). I responded creatively to my dilemma, inventing collaborative, dialogic others, two fictional characters. I bestowed upon them, B&T my virtual duoethnographers (Zazkis & Koichu 2015), conjointly humorous and critical personal and political voices, lessening my isolation, normalising my emotions and serving as a
reflexive space enabling insight and knowledge to emerge. B&T externalise the narrative of my silenced, critically-reflective self, tracing my progression through the transition cycle (Adam, Hayes & Hopson 1976), followed by an analysis of Ireland’s 50-year policy journey. This empowers me to reflect critically initially at an emotional level, then intellectually, allowing me to engage critically with the policy field. My autoethnography, therefore, has a twofold identity and purpose, evocative and analytical (Ellingson & Ellis 2008). It allows introspection so readers can connect with my feelings and experiences, exploring social and political contexts besides. This process, interlacing contextual and autobiographical (Reece & Speedy 2014), allows me to enquire into my painful, felt experiences, reflect on them (Freeman 2009; Schön 1991) and learn.

I learn that in my fulfilling, congruent world as both practitioner and manager in public service guidance, I naïvely presume guidance policy development is in safe hands and will endure. A shared policy-practice perspective in FÁS meant I did not feel the need to question, leaving me ill-equipped to survive in DSP with its dominant regulatory, conditional philosophy. Crucially, I rediscover my guidance voice, verifying my resilience so I continue to ask why! The knowledge I sought, through self-narrative of my lived experience in B&T’s reflexive dialogic space, is mine for the taking. I reconnect with my fractured self in an unexpected fashion, neither wholly recovering nor discarding entirely. Instead, I reconstruct a blended identity, evolving, adapting to the constraints of life in my new world. I incorporate my researcher self, draw on my guidance self. I am an amalgam.
Another Day, Another Reassignment

As the rest of the country attempts to recreate 1916, I'm forced to relive 2012 in the form of another phonecall to inform me I've been reassigned, this time as Training Manager in the Staff Development Unit. Stoic, I refuse to succumb to tears. Four years and an MEd does that to a girl!

Journal extract, 31st May 2016: “Back On The Boards”

It's the last day of May 2016 and my MEd is drawing to a close. As well as the usual work-life-study (im)balance, I now have a new job! Never rains, but it pours.

I'm in Newbridge with the Staff Development Team to-day, running a workshop for local trainers. I've been asked to facilitate a group which has the task of developing training materials, designing practical exercises to support learning about calculating means and “deciding” jobseeker claims. It's a scorching day, air-conditioning on a go-slow. I sense little enthusiasm in the room. Hmmm … all eyes are on me. A question hangs in the air: “Why?” I'm on the receiving end this time.

I sense a change in myself. I slip gently into my new persona: DSP Training Manager. I'm calm. This feels congruent. I acknowledge the subject matter expertise in the room, welcoming questions, reminding everyone why they are here … to engage, dialogue, challenge, reflect, interrogate. Asking questions is how we construct knowledge – together.

My multiple selves work in harmony. I draw on my counsellor, manager, trainer, facilitator and researcher skills. There's energy in the group, in me. I'm creating a critically reflective space, revoking silence. Encouraging people to ask why!
There is a need to ask questions, to bring about change. I am articulating a need for a fundamental identity change by DSP as the PES, despite its reluctance to be such. B&T show, in relating a tale of 50 years of manpower policy, how much can be learned from history, reinforcing Bochner’s (2007) appreciation of gathering knowledge not just about but from the past. This leads me to call upon DSP to embrace labour market policy development in a positive way, engage actively in an EU Network of PES that views guidance and counselling as complementary to, not a replacement for, conditionality (2015, p10). Reluctance is understandable. Just as conditionality is anathema to a client-centred philosophy, a concept of unconditionality could threaten and undermine a framework of control.

Quite contrary to a disavowal of DSP's identity, I view the incorporation of guidance as recognising a need to reshape it, providing resilience and relevance in a new operating environment, in the same way as I held myself accountable for my personal well-being by adapting my own vocational identity. As a guidance counsellor, I heed Corey’s (1996) entreaty to cease blaming the system, taking personal responsibility for staying alive both as a person and as a professional. Donning my practitioner hat, I recollect Corey’s reminder that as guidance counsellors who seek to promote growth and change in clients, we must be willing to promote growth in our own lives, as this is what makes us therapeutic persons. As a result of its own mandatory transition (with which I can empathise) the mono-cultural identity of DSP is changing by default. Through importing a client-centred philosophy in the form of FÁS Employment Services, the dynamic has altered despite opposition and resistance. Based on my personal experience
of transition, I initially think that supportive manpower policy had metamorphosed into a punitive labour market regime. However, dialoguing with B&T brings to light that the disciplinary focus is attributable more to the architecture, as policy is interpreted and implemented by civil servants with a regulatory mindset.

**Long Live Lifelong Guidance**

It is not yet time to write an obituary for guidance policy. To paraphrase Mark Twain (1906, p160), reports of its demise are greatly exaggerated. Lifelong guidance in particular is focal at EU level, with PES identified as vital to lifelong guidance, which itself is pinpointed as a key enabler in the achievement of the Europe 2020 strategy (Borbély-Pecze & Watts 2011). At national level moreover, PES guidance formed the basis of Ireland's application for “bail-out” emergency funding, with an explicit commitment to better identification of jobseeker needs by PES via early intervention and more intensive guidance counselling (IMF 2010, p27). This clearly signifies the elimination of guidance not from policy, rather from practice. It is at implementation level, therefore, where a difference can be made. A vital element in instituting change in practice is supporting transformation of societal attitude and behaviour. Vygotsky (1978) notes how the internalisation of language results in behavioural transformation, with Richardson (2005) equally reminding of the power of language in constructing social reality, stressing how meanings are made according to the available discourses. The time has come to present an alternative discourse.

Throughout this enquiry, B&T's virtual voices collaborate with me, co-authoring a counter to the master-narrative (Ellis & Bochner 2000) in our co-created space of
resistance (Lather & St. Pierre 2013). For the closing conversation, we converge, presenting our collective voices as we dialogue directly with each other, speaking up for guidance:

**Two Vodkas ‘n Coke: “An Alternative Discourse”**

Hey Gráinne, remember you were arguin’ at the beginnin’ o’ this enquiry tha’ a client-centred perspective comes with a sense o’ accountability ... where does tha’ leave yeh now so?

Well B&T, we no longer have the luxury of immersing ourselves in the here-and-now, leaving guidance policy in some illusory safe hands

Nor can we turn the clock back 50 years but, revertin’ to the there-an’-then

No indeed. I reason we must resolutely reorient the compass for the future towards a restoration of adult guidance for unemployed people

Like in tha’ European Social Charter?

Precisely. We need to create a space for guidance voices

Wha’ abou’ willingness, in tha’ conditional welfare domain, to engage in unconditional dialogue?

That’s a necessity. We must bring adult guidance out of the wilderness and firmly reinstate it on the roadmap for implementation of labour market policy as envisaged by the OECD

Promotin’ economic growth an’ counter-balancin’ the regulatory element o’ welfare policy?

Certainly, otherwise I contend Ireland will forfeit the prospect of re-establishing a connection with its traditionally client-centred core

That’d really be squanderin’ the learnin’ an’ meanin’ making we achieved by strugglin’ through austerity, hurt, confusion an’ internal conflict

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156 OECD 1964
157 Burton 2015: Joan Burton, Labour Party Leader and Minister for Social Protection said her Party’s biggest battle of political, social and economic ideas over the past five years was with their coalition partners Fine Gael, rather than with the opposition
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~ I agree. Do you recall how you portrayed the merger of FÁS and DSP as a shotgun wedding? Well, in the context that they now have a shared responsibility to reduce unemployment, it’s time to end that cold war and depolarise manpower and welfare policy.

~ Well you said tha’ at the conceptual stage, Irish labour market policy envisioned NEES as a truly integrated service, intervenin’ promptly wi’ unemployed citizens, providin’ intensive guidance counselling158 an contributin’ to delivery o’ the EU 2020 strategy.

~ That’s correct. I truly believe that dialogue can convert that creative vision into reality159 ... in my view, heeding guidance voices will lessen the framing of unemployment as an individual and economic problem160.

~ Rather than a social an’ state one,161 yeh mean?

~ Exactly. Client-centred guidance diminishes the disregard for the lived reality162 ... and affords an alternative to the judgemental discourse of deserving and undeserving.

~ ... preservin’ the progress an’ lessons o’ the last fifty years.

~ Guidance can challenge attempts to silence, enable critical reflection ...

~ An’ continual askin’ why ...

~ ... it can safeguard against displacement, by Live Register statistics, of the personal dimension, social objectives and nobility of purpose that lay at the heart of manpower policy163.

~ You would say tha’, o’ course ... yer congruent vocational identity o’ guidance counsellor mandates yeh to call for dialogue an’ some advocatin’ adult guidance voices.

~ We need them, to countermand the imbalance of power and the subordination of lifelong guidance provision ...

~ ... an’ o’ course the effective silencin’ o’ those citizens for whom the rate o’ unemployment is 100 percent164.

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158 IMF 2010, p27  
159 ELGPN 2015  
160 Herr & Cramer 1996  
161 Brodkin 2014  
162 Hearne 2014  
163 NIEC 1964; Agnew 1967; NESC 1975  
164 Wilson 1971
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