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School Counselor Perceptions of Solution-Focused Brief
Counseling in Promoting Resiliency

Stephanie Spain Anderson

SCHOOL COUNSELOR PERCEPTIONS OF SOLUTION-FOCUSED BRIEF
COUNSELING IN PROMOTING RESILIENCY

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in

Counseling

in the Adrian Dominican School of Education of

Barry University

by

Stephanie Spain Anderson, Ph.D.

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Barry University

2011

Area of Specialization: Marital, Couple, and Family Counseling/Therapy

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ABSTRACT

SCHOOL COUNSELOR PERCEPTIONS OF SOLUTION-FOCUSED BRIEF COUNSELING IN PROMOTING RESILIENCY

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Barry University, 2010

Dissertation Chairperson: Christine Sacco-Bene, PhD

Purpose:

This study explored how school counselors describe their counseling experiences using Solution-Focused Brief Counseling techniques to promote resiliency in students. A literature review revealed little research involving school counselors using a solution-focused approach in their work with students. With the increase of outward behaviors demonstrated daily by students and the time restraints and additional duties placed upon school counselors, there is a need for brief counseling in the schools. This research contributes to the field by providing additional information that builds on the current literature. The research questions proposed in this study were: How do school counselors use Solution-Focused Brief Counseling with diverse student populations? How does Solution-Focused Brief Counseling promote resiliency in students?

Method:

This qualitative, phenomenological research study was conducted via an on-line anonymous questionnaire through SurveyMonkey.com™. The sample included 10 school counselors who were current members of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) at the time of the research. The participants were purposefully selected. Data analysis produced themes that expressed the true essence of the lived

experiences of these school counselors. Five major themes emerged from the process of data analysis: Time, Support, Future Orientation, Goal Attainment, and the Important of the Resiliency Factor. Sub themes were identified from the five major themes.

Major Findings:

The participant responses indicated that school counselors use this therapeutic approach with diverse student populations in group and individual counseling sessions and that there are benefits to using a brief counseling approach in the school setting.

The results of this investigation may provide important implications for future school counselors in the field of education. Several implications are posited including, the need for future school counselor trainings on brief theoretical approaches, program effectiveness, what specific techniques and strategies are helpful to use with student in the school environment, and how to promote resiliency in students. The responses communicated by the participants solidifies that this approach is effective in the school environment with all ages whether as an individual or in a group setting.

I dedicate this book to the most
encouraging people I know...my family.

I love you! ♥

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Words cannot express my appreciation and gratitude for my family and friends. The completion of my doctorate may not have been possible without the patience, support, encouragement, and unconditional love that was bestowed upon me during the past six years. It has been noted in research that the dissertation journey is not one that can be accomplished alone. Therefore, I would like to thank some truly fabulous people in my life that helped to make me who I am today. ♥

First and foremost, I would like to express the gratitude I have for David, Mackenzie, and Isabella. They have listened to me, laughed with me, and calmed me during some of the most difficult times.

I would like to thank David for being a wonderful right-hand ladies man. He has always been available when I needed him to watch our girls when I had to study and attend classes. David was also my go-to-guy for technological inquiries when the computer was not cooperating. If only I could have recruited him to proof read for me. In the end, has never wavered in his support of my goals and he looks forward to my future and my success. ♥

To my absolutely darling daughters, Mackenzie and Isabella, who make me a better person every day. I dedicate this book to them for all of the hours that they had to miss out on “Mommy time” and entertain each other without their playmate. ☺ They have always shown such great enthusiasm for me to complete my doctoral degree. I could not ask for more loving children. I am looking forward to my future with them right beside me. ♥♥

I am very thankful to my parents, David and Linda, for their guidance, support, enthusiasm, and unconditional love. I cannot express into words how grateful I am that they made the choice to raise their children with good morals and values and a strong belief system that would guide me into the direction of challenging myself to go as far as I could dream. Thank you for being two of my biggest cheerleaders even when this journey felt like it was never going to end. I love you guys! ♥♥

I am thankful to my sister, Kimmi, who gave nonstop encouragement to finish what I had started. She always helped me focus on my short and long term goals. I am looking forward to having her alongside of me in the future when I open my own practice.

To my friends that gave constant encouragement, Lara, Genesa, and Holly, I thank you from the bottom of my heart. A toast to the endless hours of studying with a fellow doctoral student, to the long talks at lunch with my BFF, and to the friend that invited my girls for sleepovers so that I could work on my dissertation until the wee hours, our friendship is eternal. ♥♥♥

I am very thankful to my committee and my Chair, Dr. Sacco-Bene who took on another doctoral candidate that she believed in when her plate was already full. Dr. Sacco-Bene made herself available 7 days a week. She was always positive and enthusiastic toward my future. She made this journey more enriching than I could have imagined. I will never be able to show the extent of my gratitude. Cheers! ♥

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM

Introduction

Each school year, more and more children who are enrolled in public education demonstrate behavioral problems. With a number that well exceeds 52 million youths enrolled in public schools and more than six million adults working in schools, one-fifth of the United States population can be reached within the school system for intervention and direct mental health services (Stephan, Weist, Katoaka, Adelsheim, & Mills, 2007). One issue is that more and more children in the elementary schools are causing disruptions in class then in years past (Stephan et al., 2007) and teachers do not have the time or the resources to handle the situations. School administrators, teachers, and parents in various school districts spanning across the Unites States have recognized the importance of school counselors in providing preventative interventions to students in need of assistance (Franklin, Biever, Moore, Clemens, & Scamardo, 2001). One approach for school counselors to work collaboratively with students, teachers and parents is to promote resiliency in students using Solution-Focused Brief Counseling.

Role of the School Counselor

Many societal influences (i.e., state certification, school systems, professional organizations, education programs, and administrator perceptions about counselor's roles) have impacted the role of the school counselor (Paisley & Borders, 1995). As society becomes increasingly more complex, effective school counselors will need to take more of an active role in the lives of students and their families (Paisley & Borders, 1995). In recent years, school counselors have increasingly been called upon to be a part

of a collaborative team to work with students with school-related counseling issues (Stephan et al., 2007). One of the most productive ways for school counselors to encourage positive behaviors is to promote resiliency in students through the creation of small brief counseling sessions (Rak & Patterson, 1996). Resilient students cope better in difficult situations and develop healthy and stable relationships throughout their lifetime (Rak & Patterson, 1996).

Because school counselors are able to touch a wide range of students daily, they are uniquely able to identify students who are in need of a counseling component in their educational setting (Geroski, Rodgers, & Breen, 1997). In fact, the United States Department of Education (1996) reiterated that the counseling component is one of the three services that students with disabilities need most. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997 requires public school systems in the United States to provide the necessary services that would benefit students in special education (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 1999). School counselors can provide direct intervention and support to the ever changing needs of diverse student populations because of their educational background and training. School counselors have the ability and knowledge to effectively counsel students in the school setting while maintaining the “educationally relevant” stance (Fox & Butler, 2007).

Statement of the Problem

Educators today are facing significant challenges in meeting the diverse needs of students who require responsive services in schools while budgets and therapeutic resources are decreasing (Hawken & Hess, 2006). School counselors are being called upon to assist students that are not conforming to school-wide rules and expectations.

Responsive services and interventions are part of what makes counselors unique in the schools. They are able to touch a wide range of students that are in need of these services. The challenge is finding the time and support needed from the administration and teachers to assist the students in becoming better students all around.

Special education students who are referred to the counselor are for the most part children who demonstrate lack of personal control and focus, aggression, poor social skills, low self-esteem, defiance, and lack of coping skills. These problems typically stem from various sources, including, but not limited to, having low academic success, feeling as though they are being excluded from the regular education environment, experiencing excessive conflicts at school, bullying, home stressors and anxiety (Reddick, 1996; Singer, 2005; Smith, 2005; Daki & Savage, 2010). Once children believe that things will not improve, they are likely to engage in self-defeating ways of coping such as quitting or avoiding tasks, blaming others for their difficulties, or becoming class clowns or bullies. Thus, a negative cycle is often set in motion, intensifying feelings of defeat and despair. These behaviors are seen as “fixable” in the eyes of school counselors, teachers, administrators and parents. It is important to understand that if we are to help students be more motivated and learn more effectively, we must ensure that our interventions address not only their specific learning needs but their feelings of low self-worth as well and that we must provide them with opportunities to experience realistic accomplishment that nurture optimism and hope (Singer, 2005).

Due to the problems that these students and teachers face daily, steps need to be taken to encourage students to find solutions to their problems and develop a resilient attitude in the face of life’s challenges. This may help minimize the distractions these

students cause and enhance the student's sense of self-worth. By using a solution-focused model and placing a focus on goal attainment, problem-free talk, and resiliency, students have the opportunity to develop a strong social competence, which is the ability to elicit positive responses from others. While the literature is saturated with specific theoretical approaches (Hudson & Rapee, 2000; Lipchik & Kubicki, 1996; Trepper, Dolan, McCollum, & Nelson, 2007), recommendations for group counseling (McKeel, 1996; Singer 2005; Wubbolding, 2007) and guidance programs in schools (American School Counselor Association, 2004; Stephan et al., 2007; Wood & Moore, 2008), there is inadequate information about the extent to which the solution-focused approach to counseling is actually being used by school counselors and their perception of their experiences (Samide & Stockton, 2002).

Research supports that small group counseling and classroom interventions work well with children exhibiting school-related counseling issues (Franklin, Biever, Moore, Clemens, & Scamardo, 2001). Research using a solution-focused approach in the public schools with students with school related counseling issues is limited, but it has been found to have a positive impact, particularly in the elementary schools (McKeel, 1996). Common to all authors who have studied solution-focused approaches in the public school system is their concern that more empirical investigations of this application are warranted since limited evidence of its effectiveness in the school systems exists (Stephan et al., 2007; Stobie, Boyle, & Wolfson, 2005).

Most counselors in the public school system have very limited time in their schedule to see students for matters other than testing, classroom guidance, covering classes, and other assigned duties, even though the American School Counselor

Association National Model recommends that 30-40% of an elementary or middle school counselor's time be spent in responsive services (Williams, 2000). Responsive services may include individual or group counseling, crisis counseling, consultation, peer facilitation, and referrals based on educational needs (Oliver, Nelson, Cade, & Cueva, 2007). While most of the interventions that are performed by school counselors are considered responsive services, there is limited time to provide long-term counseling. This researcher hopes to contribute to the field by gathering information on the experiences of school counselors in implementing Solution-Focused Brief Counseling, as there is limited research available regarding the perceptions and experiences of school counselors who use Solution-Focused Brief Counseling in the school setting (Stobie et al., 2005).

Purpose of the Study

This study explored qualitatively how school counselors describe their counseling experiences and perceptions using Solution-Focused Brief Counseling techniques to promote resiliency within the diverse student populations who exhibit school-related counseling issues.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the school counselor's experiences with regards to the utility of a solution-focused approach in their counseling work. This researcher hopes to contribute to the field with the information gathered and hopes that it will build upon the current literature and assist in a more complete understanding the use of Solution-Focused Brief Counseling by school counselors. This study provided a detailed description of school counselors' experiences and perceptions of brief therapy which has the goal of promoting resiliency in students.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical frameworks that guided this study were Solution-Focused Brief Counseling and the Resiliency Theory. The use of Solution-Focused Brief Counseling has been implemented in several areas of counseling, but particularly in schools where interventions and strategies offered to students and teachers need to be practical (Stobie et al., 2005). School counselors need an approach that is time sensitive and is able to address the needs of the students.

Solution-Focused Brief Counseling

When a client enters a counseling office, older approaches to therapy, such as psychodynamic and cognitive behavioral therapy, would have the client discuss the past in relation to the roots of their current problems. In the 1960's, the field of counseling saw a shift from past-oriented thinking to present oriented thinking. Less emphasis was placed on searching for the history of the client's problems. Instead, the counselor would focus on how the client was handling the problem and what behaviors seemed to be maintaining the problem. Solution-Focused Brief Counseling was originally conceptualized as a set of clinical assumptions and strategies in the 1980's stemming from the research of Steve de Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg along with their colleagues (Gingerich & Wabeke, 2001). This model represented a further shift to future-orientated thinking. deShazer (1985) used the metaphor of looking at the client's problems as a lock on a door. Examining the lock will not lead to unlocking it. However, if a key was found that could open the lock it may lead to a solution (deShazer, 1985).

Solution-focused counselors believe that change is constant. Students who want to change their behaviors at school and in society have the ability to do so if they are

willing to make the changes necessary for future successes. School counselors using a solution-focused approach de-emphasize the past in order to create changes in behaviors that promote the attainment of the person's wants and needs (Wood & Moore, 2008). They selectively focus on the client's strengths and on what is working in their lives at home, in the community, and at school.

In this approach, the counselor used respectful curiosity to invite the client to envision their future (Woods & Moore, 2008). The solution-focused approach utilizes the imagination of clients through the miracle question, compliments, problem-free talk, scaling questions, exceptions, and other such techniques for visualizing the future. Interventions in brief therapy are short-term, strategic, and result oriented. Clients' own words are used, making counseling easier for clients, especially the younger children as their own language personalizes the counseling experience (Sklare, 2005). When clients are able to communicate in a comfortable and familiar way and they feel as though they are being understood, rapport is built and a more comfortable situation has been created.

To best to assist a student, it is important for parents to "buy in" to the counseling approach because the treatment effects need to be consistent from home to school and vice versa even though counselors are aware that there is a chance that the positive changes may unravel due to external variables that they do not have control over. Parents and members of the family often emerge empowered by the process of participation in partnerships with schools (Davies, 1995, 1996; Winters, 1993). Parents gain skills, knowledge, and the confidence needed to assist them in rearing their children, improving their economic condition, and in being good citizens (Davies, 1996).

Since the introduction of a solution-focused approach in the field of counseling, it appears that numerous practitioners have welcomed it as a new and innovative approach to working with clients. Literature indicates that this approach has been used with diverse population in several different types of situations in several different settings specifically in situations of domestic violence (Lipchik & Kubicki, 1996), substance abuse (Osbourn & Collison, 1998), abuse victims (Dolan, 1994), and with juvenile delinquents (Clark, 1996).

Resiliency Theory

Resiliency is defined as the capacity to survive, rebound, persevere, successfully adapt in the face of adversity (Dekel, 2005) and develop social, academic, and vocational competence despite exposure to severe stress or simply to the stress inherent in today's world (Henderson & Milstein, 1996). The Resiliency Theory is based on the proposition that if a member of one's family, community, and/or school care deeply about a person, set high expectations, show support, and value the person's participation, they can overcome almost any adversity that comes their way (Krovetz, 1998).

Research Question

The research question in a qualitative study is comprised of a central question and subquestions (Creswell, 2003). The central question is the single, overarching question of the study. The research questions used to guide this study considered the different perceptions of school counselors using Solution-Focused Brief Counseling to promote resiliency. The following research questions were explored in this study: How do school counselors use Solution-Focused Brief Counseling with diverse student populations? How does Solution-Focused Brief Counseling promote resiliency in students?

Origins of the Researchers Interest in the Topic

This researcher has been employed as a school counselor for the past seven years in an elementary school setting. Within school counseling, there are opportunities for counselors to network with their peers. Counselors express their frustrations on not having the time to counsel students as individuals or in a group setting. If they are able to find the time, a brief therapy approach is used. This researcher is looking to improve her counseling skills using Solution-Focused Brief Counseling as well as assist others in utilizing this therapy model. This researcher finds Solution-Focused Brief Counseling to be an asset to the school counseling profession. There is an interest in understanding the experiences and perceptions of school counselors that use Solution-Focused Brief Counseling to promote resiliency within their students.

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design. This type of design enables the researcher to “get to the inner experience of the participants, to determine how meanings are formed within one’s culture, and to explore the participants lived experiences rather than test variables” (Corbin & Straus, 2008, p.12). Qualitative methods are a way of exploring how people think, what people do, what they know, and feel by observing, interviewing, and analyzing data (Patton, 2002).

The qualitative tradition of this research study is a phenomenological study that describes the meanings of the lived experience regarding a phenomenon being studied (Patton, 2002). The researcher of this study explored the lived experiences and perceptions of school counselors that have used Solution-Focused Brief Counseling to promote resilience among diverse student populations.

Definition of Terms

1. **Bullying:** Bullying involves a desire to hurt through the use of hurtful action(s) (physical or mental) to gain an imbalance of power that is (typically) repetitious and enjoyment is evident by the aggressor. There is a sense of being oppressed on the part of the victim (Boulton & Underwood, 1992).
2. **Constructivism:** Philosophy of learning founded on the premise that, by reflecting on our experiences, we construct our own understanding of the world we live in (Kaplan & Maxwell, 1994).
3. **Multicultural Competencies:** The counselor's belief's, attitudes, knowledge, and skills when counseling people from diverse cultural backgrounds. The policy or practice of giving equal attention or representation to the cultural needs and contributions of all the groups in a society: special emphasis may be given to minority groups underrepresented in the past. (Sue, Arrendondo, & McDavis, 1992).
4. **Phenomenology:** Describes the structures of experiences as they present themselves without recourse to theory or assumptions from other disciplines (Chiari & Nuzzo, 1996).
5. **Qualitative Research:** Methods that are designed to help researchers understand people and the social and cultural contexts within which they live (Kaplan & Maxwell, 1994).
6. **Resilience:** The capacity to survive, rebound, persevere, and successfully adapt in the face of adversity (Dekel, 2005) and develop social, academic, and

vocational competence despite exposure to severe stress or simply to the stress inherent in today's world (Henderson & Milstein, 1996).

7. **School Counselor:** The purpose and role of the school counselor is to plan, organize, and deliver a comprehensive school guidance and counseling program that personalizes education and supports, promotes, and enhances the academic, personal, social, and career development of all students, based on the national standards for school counseling programs of the American School Counselor Association (American School Counselor Association, 2005).
8. **Solution-Focused Brief Counseling:** A brief counseling approach which uses the clients own strengths and resources in a collaborative approach to set goals that will bring about desired change by the client (Trepper et al., 2006).
9. **School-Related Counseling Issues:** Aggression, poor social skills, low self-esteem, bullying, defiance, multiculturalism, and lack of healthy coping skills.

Limitations and Delimitations

Due to the nature of qualitative phenomenological research, there are limitations to just about every research study. The limitations to this research study are as follows: The first limitation is that the participants must actively work in elementary, middle, or high schools and be current members of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) in order to be surveyed. There are school counselors who are not members of the association or they have not renewed their membership that may in fact use Solution-Focused Brief Counseling within their schools, but these will not be surveyed. Second, the researcher will not be able to contact the participants to expand on their answers to the questionnaire. It is important to remember that depending on the extent of the

training and utility of the solution-focused techniques, this may suggest a need to approach the results of this study with caution. Finally, the sample size consisting of a maximum of 12 participants may be considered small (Patton, 2002).

Organization of the Study

The intent of Chapter I was to present an overview of the research study, background, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, and the theoretical framework of the study. In Chapter II, related literature is reviewed to provide the reader with a broader perspective of the subject area. In Chapter III, the methodology and its components are described. Chapter IV will review the results of the data. Chapter V contains the purpose and significance of the study, the limitations of the study, a restatement of the methodology, discussion of the findings, conclusions of the research study, implications for future studies, and the chapter summary.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of Chapter II is to provide a literature review of (1) the theoretical background of Solution-Focused Brief Counseling and Resiliency Theory; (2) the development and role of the school counselor; (3) why there is a significant need for school counselor direct interventions and support; (4) the most common school-related counseling issues; and (5) counseling diverse student populations using Solution-Focused Brief Counseling and Resiliency Theory.

Substantial literature exists regarding school counselors and the nature of the counseling interventions that are being utilized in the public school setting (Schmidt, 1993). Common to all authors who have used solution-focused approaches in the public schools is their concern that more empirical investigations of this application are required due to the limited evidence of its effectiveness in the school systems (Stobie et al., 2005). Research using a solution-focused approach in the public schools is limited though it is favorable especially in the elementary schools (McKeel, 1996).

School counselors are increasingly being called upon to be a part of a collaborative teaming that helps with student behavior problems (Geroski, et al., 1997). Because school counselors are able to touch a wide range of students daily, they are uniquely able to identify students who are in need of a counseling component at school. For some of these students, an outside referral is necessary due to the manifestation of the behavior(s) (Geroski, et al., 1997) such as severe or violent aggression and/or depression. School counselors can provide direct interventions and support to the total student

population because of their knowledge of education, counseling background, and consequently have the ability and the skills to effectively counsel students in a school setting (Fox & Butler, 2007).

The theory of resiliency also plays a part in this research. As literature on resiliency has become more popular in education (Lambie, Leone, & Martin, 2007) positive outlooks to view at-risk children have been clarified (Lambie et al., 2007). For example, Lewis (2006) describes the progressive shift in practice from a “deficit-focused model” to a model that views students as a promise rather than a risk. Lambie et al., (2007) discussed the challenges of increasing the number of students who fall into the resilient category. There is a need for interventions and the involvement of school counselors as change agents across systems (i.e., home, school, and the community).

Current research on the implementation of a solution-focused approach with diverse student populations is limited. A study by Rhodes (2000) writes a brief account of the use of solution-focused therapy with residential staff that supports adults with learning disabilities. Stoddart et al. (2001) discusses their adaptation of this approach and it’s techniques with students with learning disabilities in the UK. They also present a brief outcome report revealing that the approach was broadly equivalent to long-term psychotherapy (Smith, 2005). Newsome (2005) reported on a study where 26 students ages 11-14 participated in an 8 week counseling program using Solution-Focused Brief Counseling. The purpose of the research study was to examine how this approach impacted at-risk students in junior high school. Results indicated that Solution-Focused Brief Counseling has potential to empower at-risk junior high students and possibly provide a positive outlook on the future.

Theoretical Framework

Solution-Focused Brief Therapy

Solution-Focused Brief Therapy approaches to interventions and strategies are built upon a constructivist epistemology meaning that clients create their own reality (Gingerich & Wabeke, 2001). This philosophy can provide a new perspective on the way that people function in today's society through its overt acknowledgment of the role of power in communication and the construction of meaning (Smith, 2005). Constructivism is a philosophy of learning instituted on the principle that, by reflecting on our experiences, we construct our own understanding of the world in which we live (Revis-Pike, 2009). Each of us generates our own "rules" and "mental models," which we use to make sense of our experiences (Myers 2009). Learning, therefore, is simply the process of adjusting our mental models to accommodate new experiences. Psychotherapeutic approaches based on the constructionist philosophy may be especially helpful, as they offer the opportunity for people to reconstruct their views of themselves and their problems in more positive ways.

As one of the therapy approaches of the postmodern era, Solution-Focused Brief Counseling relies heavily on the idea that there are no absolute truths. It's based on constructivist ideas that "insist that reality does not exist as a 'world out there' but instead is a mental construction of the observer" (Nichols & Schwartz, 2001, p. 310). The solution-focused approach is a form of counseling that is explicitly based upon a social constructionist philosophy, and it has several attributes that make it attractive to use with students with learning disabilities. This includes but is not limited to focusing on the skills rather than deficits, individualizing the intervention based on student needs and

particular skills, and providing the student with “expert status” within the therapeutic relationship (Smith, 2005).

Influenced heavily by the work of Milton Erickson and the Mental Research Institute (MRI) Team, Solution-Focused Brief Counseling is characterized by several assumptions: (1) Solution-Focused Counseling’s emphasis is on wellness, whereby the individual is seen as having the resources to solve their own problem, (2) assumes that Solution-Focused Brief Counseling is future-oriented so to not focus on the cause of the problem, (3) Solution-Focused Brief Counseling is considered cooperative and collaborative, (4) Solution-Focused Brief Counseling states that problems do not require a specific amount of time to solve related to their complexity, (5) resistance is seen as an artifact stemming from the difficulties that counselors may have while establishing goals for the client, (6) Solution-Focused Brief Counseling assumes that problems and their solutions can be seen, measured, and described. It is believed that the assumptions and techniques of the solution-focused model, an approach already seen as being beneficial in the school system, would help address the needs and concerns of the parents, teachers, and students (Stobie et al., 2005).

DeJong and Hopwood (1996) reported on a study from the Brief Therapy Center in which 275 participants received counseling using the Solution-Focused Brief Counseling approach. Of the 275 clients, 77 percent stated that they met their goals or made progress toward them. Of the 275 participants who were involved in the study, one third of them were twelve years of age or younger suggesting that this brief therapy approach is effective with children. Another study by Littrell, Malia, and Vanderwood (1995) investigated the extent to which a four-step, solution oriented brief counseling

model is effective in helping adolescents with learning disabilities resolve problems. Twelve students, aged 16 to 18, who were assessed as having a learning disability, participated in the research. The students met with the counselor once a week for four weeks. The first two sessions were of a counseling nature and the last two were follow-up sessions. The first session included identification of the problem, exploring previous successful solutions, setting goals, and introducing a task intervention. The second session was used to reinforce progress and set new tasks and goals if necessary. The follow-up sessions were used as interviews for data collection on the effectiveness of the intervention. Results reported that students saw positive changes in affect and cognition. Their intense negative feelings had decreased and they had an overall positive experience with the solution oriented counseling (Littrell et al., 1995).

According to Trepper et al. (2006), research concerning Solution-Focused Brief Counseling is growing in popularity in both Europe and North America. However, the research literature on this subject has strengths and weaknesses. One of the weaknesses has been the lack of clear specifications of Solution-Focused Brief Counseling. There is a lack of experimental efficacy regarding the effectiveness of a solution-focused approach in the school systems even though it has grown in popularity over the past 20 years and is used throughout the world in different settings. Therefore, it is imperative to understand the basics of this approach and how it has been incorporated into school counseling (Gillen, 2004).

Interventions in brief therapy are short-term, strategic, and results oriented. The emphasis is placed on empowering the client and focusing on what is going well. Solution-Focused Brief Counseling is a goal-directed and future-focused approach that

utilizes questions designed to identify *exceptions*, (times when the problem does not occur), *solutions*, (a description of what life would be like if the problem did not exist), and *scales* which are used to measure the client's current progress level toward a solution and to reveal the behaviors that are necessary to achieve or maintain future progress.

Solution-Focused Brief Counseling began in the 1980's with the research and writing of Steve de Shazer, Insoo Kim Berg, and their colleagues at the Brief Family Therapy Center in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Steve de Shazer was a pioneer in the field of family therapy who was known for his minimalist philosophy and his view of the process of change (Trepper et al., 2006). de Shazer explained that change takes place in everyday life. According to de Shazer, Milton Erickson took the learning that people already had and assisted them in applying this information to new situations. This particular method of communication was based on Erickson's three principles: (1) meet the clients where they are, (2) modify the client's outlook to gain control, and (3) allow for change that meets the needs of the clients (Gillen, 2004). Aspects of Erickson's principles have been intertwined in the solution-focused theory.

Solution-Focused Brief Counseling, which evolved from Brief Family Therapy, is a paradigm shift from traditional psychotherapy which focuses on the formulation of problems and their resolutions. Instead, the solution-focused approach focuses on the client's strengths and resiliencies examining previous solutions and exceptions to their problems, and then, through a process of interventions, the clients are encouraged to do more of these positive behaviors (Trepper et al., 2006). The clients are seen as competent and in charge, able to visualize desired change and build on positive aspects of what they are already doing well in school, work and/or at home (DeJong & Berg, 2002).

Although there has not been a plethora of well-controlled, clinical research studies of the effectiveness of Solution-Focused Brief Counseling in the school systems, the research that has been done has been shown to be effective in school counseling in the elementary and high schools (Franklin et al., 2001). While the majority of these studies used a quasi-experimental design, each showed improvements when compared to other approaches to do as well or better in fewer sessions. These earlier studies suggest that more controlled research in the area of Solution-Focused Brief Counseling is warranted as a counseling approach in the school systems.

A study comparing the effectiveness of a brief counseling approach compared to a more traditional counseling used by school counselors, Bruce and Hopper (1997) found that during a four week treatment period, students demonstrated healthy changes in cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains regardless of the therapeutic approach. The difference between counseling approaches was that the students that received brief counseling maintained the improvements for a longer period of time. A meta-analysis by Stams, Dekovic, Buist, & de Vries (2006) shows that although Solution-Focused Brief Counseling does not have a large effect that is traditional to psychotherapy; it does have a positive effect in less time and satisfies the client's need for autonomy. To bring about this satisfaction of autonomy, clients were encouraged to participate in and develop their own personal goals, while hope was being created within the client (Stams et al., 2008).

Furthermore, a research study in 1994 was conducted to explore the (a) flexibility of Solution-Focused Brief Counseling in meeting the daily demands of the school counselors and (b) whether training in Solution-Focused Brief Counseling would be a continuing contribution to the profession development of the participants in the study.

Approximately 20 counselors attended the initial workshop. Follow-up trainings were held each month for two hours. In the end, five counselors decided to participate in the study. Counselors reported that they had several concerns about their effectiveness at their work: (a) not enough contact with student and their families, (b) interventions with students and other helping professionals resulting in uncoordinated assistance, (c) students were apprehensive to counseling when referred, and (d) environments outside of the school setting tend to influence students beyond the counselor's reach. After the five counselors received training, they were told to implement the solution-focused techniques with students at their schools. When questioned about the efficacy of the solution-focused approach, the participants were unanimous in their position that Solution-Focused Brief Counseling was a practical counseling approach in the school setting. Furthermore, they noted that the approach produces immediate, noticeable results both in their utilization and in student responses.

Some features of Solution-Focused Brief Counseling are particularly child friendly. The language of this approach to counseling is concrete and generally easy to understand. The solution-focused approach utilizes the imagination of children through the miracle question and other such techniques for visualizing the future. Solution-focused counselors do not ask the question "why" because children typically cannot explain why they behave as they do (Sklare, 2005). Instead, the counselor focuses on who, what, when, where, and how aspects of the solutions may come to fruition.

A demonstration project took place in Austin, Texas at an alternative high school for high-risk students. This particular school used a solution-building model that was developed from the solution-focused approach and is designed to engage the students

with its philosophies and skills (Franklin & Streeter, 2004). The pilot study's findings were that 62% of the sampled students graduated on time, and of those that did not, more than one half continued pursuing their high school degree.

Resiliency Theory

To bring about this satisfaction of autonomy, students are encouraged to develop their own personal goals, while hope is being created through personal resilience and through the solution-focused approach. (Stams et al., 2008). Beginning in the late 1970's with the landmark study of Rutter, Maughan, Martimore, and Ouston (1979), an investigation was launched into why some children are able to experience positive life outcomes despite less-than-favorable circumstances that would generally influence them to personal failure (Rutter & Maughan, 2002). Resiliency is defined as the capacity to survive, rebound, persevere, and successfully adapt in the face of adversity (Dekel, 2005) and develop social, academic, and vocational competence despite exposure to severe stress or simply to the stress inherent in today's world (Henderson & Milstein, 1996). It includes the capacity to bounce back, to withstand hardships, and to repair oneself (Wolin, 1993). Although community/environmental, family, and individual factors all contribute to resiliency, previous research focused on either family or individual factors. Several authors, however, also reported that schools can also be influential in promoting resiliency in students (Rutter & Maughan, 2002).

The Resiliency Theory is based on the proposition that if a member of one's family, community, and/or school cares deeply about a person, sets high expectations, shows support, and values the person's participation, they can overcome almost any adversity that comes their way (Krovetz, 1998). Fostering resiliency in children is a

long-term project rooted on the belief that what we do every day around children makes a difference in their lives (Bernard, 1995). A recent study (Byrd-Craven, Geary, Rose & Ponsi, 2008) reported that continual discussions of problems, rehashing the details of the problem, speculating about the problems and future problems will lead to a significant release of the stress hormone cortisol which causes anxiety and depression over time. By focusing on resiliency, competencies, and coping, new positive neural networks will emerge and old negative networks will die (Siegel, 1999). To assist in cultivating resiliency in children across the home, school, and community, school counselors should be familiar with resiliency characteristics. Persistence, motivation, optimism, adaptability, self-esteem, appropriate social skills, and goal-oriented qualities (Morin & Linares, 2004) are just to name a few.

Henderson and Millstein (1992) proposed a six strategy model for encouraging resiliency in the school environment as: (a) finding opportunities for meaningful student participation, (b) communicating high expectations, (c) providing a caring and supportive attitude, (d) increasing social bonding, (e) setting clear and consistent boundaries, and (f) teaching student's life skills. Data supports the importance of finding meaningful opportunities for students. Gottfredson (1986) found that students who have more opportunity to share in decision making at school had a greater expectation for educational success and it has been shown to reduce delinquent behaviors among students. Furthermore, Rak and Patterson (1996) shared that having opportunities to be helpful to others had lasting protective effects. It has also been determined that students who were included in planning school events demonstrated better attendance, made academic gains, and improved behavior more so than the students that did not take on

such opportunities (Bosworth & Earthman, 2002). In addition to students taking action to promote resiliency, Werner (1989) found that student's perceptions of teacher's as caring individuals contributed to positive outcomes and resiliency. Healthy interpersonal relationships are very important to a positive school climate.

Because students have the ability to "bounce back" after hardships, the school counselor's role is manageable within the realm of counseling. Resilient students seem to develop stable, healthy personalities, and are able to deal with life's pit falls more effectively than their peers. Researchers have defined "protective factors" as conditions that buffer, interrupt, or prevent problems from occurring (Wolin, 1993). Resilient students generally have four attributes in common known as these "protective factors" (Bernard, 1995). First, resilient students have social competence which is the ability to elicit positive responses from others. Second, they have autonomy (a sense of one's own identity). Resilient children also develop valuable problem-solving skills whereas they use resourcefulness in seeking help from others. Finally, resilient children have a sense of purpose and future (i.e., goals, persistence, higher education, and hopefulness).

Another set of protective factors for students are drawn from meaningful partnerships between families and schools (Tolan et al., 2004). Parents may without a doubt be the key in developing resilience in their children, but the schools should target family resilience as well (Wolin & Wolin, 1995). Periodic contact from the schools to the families concerning school performance provides feedback and helps to make the connection between the importance of home, school, confidence and motivation.

Student's who have faced their share of distress and trauma, need to be monitored by the school counselor but not necessarily be pulled for services during the school day

unless necessary. On the other hand, even though many students have developed appropriate coping mechanisms that enable them to function in society, some students still continue to struggle and therefore may require specialized intervention (Wood & Moore, 2008). Counselors, teachers, and parents work collaboratively to develop a counseling plan. By placing a focus on resiliency and the future, students can benefit from short-term counseling in individual and small group settings. Students can be placed in a group or individual counseling setting depending on the needs of the student. School counselors can assist students on an educationally based level to learn to cope with situations that seem to be out of their control, to be stronger than the bully that makes fun of them daily, to do the best they can academically because they are the ones who matter in the long run and to hold their heads up high no matter what.

For students with disabilities and those with low socio-economic status, the following issues take a toll on personal, social and academic success: The daily occurrences that disrupt their learning, the low-self confidence that hinders their success, and the mocking behaviors that interfere with making good choices (American School Counselor Association, 2004b). School counselors need to advocate for all students but particularly the students that fall short of being able to stand up for themselves (Wood & Moore, 2008). Students with educational disabilities hold Individual Education Plans and in the Individual Education Plans (IEP) a counseling component may be included as a related service. It has been found that students with disabilities from speech, to specific learning disabilities, to more severe social/emotional behaviors can benefit from a counseling component weekly while at school (Noam & Hermann, 2002).

Educational resilience is defined as the heightened likelihood of success in school and other life accomplishments despite environmental adversities brought about by early traits, conditions, and experiences (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1994). One of the most productive ways for school counselors to promote resiliency in students is through the creation and implementation of appropriate brief counseling programs and groups (Rak & Patterson, 1996).

Solution-Focused Brief Counseling and the School Counselor

Time and resources in schools are scarce and school counselors are being asked to accomplish more with less (Fox & Butler, 2007). The school counselor's ability to assist students on a counseling level is influenced by several factors: caseloads, meetings, extraneous school responsibilities and duties, and limited resources. There is limited opportunity for on-going, long-term counseling in school despite the high demands of individualized counseling. Therefore, there is a need for an approach that is positive, goal and future orientated. Schools are in need of behavioral support systems that are feasible, sustainable, and do not take away from the time that counselors need to spend on their other assigned duties. In response to the pressures of society for expedient treatment and situational limitations, short-term therapy models have moved into the forefront during the last two decades (Steenbarger, 1992). Due to these time limitations and resources, school counselors are looking for interventions that are brief, effective, and focus on results (Williams, 2000).

There are several aspects of the solution-focused approach that is appealing to the school setting. Solution-Focused Brief Counseling can be quite positive and practical. Murphy (1996) explained that the beliefs of this approach are that people are resourceful

and competent. This promotes collaboration between school personnel, students and their parents. The present/future orientation works well in the school setting due to the time limitations of the school counselor. Specific and concrete goals illustrate change in the problematic situation and are more realistic than nonspecific goals.

Solution-Focused Brief Counseling is a recognized therapeutic approach that has been shown to be effective in time-limited circumstances (Sukhodolsky, Ross, & Perine, 2000). Sukhodolsky et al., (2000) described two reasons why a solution-focused approach is relevant in a school setting: “There are so many children to reach and so few child therapists to go around...because children’s character structure is more flexible, their personalities are more resilient, and their outlook is more positive” (p.144). In a study by DeJong and Berg (2002), it was reported that 78% of children 12 years of age and younger made progress toward achieving their goals through working with the school counselor using a solution-focused approach. Eighty-nine percent of children 13-18 years old also made progress toward their goals. In a study by Mostert, Johnson, and Mostert (1997), Solution-Focused Brief Counseling was determined effective and practical approach when working with their students. In the initial study, the investigators interviewed five school counselors who had been trained in using solution-focused techniques. The finding indicated that the counselors felt as though they were able to utilize the model with minimal initial training and ongoing professional support. The school counselors also stated that this particular brief counseling approach would be beneficial when working with students, parents and with other professionals regarding collective problem solving.

Bruce and Hopper (1997) described brief counseling as an approach which requires four components for promoting change. The four elements are: (1) Counselors need to take a nonjudgmental acceptance of the client's worldview; (2) Counselors need to be aware of the client's strengths and utilize resources that are available; (3) There needs to be a positive rapport between counselor and client; and (4) Specific and concrete goals need to be identified. In a study by Corocoran (2006) comparing the effectiveness of traditional and brief counseling approaches, it was found that students demonstrated positive changes after a four week period regardless of the treatment approach. However, the students that received the brief therapy maintained their improvements after one session for four weeks while the other students required more and longer sessions to achieve similar results.

In applying a solution-focused approach in public schools, Murphy (1996) focused on the roles of parents, students, and teachers in resolving school-related behavior problems and would make note of all of the small changes that eventually led to achieving positive outcomes personally, socially, and academically. Students and parents tend to believe in counseling when they can see tangible results. Perhaps the student receives fewer behavioral referrals or the parents experience less tantrums at home. In any case, the students and parents have to be accountable for their actions or lack thereof. School support cannot stand alone in order for it to be effective and transfer over in to the community and home (Williams, 2000). School counselors can use the solution-focused approach and the resiliency model to include families in three important ways: (1) Parents can identify appropriate resources for their child; (2) Parents can assist in

improving coping skills along with problem solving strategies; and (3) Parents can reframe the condition of their child's learning difficulties.

Geil (1998) compared the outcomes from behavioral consultation and Solution-Focused Brief Counseling. The sample consisted of eight elementary students who exhibited externalizing symptomology in the classroom setting using a single-case AB design. Classroom based observations showed behavioral improvements using the solution-focused approach. Solution-Focused Brief Counseling is a child friendly approach that takes a non-blaming attitude using problem-free talk and exception gathering. The language is concrete and relatively easy for children to grasp. This brief approach to therapy utilizes the imagination of the child by asking a miracle question, scaling questions, problem-free talk, exception questions, goal setting, and giving compliments.

The miracle question is often asked in the first session to help the counselor clarify the client's concrete and specific goal(s). The miracle question asks the client to imagine what it would be like if they woke up and the problem was gone. How would they know that the problem had gone away? What changed? How was life different now? It can be stated according to Tohn and Oshlag (1996), as "Suppose that tonight, after our session, you go home and fall asleep, and while you are sleeping a miracle happens. The miracle is that the problems that brought you here are solved, but you don't know that the miracle has taken place because you were sleeping. When you wake up in the morning what will be some of the initial things that you notice will be different that will tell you that this miracle has indeed happened?" (pp. 170-171). Who in your life may notice this change? What is the first step that you can take that will move you on the

right path of reaching this miracle? I wonder if a piece of this miracle is already occurring (Cotton, 2010)?

Scaling questions require the client to gauge their problem or issue on a scale from 0 to 10 with 0 representing the worst the problem has ever been and 10 depicting the success of the client's achievements towards their specific goal(s). An example of a scaling question might be: On a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 representing how you felt when you first came to counseling, and 10 representing your experience when the behaviors that brought you to counseling are/were absent, how would you rate how you feel at this time? Scaling questions provide the client and the counselor with a way of discussing issues that are difficult to describe. Berg and Dolan (2001) stated that the use of numbers seems to trigger some cognitive ability to calmly observe or assess one's own situation. Counselors can also create this into a visual form for students to identify with more easily if necessary.

Problem-free talk is designed to convey to the client that they are not seen as the problem. The counselor's focus is on what the client does well. Solution-focused questions focus on personal qualities and competence during problem-free talk. Counselor may choose to discuss topics not related to counseling to help establish rapport at this time. The conversation revolves around times when there are no problems.

By exploring how the client behaves when the problem is not occurring, the "exceptions" to the problem are brought into the forefront (Keiser, Piercy, & Lipchik, 1993). Exception questions ask the client to consider a time when the problem(s) is not as significant and explore what the client is doing differently at that particular time which makes the situation better. This is when the counselor identifies strengths related to the

problem that initially brought the client to counseling and then encourages them to do more of the behaviors that are associated with the exceptions to the problem (Guterman, 2006).

Well-developed goals are created through the collaboration of the client and the counselor. Typically, clients do not formulate any type of goal prior to the initial counseling session. The counselor and client work together on goal development (DeJong, Berg & Miller, 1995). Well-developed goals, according to Berg et al. (1992), have seven essential characteristics:

- 1) Goals are well-developed when they are small.
- 2) Goals are well-developed when they are specific and behavioral.
- 3) Goals are well-developed when they encourage goal attainment as opposed to the elimination of something.
- 4) Goals are well-developed when they are realistic in relation to life experiences.
- 5) Goals are well-developed when they are conceptualized as first steps in a continuing process.
- 6) Goals are well-developed when they are the client's priority and in the client's own words.
- 7) Goals are well-developed when they are felt by the client to require a commitment to work.

Another solution-focused technique is to use compliments. Compliments are used to acknowledge the client's efforts toward a solution. The counselor assists the client in

discovering what they have done to contribute to the change in their life. Compliments can come in the form of kind words and/or a letter to the client.

Development of School Counseling Program

The rationale leading to the development of guidance and counseling services in the United States commenced in the 1890s with the social reform movement. The difficulties of people living in urban low socio-economic housing areas and the widespread use of child labor outraged many citizens (Beesley, 2004). One of the consequences was the compulsory education movement and shortly thereafter the vocational guidance movement, which, in its early days, was concerned with guiding people into the workforce to become productive members of society. A primary role of counselors was to prepare students to go to work, and vocational counselors could assist in the sorting of students into the appropriate work paths (Gysbers, 2001).

The man seen as the father of the vocational guidance movement was Frank Parsons. His work with the Civic Service House led to the development of the Boston Vocation Guidance Bureau (Gysbers & Henderson, 2001). In 1909, the Boston Vocational Guidance Bureau created a system of vocational guidance in the public schools. In these earlier years, guidance and counseling were considered to be mostly vocational in nature, but as the profession advanced, other personal concerns became part of the school counselor's agenda. Early in the life of the profession of school counselors, they provided mainly vocational guidance by assisting students with college and career planning (Beesley, 2004). A typical visit to the counselor's office in high school was to create a semester class schedule or to make a class change in the current schedule. School counselors were also responsible for assisting students with scholarships and

grants. The long-established professional role of the school counselors has since shifted to counseling services (Gysber, 2001) partially in response to our ever changing world.

The United States' entry into World War I brought the need for assessment of large groups of draftees, in large part to select appropriate people for leadership positions (Bemak, 2000). These early psychological assessments performed on large groups of people were quickly identified as being valuable tools to be used in the educational system, thus beginning the standardized testing movement that in the early twenty-first century is still a strong aspect of United States public education. During this time, approximately 900 high schools had some type of vocational guidance system (Bemak, 2000). In 1913, the National Vocational Guidance Association was formed and helped legitimize and increase the number of guidance counselors. Vocational guidance counselors in the past were often teachers sharing additional duties along with their teaching responsibilities without additional compensation.

The 1920s and the 1930s saw a broadening of counseling roles beyond working specifically with vocational concerns. Social, personal, and educational aspects of a student's life also needed attention. Trends began to move toward less testing and more of a focus on individual counseling (Gysber & Henderson, 2001). Devastation from both World Wars necessitated helping students plan for their future and assist returning veterans with more than choosing jobs. Clinical services were introduced into schools by the time World War II was underway (Gysbers & Henderson, 2001).

In the 1950s to the 1960s, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) was formed, furthering the professional identity of the school counselor. School counseling continued to fare well in the high schools taking on a more personal role with

students as well as continuing with a vocational stance. In the 1960's, C. Gilbert Wrenn brought to light the need for more cultural sensitivity on the part of school counselors. Other theorists began to bring counseling theories to the field of school counseling. Frederick Perl's gestalt therapy, William Glasser's Reality Therapy, Abraham Maslow and Rollo May's existential approach, and John Krumboltz's behavioral counseling approach began to surface (Gysbers & Henderson, 2001). It was during this time that legislative support and an amendment to the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) provided funds for training and hiring school counselors with an elementary emphasis.

Beesley (2004) reported that the 1970's and the 1980's were dark times for the profession of school counseling. It was during this time period that declining enrollments and staff reductions caused many school counselors to find themselves at risk of being eliminated. This was due in part to a role identity crisis and the lack of ability on the part of school counselors to appropriately show the positive effects of their work in the schools (Baker, 2001; Beesley, 2004). School counselors needed to define their roles and responsibilities to prove that they played imperative roles at the school level. By the late 1970's the developmental approach to guidance was gaining strength and the concept of elementary school guidance saw rebirth (Baker, 2001).

The 1980's saw the development of training standards and criteria for the school counseling program. Schools had to provide adequate educational services to meet the ever growing needs of the student population (Baker, 2001; Gysbers, 2001). At this same time, the roles and responsibilities of the counselor changed. Counselors started finding themselves as gatekeepers to Individualized Education Programs (IEP) and Chairpersons

of the Child Study Teams as well as consultants to special education teachers, especially after passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990.

The growing trend is for counselors to be seen as professionals in a large system, working fluidly with all aspects within the system. The expected duties are far more elaborate than those practiced by vocational guidance counselors of the past, hence the position of many school counselors that the name of the profession should reflect its expanded roles. Many counselors feel that they are more a part of the school as a whole rather than just a department (Dahir, 2001).

Role of School Counselors

A school counselor is a counselor and educator who work within the school system. The purpose of school counseling is to assist students in achieving success and happiness within their social and educational environment (American School Counselor Association, 2004). Professional school counselors are able to implement a comprehensive school counseling program that promotes and enhances student achievement, responsive services, individual strategies, and an advocacy and support program (Dahir, 2001). According to the American School Counselor Association's (ASCA) National Model, the school counselor's role is to assist all students in achieving academically through a set of developmentally and systematically appropriate interventions (ASCA, 2004; Center for School Counseling Outcome Research, 2000).

Professional school counselors meet the needs of students through three basic domains: social/personal development, academic development, and career development. Personal/Social development assists students with acquiring and developing self-knowledge, self-acceptance, responsible behaviors, problem-solving, decision-making

skills, interpersonal and communication skills, respect, and the ability to value diversity. The academic development domain assists students with academic readiness, to arrange and interpret formal evaluations, to assist students in understanding the relationship between attitudes and behaviors relating to academic achievement and to seek secondary academic opportunities. The career domain assists students with understanding how to apply knowledge of interest, ability, preference, attitude, and their values as they relate to choosing a post-secondary school and/or career. Counselors also assist in developing skills needed to seek, acquire, maintain, and change one's career path. Counselor knowledge and skills in these three domains are taught through classroom instruction, consultation, collaboration, counseling, and coordination. The National Standards for Professional School Counselors was adopted by the American School Counselor Association in 1997; and the school counseling standards are similar to the academic standards used nationally by the United States Department of Education (Dahir, 2001). These standards provide guidelines of the tasks and goals of school counselors.

The role of the school counselor has been redefined and modernized, oftentimes to meet the needs of a changing society or in response to societal events since the inception of the profession (Beesley, 2004; Burnham & Jackson, 2000; Gysbers & Henderson, 2001; Paisley & Borders, 1995). Prior to 2000, 34 articles were published in *Elementary School Guidance and Counseling*, a peer reviewed journal published by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA), that were directly related to the subject of school counselor roles. For example, a study by Coll and Freeman (1990) investigated counselor perceptions of their roles as opposed to secondary school counselors. A couple of years later a study by Hardesty and Dillard (1994) explained how the duties of the

elementary school counselor were often perceived less essential to the running of the school than were the duties of the high school counselors (Burnham & Jackson, 2000).

The role of the school counselor also depends on placement. Elementary counselors have opportunities to provide classroom guidance and small group/individual counseling regarding social skills, coping skills, and personal awareness. They are able to have a connection with the majority if not all of the students in school. With the advent of systems thinking, counselors are able to have a working relationship with parents and families, community members, and social agencies (Burnham & Jackson, 2000).

Secondary school counselors may focus on conflict mediation, self-esteem, along with the traditional curriculum advisement and scheduling concerns (Burnham & Jackson, 2000). The roles of school counselors at the middle and high school level are largely assigned by the administration. These tasks can include class scheduling, discipline, counseling, and administrative type duties. The problems begin to arise when the extra assigned duties dilute the main counselor's goals of assisting student with academic, social/personal, and career development.

Since the reauthorization in 2001 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, known as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), it became the most comprehensive national educational reform in years (Phelps, 2002). The central purpose of this educational movement was to narrow the achievement gaps between and among minority groups and their White and Asian-American counterparts (United States Department of Education, 2001). Three of the five goals of the No Child Left Behind Act address curriculum and achievement.

Need for School Counselor Intervention and Support

According to the American School Counselor Association, the school counselor is a certified professional who addresses the needs of students through a comprehensive developmental guidance program (American School Counselor Association, 2003). As counselors have moved through the 1st decade of the 21st century, it is obvious that United States schools and society are continually in the process of change. The demographics of the United States population are shifting with an increase number of school age children as well as an increase of ethnic and racial diversity. There is an increase in poverty, disabilities among students, and problematic behaviors (Clark & Breman, 2009). Professional school counselors are challenged to efficiently and effectively provide guidance and counseling services to all students while responding to the current initiatives that address the achievement gap (House & Hayes, 2002). The school counselor can play a key role in fostering a caring school environment. The school counselor is able to engage students in a comprehensive, preventive, and developmental intervention that helps to promote a sense of belongingness. In the vast majority of elementary and junior/senior high public schools, it is customary that when a student is troubled or acting in a problematic manner, he or she is referred to the school counselor. One of the objectives of the teacher and parent is for the counselor and her/his team of experts in the field of psychology to “fix the problem” (Williams, 2000). What makes this difficult is that educators today are facing a unique set of challenges to meet the needs of diverse populations in the schools while they are lacking the necessary resources and support in which to do so effectively (Hawken, 2006). While counselors have support from their team, they may lack support from the students, their families, and

outside influences. Community resources are also an important factor in assisting students in meeting their needs and minimizing outward behaviors. The team of “experts” would include the school psychologist and behavioral analysts who are stretched beyond imagination. The majority of students come to school with the expectation that they must control their behaviors and that a primary level, school-wide behavior plan will be effective (Hawken, 2006). In today’s society, many schools have implemented a school-wide behavior plan in order to ensure accountability, reinforce expectations, and provide consequences when there has been an infraction to the plan.

However, the problems confronting public schools have come to the attention of people around the country. Anger, social problems, teasing, bullying, disruptive behaviors, and low self-esteem are among a myriad of personal and social issues that students experience or come in contact with daily (Birdsall, 2002). With these problematic behaviors, students have a difficult time concentrating on school work and student achievement is likely to decline. This particularly exacerbates the problems for students with learning disabilities. No matter what the disability, whether it is learning, speech, occupational, physical, language, emotional, etc. Students need to have someone that will be a guiding force that will assist them to persevere through these tough times. School counselors are trained to support students with such issues (Fox & Butler, 2007).

As school counselors coordinate comprehensive guidance services, provide consultative services to parents, educators, and the community, as well as classroom guidance, the act of providing small group and individual counseling becomes limited. School counselors are in fact system change agents and should be allowed to put their

expertise into play without the time constraints that typically become burdens (Williams, 2000).

School counselors provide a natural link between the special and general education teachers. It is only when students feel that their environment is supportive and safe that the fear of failure is reduced (Herring, 1990). All children have a need for direction, acceptance, encouragement, support, and direction from the adults and peers in their life during their school age years. However, for students with learning disabilities, these needs take on a whole new meaning (Bowen, 1998). School counselors must be consistent, reassuring, persuasive, sensitive, structured, direct, and patient (Bowen, 1998). This also means that the counselor must have the ability to identify, reflect, and to clarify any inaccurate beliefs of teachers, parents, and students. It is pertinent that counselors assist parents in understanding their child's disability, its impact on the student's learning and capabilities, and the social problems that the child may experience at home and school (Bowen, 1998). They can acquaint parents on techniques that are particularly effective with students who have learning disabilities and can work cooperatively with parents to achieve common goals. Parenting workshops can also provide information on a variety of subjects that address their needs as a family unit.

Teachers and counselors can assist in creating school-based intervention plans and behavioral contracts to fit the needs of the individual students who are at risk for demonstrating outward behaviors (Crone, 2003). Essential elements are necessary for change to take place. Behavioral principles need to clearly be defined within the school-wide behavior plan. Because school counselors are able to network with the student

population on a daily basis, they are able to monitor children and provide preventive “therapeutic” approaches when necessary.

School counselors are expected to spend the majority of their work day in direct service to all students. The American School Counselor Associations (ASCA) National Model states that 30-40% of an elementary counselor’s time is to be spent in responsive services (Williams, 2000). Responsive services may include individual or group counseling, crisis counseling, consultation, peer facilitation, and referrals based on educational needs. Much of the research on group counseling for children and adolescents has been conducted in the school setting. Small group counseling for children and adolescents is offered in schools more than any other setting (Corey & Corey, 2006).

The group model provides many purposes for all students. It gives the students a sense of connectedness and supports them as they transition through elementary school into junior/senior high school and beyond. The group model also helps general education and special education students find a safe place to explore issues that are important to their personal growth and academic success (Arman, 2002). Individual and group counseling also allows students to develop and practice resiliency skills that are necessary for success in the future. One of the best interventions at times is having someone to express unhappiness to without the risk of being judged or reprimanded for their thoughts and feelings during that particular day (Arman, 2002). Because of this lack of feeling safe to express thoughts and feelings at school and home, students are more apt to speak to the counselor about personal issues than they are to their parents. Another focus of responsive services is to work with the family to clarify, reiterate, and justify the

student's thoughts and feeling as well as the parents. There needs to be a sense of connectedness in order for the therapeutic intervention to be effective both in the home and school setting. Sometimes all that is needed is mediation. This is typically in the form of a parent/teacher conference or a meeting with the school counselor along with the student.

In a study by Hill (1999), it was found that young people value having school counselors. They felt that the counselors were very useful in times of need. Primary and secondary students felt that social problems and family problems were quite worrisome for them. However, the students also felt that the teacher/counselor role was problematic due to time constraints (Fox & Butler, 2007). Unfortunately, the counseling relationship must be developed and conducted in a limited time period. The students' suggestions were to employ additional school counselors so to alleviate this problem. Two common reasons for not seeing a counselor were: (1) other students finding out that they had gone to see them and (2) the school counselor being a stranger (Hill, 1999). In the elementary world today, it is virtually impossible not to know the counselor and for the counselor not to know the students.

School-Wide Interventions: A Collaborative Approach

Living and working in a functional society with new age technology at the fingertips, educators are challenged to improve and keep current their communication and collaboration skills. Current trends and issues in education, and specifically in school counseling, indicate the importance of collaborating for student success. The Glasser Quality School model holds that all children learn best when conditions for a positive relationship are present between parent and teacher, student and teacher, parent and

student, student and student, administrator and student, and administrator with students and parents (Wubbolding, 2007). The Glasser Quality School students feel a sense of belonging and believe that they are a part of the decision making process. This is what collaboration is all about. Collaboration is the process whereby two individuals or a group work together for a common goal, a mutual benefit, or a desired outcome (Wubbolding, 2007). Trust, respect, open and clear communication, and active listening are essential requirements for collaborative efforts. It's about the school-wide collaboration between all parties who have come together for the success of the student. Initiating and preserving collaborative efforts is an appropriate role of the school counselor. School counselors can work collaboratively with others in the school (teachers, administrators, and students), family members and the larger community in order to fulfill the primary mission of the school and support the development of all students in the academic, social-emotional and career domains.

During the 1994 National School Counseling Week an American School Counseling Association Summit was held in Washington, D.C. It was at this time, the American School Counseling Association proactively announced the school counselor's role as facilitator and change agent in the local school community. Fortunately, there are many opportunities available for school counselors to collaborate for student success in the school setting and in the community. Collaborative efforts may begin at the school level as school counselor's work with teachers, administrators, parents and other health care professionals to ensure academic and social progress, personal satisfaction, and success for all students is obtained; however these are not intended to be all-inclusive. Examples of elementary school counselor collaboration are listed below:

Parents: Parent education, communication/networking, academic planning, college/career awareness programs, one-on-one parent conferencing, interpretation of assessment results.

Teachers: Classroom guidance activities, academic support, including learning style assessment and education to help students succeed academically, classroom speakers, at-risk student identification and implementation of interventions to enhance success.

Administrators: school climate, behavioral management plans, school-wide needs assessments, student data and results, student assistance team building.

Students: Peer education, peer support, academic support, school climate, leadership development, community, job shadowing, service learning, crisis interventions, referrals, parenting classes, support groups, career education.

The years that children spend at the elementary level set the tone for developing the attitude, knowledge, and skills necessary for them to become healthy, competent and confident learners. Through a collaborative developmental school counseling program, school counselors work as a team with the school administrators, faculty and staff, parents and the community to create a caring climate and atmosphere (American School Counselor Association, 2003).

Common School-Related Counseling Issues

In the public school system, there are several moderate to severe behavioral “labels” that can be given to students who conduct themselves in ways that are not appropriate for their age. Most students who require such a label have a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) and/or an Individual Educational Plan (IEP). Interventions with

these students require written documentation provided by a behavior analyst and perhaps placement in a self-contained classroom where a teacher can assist them in controlling their challenging behaviors.

Many students in special education programs develop strained relationships with their peers and teachers due to lacking a sense of belonging and feeling insecure in their environment. These problems typically stem from various sources, including but not limited to having low academic success, feeling as though they are being excluded from the regular education environment, experiencing excessive conflicts at school, bullying, home stressors and anxiety (Singer, 2007).

The children and adolescents who are able to be serviced at school by a certified school counselor whether they fall under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) guidelines or are regular education students, have school-related counseling issues such as aggression, poor coping skills, low self-confidence, defiance, poor social skills, bullying issues, excessive school conflicts, social phobias and other such behaviors. These counseling issues are seen as “fixable” in the eyes of school counselors, teachers, administrators and parents. A mental health diagnosis is not needed unless perhaps the behaviors manifest themselves into more intense or deviant behaviors (Geroski et al., 1997).

Social Phobia is classified in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV™) as an anxiety disorder. The DSM-IV™ criteria is marked by persistent fear of social or performance situations or when one is exposed to unfamiliar people or to possible scrutiny of others. Social phobia is often associated with maladaptive characteristics such as low self-esteem, difficulty being assertive, feelings of

inferiority, and/or fear of rejection. Students with social phobias often unachieved in school due to test anxiety and avoidance of class participation (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). A study conducted by Velting and Albano (2003), found that the frequency of social phobias among adolescents increases with age, with the greatest increase among female children ages 12-13. Cognitive behavioral therapy is most often used with social phobias, however, Solution-Focused Counseling counteracts the natural tendencies of clients to be self-critical by incorporating the client's strengths and resources in the treatment plan. This therapeutic approach works well with children as it focuses on resiliency and the use of existing strengths as a foundation to building solutions.

The acts of bullying are also in need of counselor intervention. According to the National Center for Education Statistics-2002, almost one third of public schools have reported daily to weekly occurrences of student bullying (Hall, 2006). Research suggests that nearly half of today's students will experience some form of bullying during their education; however, rates of bullying as high as 81% for school-aged males and 72% for school-aged females have been reported in some studies (Casey-Cannon, Hayward, & Gowen, 2001; Sanders, 2004). In a survey by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, one in five students in grades 6 through 10 admitted bullying their classmates (Cole, Cornell, & Sheras, 2006). Racism and discrimination toward many minority groups (e.g., gender, homeless, race, ethnicity, disability etc.) are other pervasive examples that model elements of bullying. There are also attitudes that are still widely (although perhaps more privately) held that bullying is a common experience and

that victims somehow deserve the treatment they receive (Vernberg & Gamm, 2003). Some parents and students see the act of bullying as a rite of passage.

When speaking of age and school grade, several studies indicate a decreased occurrence of bullying and victimization with increasing age (Golfin, Palti, Gordon, 2002). Results by ethnicity for bullying and victimization are inconsistent (Graham & Juvonen, 2002). In a United States national study conducted by Nansel and colleagues of 6th to 10th grade students, Hispanic students were more likely to admit to bullying others and to being a victim than of African American students (Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simons-Morton, & Scheidt, 2001). Graham and Juvonen (2002) reported that the least prevalent ethnic group at school is most often bullied and the most prevalent ethnic group is often the least bullied at school. Clearly more studies are need in this area to fully understand the role of social factors that lead to bullying among ethnic groups.

Counseling Diverse Student Populations with Solution-Focused Brief Counseling

Solution-Focused Brief Counseling has been applied to several behavioral health concerns ranging from social skill and academic problems (Newsome, 2005), to anger management (Smith, 2005), to aggressive and oppositional behaviors (Corcoran & Stephenson, 2000). This model fits well with school-aged children because it connects with their resiliency and ability to use resources that they already have stored within them. Having the innate ability to carry over the strategies learned from school-to-home and vise-versa is key in promoting resiliency using this therapeutic approach. Parents have reported seeing less aggression in their children when they apply solution-focused strategies (Corcoran & Stephenson, 2000). Solution-Focused Brief Counseling is a

strength-based approach that seems to bring out success in counseling in a brief period of time.

Solution-Focused Brief Counseling with Students with Learning Disabilities

The United States Department of Education (1996) reaffirmed that a component of school based counseling is one of the three services that students with disabilities need most. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997 requires that the public school systems in the United States provide the necessary related services that would be most beneficial to students in special education (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 1999). Together these laws mandate that all individuals up until the age of 21 will receive free and appropriate public education (FAPE) with access to a wide array of services. With this mandate, school counselors are now being held responsible for providing preventive and supportive services for students with disabilities who are included in public education (Bowen, 1998).

Anxiety, nonparticipation, poor self-confidence, and depression are problematic daily concerns for students with disabilities. Students with learning disabilities have been perceived as demonstrating more behavior problems than regular education students (Kauffman, 1997). Given that psycho-social adjustment and school achievement are integrally related, persistent patterns of poor leaning and achievement in school may influence students to embrace maladaptive behaviors (Kauffman, 1997). When children believe that their life and education will not improve, they are likely to engage in negative behaviors such as quitting or avoiding tasks, blaming others for their difficulties, or becoming class clowns or bullies. Thus, a negative cycle is often set in motion, intensifying feelings of misery and defeat. It is essential to understand that if we are to

help students be more motivated and learn more effectively, we must ensure that our interventions and strategies address not only their educational needs but also their feelings of low self-worth and teachers must provide them with opportunities to experience realistic accomplishment that nurture optimism and hope.

Recent studies (Herring, 1990; Singer, 2005) show that many students with learning disabilities feel isolated, and as many as half reported feelings of disappointment, frustration, and embarrassment. These same students report to being bullied and teased on a regular basis at school (Singer, 2005). A variety of group counseling techniques have been adapted to work with children with educational disabilities. For example, cooperative learning groups have been shown to be successful (Hallahan & Kauffman, 1996), behaviorally based groups have also been shown to help manage behaviors within the classroom; and social skills groups have been shown to enhance social self-confidence (Singer, 2005). Herring (1990) reported that students with mild disabilities need to feel secure and to experience a sense of belonging in order to feel that the environment is safe and supportive. Group counseling provides the opportunity for students to utilize their newly established social skills, communicate feelings with others, assist in the formulation of essential identity attributes, and to give and receive feedback (Corey, 1997).

The brief solution-focused approach to counseling can also assist students with learning disabilities with being successful both in and out of the inclusive classroom. Many of these students have strained relationships with their peers along with their teachers. Even though students are in the inclusive classroom and are not being pulled from their studies to attend pull-out programs, stress and anxiety of what peers perceive

of them may still linger. The small group counseling opportunities are designed to have high-peer interactions, offer constructive feedback, and provide opportunities to identify and practice skills (Corey, 1997).

Solution-Focused Brief Counseling with Multicultural Students

In recent years, public school personnel have seen an increase in the number of students from culturally diverse backgrounds enroll in public education. In fact, predictions have been made to suggest that by 2011, the majority of students in public schools will come from diverse cultural, ethnic, and/or racial backgrounds (Holcomb-McCoy, 2001). Predictions such as this need to be handled in a way that allows all students to benefit from a safe, nurturing, and learning environment.

Issues of trust have led administrators and counselors to think differently when making decisions regarding how to best proceed with counseling services. Counselors need to have the knowledge, skills and awareness to work effectively with a diverse student body (Corcoran & Stephenson, 2000). Solution-Focused Brief Counseling makes for effective counseling with diverse populations because it focuses on the client's experience within their own frame of reference and it uses the student's words and phrases rather than the counselor's. This approach also recognizes that the students are the experts of their own lived experiences. These features of Solution-Focused Brief Counseling assist students from culturally diverse backgrounds overcome any resistance to counseling that they may experience. Corcoran & Stephenson (2000) indicated that solution-focused counseling approaches "conveys respect for cultural differences through its dominant values of client self-determination and the belief that people possess the strengths and resources to resolve their own problems" (p. 5).

Multicultural counseling takes place when a counselor and student are from different cultural groups. Due to the fact that significant demographic changes are taking place within the United States, multicultural awareness is becoming increasingly important within the school environment. Seven divisions of the American Counseling Association (ACA) have endorsed the multicultural competencies developed by the Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development (Sue & Sue, 1999). Multicultural competencies refer to the counselor's beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, and skills when counseling people from diverse cultural backgrounds (Sue, Arrendondo, & McDavis, 1992). It is important to bring an alliance between the counselor and the student. The awareness of how culturally diverse students may be alike or different from them may be vital to building success (Fuertes, Bartolomeo, & Nichols, 2000). Solution-Focused Brief Counseling is an approach that can be used with diverse populations presenting a variety of problematic behaviors. The utility of this approach allows the counselor to work with the student in a respectful and positive manner, by focusing on resources and strengths using a collaborative, rather than a directive approach (Corcoran & Stephenson, 2000).

The field of multicultural counseling has experienced rapid growth in recent years as evident by the significant amount of empirical, conceptual, and theoretical writings on this topic (Worthington, Mobley, Franks & Tan, 2000; Mendoza & Kanitz, 1994). The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) adopted and revised a position held encouraging school counselors to guarantee that culturally diverse students have access to appropriate services and opportunities promoting maximum development (ASCA, 1999). Unfortunately, little is known about counselor attitude toward counseling the culturally

diverse student population and their ability to address the student's needs (Worthington et al., 2000).

Solution-Focused Brief Counseling with Bullies and Victims

All over the world, bullying and victimization are common in elementary and secondary schools. Bullying in schools is increasingly becoming a part of the everyday lives of students whether they are directly or indirectly affected (Wolke, Woods, Stanford & Shultz, 2001). Bullying is defined as a repeated aggression in which one or more persons intend to harm or disturb another person either psychologically, physically, or verbally (Boulton & Underwood, 1992). Examples of psychological bullying would be isolation, excluding, and gossiping. Examples of physical bullying are kicking, pushing, hitting, and the removal of personal property. Bullying of the verbal nature would include name calling and making threats.

Bullying in schools is a worldwide problem that can have negative consequences for the general school environment and for the rights of students to learn in a safe environment without fear. Bullies are at an increase risk of juvenile delinquency, crime, and substance abuse (Kaltiala-Heino, Rimpela, Rantanen, & Rimpela, 2000). Bullies have been reported to be aggressive, impulsive, hostile, antisocial, and uncooperative towards peer interaction. Even though it has been said that bullies are antisocial, they are found to make friends easily and obtain classmate support (Demaray & Malecki, 2003). Perhaps this "friendship" is due to the fear that is instilled in the students. It may also have to do with students wanting to stay on the "good side" of the aggressive student so to not be picked on. Long-term negative consequences for victims also play a role in the

anti-bullying campaigns. Victims are at risk of depressive symptomology, lower academic achievement, and lower self-esteem in adulthood (Kaltiala-Heino et al., 2000).

There have been numerous studies on bullying through the years (Demaray & Malecki, 2003; Haynie, Nansel, Eitel, Davis, Saylot, Yu, & Simmons-Morton, 2001). One study even looked at bullies, victims, bully/victims, and the uninvolved. Haynie et al., & Simmons-Morton's study was a step forward in research of the nature of bullying and victimization. Their study revealed that behavioral misconduct, deviance, self-control, and peer influences were the best predictor of bullying followed by depressive symptomology, social competence, and school functioning. They also concluded that parenting styles may also have an indirect effect on bullying, because parenting has a lot to do with social competence, peer choices, and school functioning (Haynie et al., 2001).

Professional literature distinguishes generally between two types of youth aggression--reactive aggression and proactive aggression. Reactive aggression is characterized as a "hot-blooded," automatic, defensive response to immediate and often misperceived threat (Hubbard, Dodge, Cillessen, Cole, & Schwartz, 2001; Wood & Gross, 2002). Teachers and caregivers often refer to them as having "a short fuse" because they tend to be intolerant of frustration, easily threatened, impulsive and have an over-reactive ill response to any source of stress or fear, and unpredictable in their tantrums and outbursts (Sterba & Davis, 1999; Vitaro, Brendgen, & Tremblay, 2002).

Unlike reactive aggression, proactive aggression does not characteristically occur as an emotion-laden, defensive response to immediate threat. Instead, it is described as organized, purposeful, and often premeditated rather than automatic (Galezewski, 2005). Proactive aggression is used consistently as a tool for personal gain (status, control, self-

confirmation, gratification, etc.) (Vitaro & Brendgen, 2005). It is applied strategically, methodically, subtly, and with increasing intensity until the desired goal is achieved (Hubbard et al., 2001). Over time, proactive aggressors may develop considerable verbal proficiency at defending the self-constructed logic of their aggressive behavior to themselves, to authority figures, and even to their victims. Teachers report that they feel unprepared to recognize and handle the kinds of bullying that they are encountering daily in the classroom (Newman-Carlson & Horne, 2004). They strongly agreed that bullying has profoundly impaired educational processes and programs at multiple levels. Too often teachers have to stop teaching in order to address problematic behaviors in the classroom. It is evident in the research and professional literature that counseling for identified or suspected bullies is a necessary component of comprehensive guidance programs aimed at preventing or stopping bullying behavior (Davis, 2006; Kaltiala-Heino et al., 2000)

One way that school counselors can effectively work to reduce proactive aggressors' reliance on aggression for personal validation is by seeing to it that they receive sufficient validation for the pro-social things that they do (Cole, Cornell, & Sheras, 2006; Malecki & Demaray, 2004). When respect from others is achievable through positive behavior, proactive aggressors will have less reason to risk the potential consequences of coercive behavior in order to gain the respect they seek (Horne, Orpinas, Newman-Carlson, & Bartolomucci, 2004). In a study by Baker & Soden (1997), Solution-Focused Brief Counseling was assessed with a group of eight students to test its effectiveness in reducing bullying behaviors. Participants met once per week for four weeks. The counseling approach was utilized in a way that the experimental group

would recognize when they were not bullying, therefore recognizing what pro-social behaviors they were using and how others were responding to them. Results showed less bullying behaviors from the participants (Baker & Soden, 1997).

In 1998, *Educational Psychology in Practice* published an article outlining the effectiveness of support group counseling using the solution-focused approach (Department of Education and Employment, 2000). The Anti-Bully Project referred to in the above named article continuously monitors referrals, interventions and outcomes in relation to using Solution-Focused Brief Counseling in a group setting. The study used the “victim’s” own perceptions of the situation to identify “bullies,” “bystanders,” and “friends” to make up the support group. The group members are then invited to offer suggestions on ways of helping the victim. The interventions are then reviewed one week later and as needed from that point on. This strategy has been shown to work quite effectively with primary school children (Young, 2002). Secondary school counselors find it difficult to dedicate specific times to meet with the groups and support student views when the counselor knows that the student’s perception of an issue may be skewed (Young & Holdorf, 2003). The consequences for a group counseling intervention going wrong is greater in the secondary schools. Due to such concern, the Anti-Bullying Project has begun to use individual Solution-Focused Counseling in secondary schools.

Solution-Focused Brief Counseling with Students with Social Phobias

Social phobia is a debilitating disorder that is estimated to affect 3% to 4% of school-aged children each year in the United States (Beidel, Turner, & Morris, 1999). Social phobias are often associated with maladaptive behaviors such as low self-esteem, feeling of inferiority, difficulty being assertive in a social setting, hypersensitivity to

criticism or rejection (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). These phobias initially appear at age 8 when children are more attuned to others, negative evaluations, and experiences (Hudson & Rapee, 2000). Solution-Focused Counseling counteracts the natural tendencies of clients to be self-critical by incorporating the client's strengths and resources in the treatment plan. Children are more adapt to focus on past successes and their strengths than to attempt to correct past mistakes. This therapeutic approach works well with children as it focuses on resiliency and the use of existing strengths as a foundation to building solutions. It's also successful with school-aged children because it connects with their ability to be resilient and they are capable of using resources that they already have within them. Solution-Focused Brief Counseling emphasizes wellness whereby individuals are seen as having the resources and that the problems are not evidence of an underlying pathology (Berg & Steiner, 2003).

The human brain retains the ability to continually reshape so that it allows us to learn and grow with new experiences. By focusing on resiliency, coping, and competencies with students that have social phobias, new, positive neural networks will emerge and old, negative neural networks will die (Siegel, 1999). A recent study by Byrd-Craven et al., (2008) shows that extensive discussions about past or present problems leads to a significant increase in the stress hormone cortisol, which causes increased depression and anxiety over time. Due to finding such as the one noted above, Solution-Focused Brief Counseling is a popular approach in counseling diverse groups due to its future orientation, focus on goal attainment, and resiliency.

Solution-Focused Brief Counseling is an alternative to different models of cognitive behavioral therapy. Research has documented its effectiveness, and follow-up

studies have noted its long lasting effects (Lethem, 2002; Newsome, 2005). Moreover, the way that the solution-focused language presents itself to children is simple and non-blaming with concepts that are easily understood at any age (Lethem, 2002). When using Solution-focused techniques with a child that has social phobias, it works well if the student and counselor work at a pace that is best for the student.

Families of these diverse populations of students at times have impressive creative ideas and healthy communication as well as areas of their lives that are going well. In these instances, potential solutions are already in place in the family unit. Continued support from home and the community may be the difference between getting through difficult times and submitting to them. Studies show that healthy family communication lessens the need for intervention services in school-age children (Abdu-Adil, & Farmer, 2006).

Chapter Summary

School counselors are in a unique position of networking and interacting with the student population on a daily basis. They have a window of opportunity open to them to become proactively involved in the education and emotional wellbeing of their students. They must use their skills and knowledge to continuously assist students with being successful academically, socially, and personally happy with whom they are and where they are going in life even in the throes of time constraints, decreased funding, dysfunctional environments, and lack of administrative support in some cases. The solution-focused approach focuses on the students strengths and has them create goals and exceptions to their problem instead of how the problem initially came about. Research shows that Solution-Focused Brief Counseling works well with diverse student

populations (Corcoran & Stephenson, 2000; Young, 2002; Zimmerman, Prest, & Wetzel, 1997).

Groups counseling with general education and exceptional education students using a brief therapeutic approach provide students with several benefits. It offers peer interaction, constructive feedback from the counselor and members of the group, and allows for the opportunity to practice skills that will help the student become resilient to life's stressors (Bowen, 1998). Without a doubt, resiliency skills are tools to help students successfully navigate through the present world into their future. By endorsing resiliency skills, schools counselors can proactively support today's youths.

The day of self-contained special education classrooms wherein students with learning disabilities and behavioral issues spend the majority of their instructional time in resource rooms being taught by exceptional education teachers, for all practical purposes, is a thing of the past. Thus, there is a continuing growing need for highly qualified staff, such as school counselors, to meet the social and emotional needs of this growing diverse student population. This study focuses on the perceptions and experiences of school counselors that utilize Solution-Focused Brief Counseling to promote resiliency in diverse populations.

The intent of Chapter II was to provide a literature review of (1) the theoretical background of Solution-Focused Brief Counseling along with the Resiliency Theory, (2) the development and role of the school counselor, (3) why there is a significant need for school counselor direct interventions and support, (4) the most common school-related counseling issues and (5) counseling diverse student populations using Solution-Focused Brief Counseling and the Resiliency Theory. In Chapter III, this researcher describes the

proposed research design and explains the methodology in detail so that there is a clear understanding of the study.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Chapter III includes a description of the research design and discusses the rationale for this approach. It explains the participant selection process, describes the role of the researcher, the data collection process and data analysis, and discusses ethical considerations. The goal of this research was to examine the role of resilience and the school counselors' experiences using Solution-Focused Brief Counseling when meeting the needs of diverse student populations in the school setting.

Philosophical Framework

Rationale for a Qualitative Study

Qualitative research methods were developed in the social sciences to enable researchers to study social and cultural phenomena. Qualitative data sources include observation and participant observation, interviews and questionnaires, documents and texts, and the researcher's impressions and reactions (Myers 2009). The motivation for doing qualitative research, as opposed to quantitative research, comes from the tenant that, if there is one thing which distinguishes humans from the natural world, it is our ability to converse with others. Qualitative research methods are designed to help researchers understand people and the social and cultural contexts within which they live. Kaplan and Maxwell (1994) argued that the goal of understanding a phenomenon from the point of view of the participants and its particular social and institutional context is largely lost when textual data is quantified. A qualitative design, as defined by Denzin and Lincoln (as cited in Creswell, 1998), is one in which the researcher studies things in

their natural environment, attempting to make sense of or interpret the phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

This study used a qualitative design to explore the lived experiences of school counselors who have utilized Solution-Focused Brief Counseling in the school environment and describe the counselor's perceptions of this approach in promoting resiliency in their students. Qualitative inquiry requires a research design that is based on previous knowledge and a sense of curiosity pertaining to a specific population or phenomenon (Creswell, 1994; Gilgun, Daly & Handel, 1992). It emphasizes the importance of looking at variables in the natural setting which they are found. Qualitative research explores the depth, richness, and complexity of the phenomena. In fact, qualitative research methods were developed to do this particularly in the social sciences to enable researchers to study social and cultural phenomena (Myers 2009).

Rationale for a Phenomenological Study

Phenomenology is a philosophical movement that was originated with the work of Edmund Husserl in the early twentieth century. It focuses on phenomena, the way the world appears to us (Chiari & Nuzzo, 1996). Phenomenology began in the philosophical reflections of Edmund Husserl in Germany during the mid-1890s. Husserl believed that phenomenology would become the basis for all scientific inquiry, stating that the way the world appears must be fully appreciated before scientific explanations are discovered (Chiari & Nuzzo, 1996). The aim of phenomenology, as advocated by Husserl, is to study human phenomena without considering questions of their causes, their objective reality, or even their appearances. The operative word in phenomenology is "describe." The goal of this researcher was to describe as specifically as possible the phenomenon,

avoiding any pre-given framework, but remaining true to the facts (Welman & Kruger, 1999, p. 189).

The central question in phenomenology is, what is the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experiences for this person or group of people who are experiencing this phenomenon (Chiari & Nuzzo, 1996). Taken from the word *phaino*, phenomenon is defined as “the ability to bring something to light, to place in brightness, to show itself in itself, and the totality of what lies before us in the light of day” (Moustakas, 1994).

This study was informed by phenomenology. The use of phenomenology involves the understanding that individuals have their own interpretation of “truth” in a given situation. This type of research is not particularly concerned with the facts and details of a situation as it is with the meaning assigned to it, the underlying structures of those meanings and how those structures are reinforced. In the same breath, there is an understanding that several people can experience the same phenomenon and each assign a different meaning to it due to previous experiences and prior knowledge

Any exploration of phenomenology as a research method needs to be set in a wider context of research or what Kuhn (1970) called a paradigm shift. The research paradigm shift is only part of a larger paradigmatic shift which took place in the Western World in the late twentieth century. The move from modernity to post-modernity, from cultural dominance of one group over others to the concept of multi-culturalism and the acknowledgment of cultural diversity, are some of the major changes that have taken place in the world in which we live.

Within phenomenology, with its emphasis on understanding the person's experience of the world and his/her situation, the research methods are the methods of

philosophy. According to Moustakas (1994), “what appears in the consciousness is the phenomenon” (p. 26). Hegel explains phenomenology as, “knowledge as it appears to the consciousness, the science of describing what one perceives, senses, and knows in one’s immediate awareness and experience” (Moustakas, 1994).

Phenomenology was probably the most significant philosophical movement of the twentieth century, as far as the social sciences are concerned (Nichols & Schwartz, 2001). Not surprisingly, phenomenology was attractive to psychological investigators in the early part of the 20th century in phenomenological psychology (Nichols & Schwartz, 2001). Husserl's ideas, altered and developed, have informed research in sociology, psychology, social psychology, education, health sciences, and many other fields. Phenomenological ideas have also inspired numerous schools of thought that believe it is necessary to understand the meaning attributed by persons to the activities in which they engage in order to understand their behavior.

From this perspective, the move towards the adoption of qualitative methods in social research was prompted by the rise of phenomenological sociology, particularly through social constructivism (Nichols & Schwartz, 2001). Constructivism is a philosophy of learning founded on the premise that, by reflecting on our experiences, we construct our own understanding of the world we live in. Each of us generates our own “rules” and “mental models,” which we use to make sense of our experiences. Learning, therefore, is simply the process of adjusting our mental models to accommodate new experiences. According to Smith and Mackie (1997, p. 309), two psychologists, who define social construction as “the reality we inhabit is not objectively given, but is constructed by each of us-and by all of us...We seek to validate our view of reality by

checking our perceptions against others, particularly others who share important relationships or group memberships with us.” Constructivism is a meta-theory that has developed from a movement in the humanities and social sciences that state that one cannot know reality apart from his or her construction of it (Franklin, 1995). People are capable of change and influenced heavily by societal interactions, relationships, and language.

This study was concerned with the lived experiences and perceptions of school counselors that have utilized Solution-Focused Brief Counseling in the public school setting to meet the needs of their diverse student populations. The study also took a look at how Solution-Focused Brief Counseling played a role in promoting resiliency in children and adolescents. An existing literature review revealed limited research involving school counselors using a solution-focused approach during group and individual counseling with students. This researcher hopes to make a contribution to the field of school counseling by sharing the additional information that was built upon the current literature and perhaps it will assist in further education for school counselors who are currently in or new to the field.

Epoche and Bracketing

Like phenomenology, the term epoche was popularized in philosophy by Edmund Husserl. Through the methodical procedure of phenomenological reduction, which is when one is thought to be able to defer judgment regarding the general philosophical belief in the external world, one can observe phenomena as they are originally given to consciousness (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Epoche is learning to look at things in a way such that we see only what stands before our eyes and only what we can describe and

define. This attempt to suspend any and all beliefs as we observe and listen is an attempt to minimize interpretation. This is done through the “Epoche process” (Moustakas, 1994, p.22), where pre-judgments are set aside regarding the phenomenon. As a result, the researcher can enter upon the topic with a fresh perspective. However, phenomenologists believe that the researcher cannot completely detach from his/her own presuppositions and that the researcher should not pretend otherwise (Hammersley, 2000). Following this epoche or reflective process, the researcher builds a rich description of their conscious perceptions, coined “imaginative variation” (p.97), which includes “feeling, thoughts, examples, experiences, and ideas that portray the total experience” (p.47).

Bracketing’s first task is the well-known identification and temporary setting aside of the researcher's assumptions. Acts of bracketing occur at interpretive moments when a researcher holds each of the identified phenomenas up for inspection.

Groenewald (2004) explained that epoche is separate from bracketing as epoche is an “ongoing analytic process,” which implies it should be integrated into the continuous progress of the whole research method from the very beginning of the study. Epoche, therefore, is a habit of thinking which continues throughout the pre-empirical and post-empirical phases of the study. Bracketing is an event, the moment of an interpretative fusion and the emergence of the conclusion.

There was some skepticism expressed by Ashworth and Lucas (2000) that it is even possible to achieve the degree of objectivity required for valid epoche and bracketing if a researcher has had experiences of the phenomenon under attention. Within qualitative research, epoche can reasonably be interpreted as emphasizing a particular time when significant events occur in the experiences of a researcher, but any

impact from the memory would need to be put aside during data collection (Groenewald, 2004). Gearing (2004) is not alone in identifying practical distinctions between epoche and bracketing. Variations of function and purpose are also argued by such researchers as Denzin and Lincoln (1998), Groenewald (2004), and Patton (1990). The distinctions emerge from how a researcher engages with data at the collection stage and how that engagement shifts at the interpretation stage. The literature is not forthcoming in describing the onset of bracketing or epoche in phenomenology or does it provide models of operations which demonstrate the theories at work in a research project. Even individual respondents in a study may trigger varying emotional impacts upon the memory of a researcher of the same event. Of all the major traditions of qualitative research as defined by Creswell (1998), for example the case study, biography, ethnography, grounded theory, and phenomenology, it is phenomenology which relies on the interpretative authenticity of the researcher. In attempt to gain knowledge on how school counselors perceive the use of Solution-Focused Brief Counseling, an inquiry into the conscious of the participants took place based upon their lived experiences within the phenomenon of using Solution-Focused Brief Counseling. By permitting the participants to construct their own perceptions, they were in touch with their feelings, thoughts, and ideas toward the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). This researcher was then able to tap into the individual experiences to find the essence of the phenomenon as perceived by the individuals who have lived through them.

Research Question

The research question in a qualitative study is comprised of a central question and sub-questions (Creswell, 2003). The central question is the single, overarching question

of the study. The research questions used to guide this study considered the different perceptions of school counselors using Solution-Focused Brief Counseling to promote resiliency. The following research questions have been explored in this study: How do school counselors use Solution-Focused Brief Counseling with diverse student populations? How does Solution-Focused Brief Counseling promote resiliency in students?

Method

The following sections discuss the research methods used in this study. The sections include the role of the researcher, sampling and instrumentation, data collection and process, data analysis, ethical considerations, and the chapter summary.

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, the researcher is one of the primary data collection instruments (Moon, Dillon, & Sprenkle, 1990). The role of the researcher in this phenomenological study was to methodically and thoroughly capture and describe the essence of how the participants perceived their experiences using Solution-Focused Brief Counseling when working with diverse student populations in the school environment. The central part of this process enabled this researcher as the instrument to delineate knowledge in the present study. It required: Epoche, phenomenological reduction, imagination variation, and the cluster of meanings units and its essence (Moustakas, 1994). The theory of phenomenology often leads to the seeking out of units of meaning. However, the term has an implied pre-suppositional tone to it. An item of relevance to the area of research may appear to have meaning assigned to it in terms of its potential significance to the interpretative conclusions that will appear in data analysis (Gearing 2004). By recording themes, language, and patterns one can develop insight into

capturing the experiences of a specific population and phenomena. Clusters of themes are typically formed by grouping units of meaning together (Moustakas, 1994) and it identifies significant topics.

Prior to the data collection process, this researcher reflected upon her own preconceived ideas regarding Solution-Focused Brief Counseling. According to Creswell (2003), qualitative research brings to the forefront thoughts and feelings of the researcher during the data collection process. Allowing the researcher to disclose any biases, personal interest, beliefs, ideas, and preconceived notions, it helped to safeguard against incorrect data (Creswell, 2003). According to Miller and Crabtree (1992), the researcher “must bracket his/her own preconceptions and enter into the individual’s life world and use the self as an experiencing interpreter” (p. 24). Moustakas (1994) points out that “Husserl called the freedom from suppositions the epoche, a Greek word meaning to stay away from or abstain” (p.85). In this study, the researcher’s biases were addressed through the epoche process. This process enabled the researcher to obtain knowledge in an open and unbiased manner (Mustakas, 1994). Through bracketing, the goal of the researcher is to separate the phenomenon from what has previously been perceived by the self to be the truth. As Boethius (1962) illustrated:

“The man who searches deeply for the truth and wishes to avoid being deceived by false leads, must turn the light of his inner vision upon himself. He must guide his soaring thoughts back again and teach his spirit that it possesses hidden among its own treasures whatever it seeks outside itself” (p.69).

This researcher made every effort to remove all biases.

Personal interest and experiences have piqued this researcher's interest into how other school counselors perceive their experiences using a solution-focused approach in the school setting and how it promotes resiliency. Having firsthand experience using this approach with students, it was not difficult to identify with the experiences of participants in the study. This researcher has been a school counselor for the past eight years in an elementary school setting and prior to that an elementary school teacher for six years. This researcher was interested in enhancing her knowledge and skills regarding the topic of Solution-Focused Brief Counseling. This researcher solidified her beliefs that there are benefits to being a classroom teacher prior to becoming a school counselor. There is a strong empathetic relation between the two. Teachers at times do not agree on behavioral techniques and strategies that school psychologists, behavioral analysts, and school counselors require of them to implement with students that are having difficulty in school. Counselors find that these professionals can not relate because they are not in the classroom working with twenty plus children at a time. This researcher has found that suggestions are accepted more readily when coming from someone that has shared in the same experiences.

There are several opportunities to network with fellow school counselors and it has been noted that many counselors do not have the opportunity to counsel students as individuals or in a group setting. If they are able to find the time, a brief therapy approach is used. This researcher would like to improve her counseling skills using Solution-Focused Brief Counseling as well as assist others in utilizing this therapy model. By learning about the essence of school counselor experiences regarding this therapeutic approach, this researcher hopes to gain insight into how others utilize, expand, and

perceive solution-focused strategies. This researcher has found Solution-Focused Brief Counseling to be an asset to the school counseling profession and holds an interest in understanding the experiences and perceptions other school counselors that have used this type of brief counseling to promote resiliency within their students. The knowledge gained may be useful for the development of future continuous education courses, trainings, school counselor goals and objectives, and individual school-wide programs.

Sampling and Instrumentation

Sampling

According to Hycner, “the phenomenon dictates the method including even the type of participant (p. 156).” The sampling used in this study was purposeful. As stated by Creswell (2003) “...the notion behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants that will best assist the researcher recognize the problem and answer the research questions” (p.185). School counselors were considered participants in this qualitative study for the reason that they play a direct role in the counseling of students. This researcher selected a sample of no more than 12 participants based on judgment and purpose of the research, looking for school counselors who have lived experiences relating to the phenomenon being researched. The purpose of collecting data from multiple participants is called data triangulation. Data triangulation is used to contrast the data and “validate” the data if it generates similar findings (Arksey & Knight, 1999, Holloway, 1997). The specific population for this study were school counselors who are current members of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA). Participating school counselors had to be actively employed in either elementary, middle, or high schools. Full or part-time employment did not play a role in the selection of participants.

Instrument

The instrument used for this study was a questionnaire (Appendix C) created by this researcher. It was distributed to current members of the American School Counselor Association, specifically ASCA SCENE, via SurveyMonkey.com™. It contained a variety of questions with open-ended, forced choice, yes/no, and narrative responses to elicit how the participants make sense of the lived experiences being studied. It was suggested that participants write their narrative responses in a Word document and then cut and paste them into the questionnaire. There was a section in the early part of the questionnaire for eliciting demographic information from the participants. Such information included, gender, years of experience as a school counselor, school setting, grade levels represented at the school, number of counselors at the school, student population in terms of ethnicity and enrollment and counselor training.

The questionnaire (Appendix C) created via SurveyMonkey.com™ was comprised of several sections, each addressing a specific component to the research question. The questions were directed to the participant's experiences, feelings, beliefs, and convictions about the theme in question. The questionnaire was developed to collect anonymous responses and not collect personal information such as email addresses, names, or Internet Protocol (IP) identifiers. To ensure confidentiality, SurveyMonkey.com™ makes the following statement in its privacy policy: "Servers are kept in locked cages; entry requires a passcard and biometric recognition; digital surveillance is utilized; the facility is staffed twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week; firewalls restrict access to all ports except 80 (http) and 443 (https); QualysGuard network security audits are performed weekly; and Hackersafe scans are performed

daily” (www.surveymonkey.com/Monkey_Privacy.aspx). Data was obtained in the most direct manner. Since qualitative interviewing is open-ended, it provided the format for the flow of thoughts and ideas from the participants.

Data Collection and Process

The specific phenomena that this researcher focused on was, Solution-Focused Brief Counseling and more particularly the lived experiences of school counselors using this theoretical approach with diverse student populations in their schools to promote resiliency. This researcher made good use of the media available to the school counseling populations that are current members of the American School Counselor Association via the internet. The primary method of data collection for this qualitative study was through the completion of a questionnaire sent via email through Surveymonkey.com™.

In today’s fast paced world, web-based surveys are becoming a popular method of data collection due to ease of implementation, expeditious turnaround time, cost effectiveness, and anonymity (Schonlau, Fricker, & Elliott, 2002). The questionnaire was available to school counselors in the United States who were current members of the American School Counselor Association and who were also enrolled in ASCA SCENE. The SCENE is a networking site on the ASCA website where school counselors can ask questions, learn from one another, and complete research studies that are applicable to their field of expertise. By surveying school counselors from around the country, this researcher gained a more global picture into the experiences of school counselors who are utilizing Solution-Focused Brief Counseling as a therapeutic component to promote resiliency in students.

SurveyMonkey.com™ is a web-site that was developed in 1999. It is an innovative online survey tool that is used to create and publish custom surveys in minutes, and then view results graphically and in real time. It also allows for anonymity of the research participants. Anonymity creates a secure atmosphere that allows for comfortable self-disclosure of personal information. It is crucial for all participants to feel as comfortable as possible when completing the questionnaire in order for this researcher to elicit information that is sincere and valid (Meho, 2005). Contacting participants through email and allowing them to respond in the same manner was not only cost effective but it was also convenient for both parties. Research indicates that on-line questionnaires exclude social stigmas such as gender, ethnicity, and physical appearance (Wiather, 1996, as cited in Meho, 2005).

Although there are several positive aspects of on-line data collection, there are also limitations. During face-to-face interviews, researchers are able to document non-verbal communication such as body language, appearance of facial changes when asked specific question, and tone of voice.. On-line data collection eliminates the physical features and tone of voice of the personal interview. This in turn may cause possible loss of important data (Berg, 2004; Shepherd, 2003). Another limitation of the research study is that this researcher did not use member checking due to the anonymity of the participants. Member checking is a technique used by researchers to improve credibility, accuracy, and validity. Participants affirm the findings as valid, accurate, and that they reflect their experiences. This researcher chose to send the questionnaire via SurveyMonkey.com™ to preserve participant anonymity. Although there are benefits to

conducting live interviews and follow-up sessions, there continues to be a loss of true self-expression from participants.

After receiving the approval of the Barry University Institutional Review Board (IRB), this researcher began her research study. A list of participants was created via the American School Counselor Association website, ASCA SCENE, and a recruitment letter (Appendix A) was sent to potential participants via an email. ASCA SCENE is a networking site where school counselors can share and learn from each other. This recruitment letter stated the purpose and description of the study. It also included a link to the website to access the research study. Once the participants reached the survey site, they were presented with two documents. The first document was the Cover Letter for Anonymous Study (Appendix B), which included an Informed Notice. The Letter for Anonymous Study introduced the researcher, described the nature and intent of the research study and estimated the time required to complete the questionnaire. Issues of confidentiality and consent were addressed in the Barry University Informed Notice Consent (Appendix B). This notice explained to participants that completing the questionnaire was completely voluntary. The participants were offered two options at the initial stage of the study: Yes, I would like to participate in the anonymous research study or No, I do not wish to participate in the study. If the participant opted out of the study, an automatic thank you note (Appendix D) was sent. Participants were able to respond to the letter within a two week period if they agreed to participate. This researcher took this action as giving consent. The Letter of Anonymous Study and the Informed Consent are included in Appendix B.

Questions are presented as followed:

Research Question 1: How do school counselors use Solution-Focused Brief Counseling with diverse student populations?

Research Question 2: How does Solution-Focused Brief Counseling impact the resiliency of students?

Data collection continued until the topic was exhausted, that is when the subjects no longer introduce new perspectives on the topic.

Demographic Information: This section collected information regarding the respondents. The forced choice items provided information on how many years of experience in the school counseling field, school counselor's gender and assignment, demographics of the school, student population and counselor training.

This researcher allowed two weeks for participants to complete the on-line questionnaire. At the end of the two week period, this researcher sent out a reminder email to elicit additional responses. Information was gathered and common concepts and themes in participant responses were extracted in order to capture the essence of the overall lived experiences of the school counselors when using Solution-Focused Brief Counseling

Data Analysis

Corbin and Strauss (2008) stated, "The first initial step in any analysis is to read data collections from beginning to end" (p. 163). While reading through the material, this researcher placed the collected data in front of him or her and studied the material (Moustakas, 1994). This researcher then used an analytic tool to analyze the data.

According to Corbin and Strauss (2008), "Analytic tools assist researchers to: Distance themselves from the personal experiences that may interfere with them seeing new

possibilities in the data; avoid common practices in thinking about the phenomenon; stimulate the inductive process; use time wisely; allow for clarification of assumptions from researchers as well as participants; listen to people around you; avoid rushing through the examination of the data; and allow for the creation of categories and themes when examining the data” (p. 67).

During this qualitative study, this researcher analyzed the data through methods and procedures of phenomenological analysis (Moustakas, 1994). After the data had been collected and read over several times, horizontalization of the data created clustered themes and meaning units that were extracted and categorized. Meaning is formed when the object in question, as it materializes in our consciousness, fuses with the object in nature: “what appears in consciousness is an absolute reality while what appears to the world is a product of learning” (p. 27).

This data analysis process included:

- 1.) Epoche/Bracketing
- 2.) Phenomenological Reduction
- 3.) Imaginative Variation
- 4.) Cluster of Meaning Units to form themes
- 5.) Data triangulation and the creation of a summary.

If themes were found to be repetitive and/or off topic in nature, they were not considered for further data analysis.

The primary units of analysis for this research project were school counselors as individuals. The research questions focused on the perceptions and experiences of school counselors who have utilized Solution-Focused Brief Counseling to promote resiliency

with diverse populations of students. The participants were informed that all results will be in summary form without specific analysis linked to the participants, school system, or specific school. Participants were not identified by name in the summary. The data analysis was descriptive in nature.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher of this qualitative study explored the perceptions and lived experiences of school counselors who have utilized Solution-Focused Brief Counseling in school environment and the resiliency theory after receiving approval by the Barry Institutional Review Board prior to the process of data collection. The informed consent information explained possible risks and benefits to the participants. This researcher does not believe that there were any risks to the participants that would be harmful in nature. The questionnaire was completely anonymous and the researcher was not unable to make any further contact once the questionnaire had been returned. This researcher assured participants that their identity would not be of interest in this study. Anonymity was maintained and the questionnaires are currently kept in a secured location through SurveyMonkey.com™ as well as on this researcher's personal computer that is password protected. The questionnaire collected only anonymous responses. The web-based questionnaire inhibited this researcher from identifying personal information and making further contact with the participants. Participation in this study was strictly voluntary. Participants had the option of withdrawing from the study at any time. It was stated to the potential participants in the letter that if they were to opt out of the study or withdrew at any time, there would be no unfavorable effects. The American School Counselor Association provides guidelines that are available for review regarding ethical issues and

considerations located on their website. The data will be stored until it is destroyed no earlier than January 1, 2016.

Chapter Summary

This chapter on methodology discussed the rationale for conducting a qualitative research study using a phenomenological approach to research. Phenomenology looks for the description of meanings for individuals within their lived experience (Creswell, 2003). This researcher explored the lived experiences of school counselors that are members of the American School Counselor Association who have used Solution-Focused Brief Counseling to promote resiliency within their students. This chapter clarified the role of the researcher in a phenomenological study and described the selection of participants. Potential participants were informed of their right to opt out of the study at any time without penalty. It was also important to inform the participants that anonymity would be maintained and the responses to the questionnaire are secured electronically. Personal identifiers were not used on any part of the questionnaire.

The chapter also described the instrumentation for data collection. The questionnaire was created by this researcher and made available through SurveyMonkey.com™. It was comprised of open-ended, forced choice, yes/no, and narrative responses. Participants had two weeks to respond from the initial request date to the completion of the questionnaire. A second questionnaire request was sent when there were fewer than twelve completed responses collected within the initial two week period. Issues such as data analysis and limitations were also discussed in this chapter.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore qualitatively how school counselors describe their counseling experiences and perceptions using Solution-Focused Brief Counseling techniques to promote resiliency within the diverse student populations who exhibit school-related counseling issues. The research method used was phenomenological. Phenomenology describes the lived experiences of an individual regarding the phenomenon being studied (Patton, 2002). School counselors were purposely selected as they are the ones who have the skills and opportunity, if time allows, to provide counseling to students on a weekly basis. By participating in this research study, school counselors were given the opportunity to reflect upon their use of Solution-Focused Brief Counseling and describe their experiences. It was this researchers hope that by participating in this study, school counselors would be able to reflect and evaluate what works well and what they can do more of to promote resiliency in their students. This chapter summarizes the data collected and the themes that emerged through the process of data analysis. The five themes are as follows: Time, Support, Future Orientation, Goal Attainment, and the Importance of the Resiliency Factor.

Demographics of Participants

Response Rate

School Counselors were recruited through the American School Counselor Association (ASCA), specifically ASCA SCENE (Appendix A). This is an on-line networking site used to elicit discussions on school counseling issues, provide feedback,

ask questions to other school counselors, and complete questionnaires for research purposes. There are over 13,000 school counselors that are members of the SCENE. Of the 13,396 members, 72 school counselors reviewed the questionnaire without responding. Eighteen counselors initially agreed to participate in the study after reading the Letter of Anonymous Study (Appendix B) and started the process of answering the demographic questions (Appendix C). Thirteen participants completed this portion of the questionnaire. Participants were included in the data even if they chose to skip a particular question. The number of participants that answered specific questions varies due to the option of moving forward to the next question without having answered the previous one. Of the thirteen participants that continued on to the narrative response questions, only 10 completed the questionnaire in its entirety. The other 3 participants opted-out of the study without penalty.

Demographics by Gender

The participant’s gender was collected using forced choice questions. Five participants were male and seven participants were female. One participant skipped this initial question. Figure 4.1 illustrates the gender of the participants.

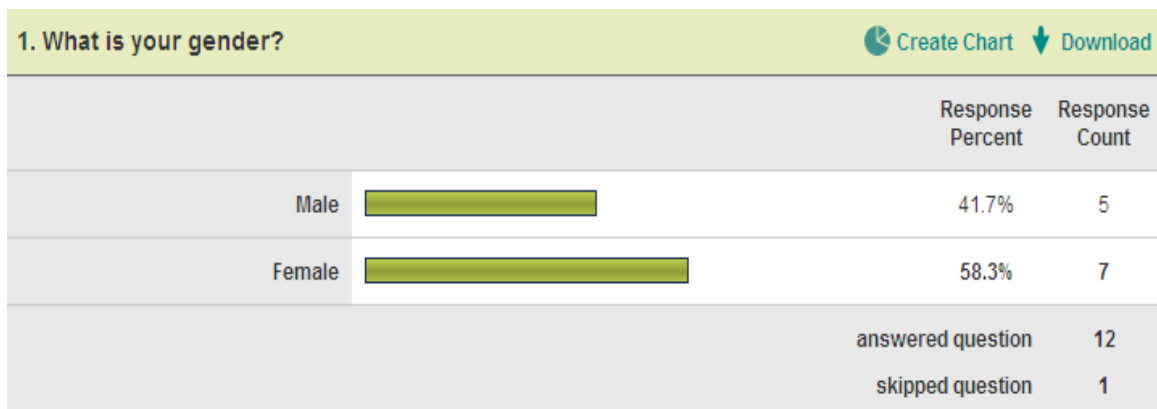


Figure 4.1 Demographics by Gender

Demographics by Cultural Identification

The participant's cultural identification was collected by offering several choices to describe one's ethnicity. One participant was Asian American/Pacific Islander and eleven participants were Caucasian. There were no participants of the African American, Hispanic, and Native American decent. One participant skipped this question. Figure 4.2 illustrates the cultural identification of the participants.

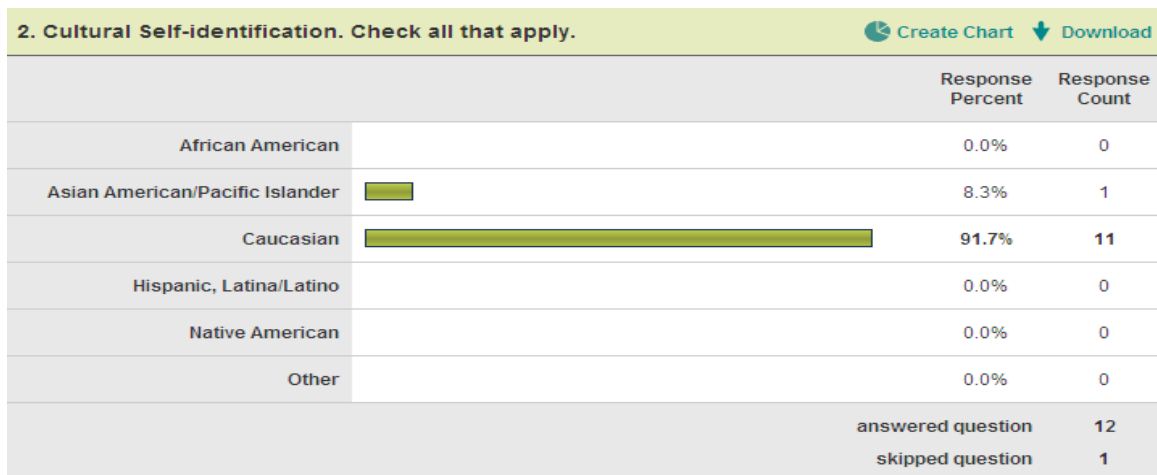


Figure 4.2 Demographics by Cultural Identification

Demographics by Residential State

The participant's residential state was collected using free response. Seven participants were from Florida. One participant was from Ohio. One participant was from Hawaii. One participant was from Tennessee and one participant was from Wisconsin. Two participants skipped this question. Figure 4.3 illustrates the participant's residential state.

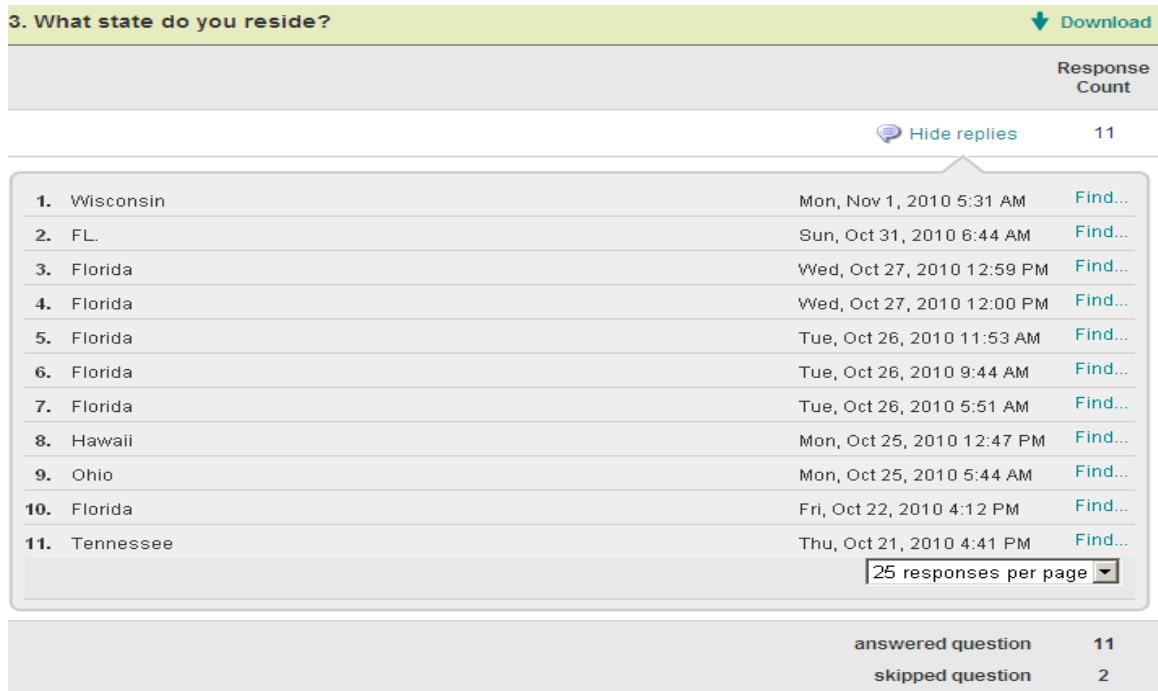


Figure 4.3 Demographics by Residential State

Demographics of Counseling Experience

The participant's years of counseling experience was collected using a free response method. For the purpose of this study, the collected responses were placed in five year increments. Three participants reported that they have been a school counselor for 1-5 years. One participant reported that they have been a school counselor for 6-10 years. Three participants reported that they have been a school counselor for 11-15 years. Two participants reported that they have been a school counselor for 16-20 years and two participants reported that they have been a school counselor for over 20 years. Two participants skipped this question. Figure 4.4 illustrates the counseling experience of the participants.

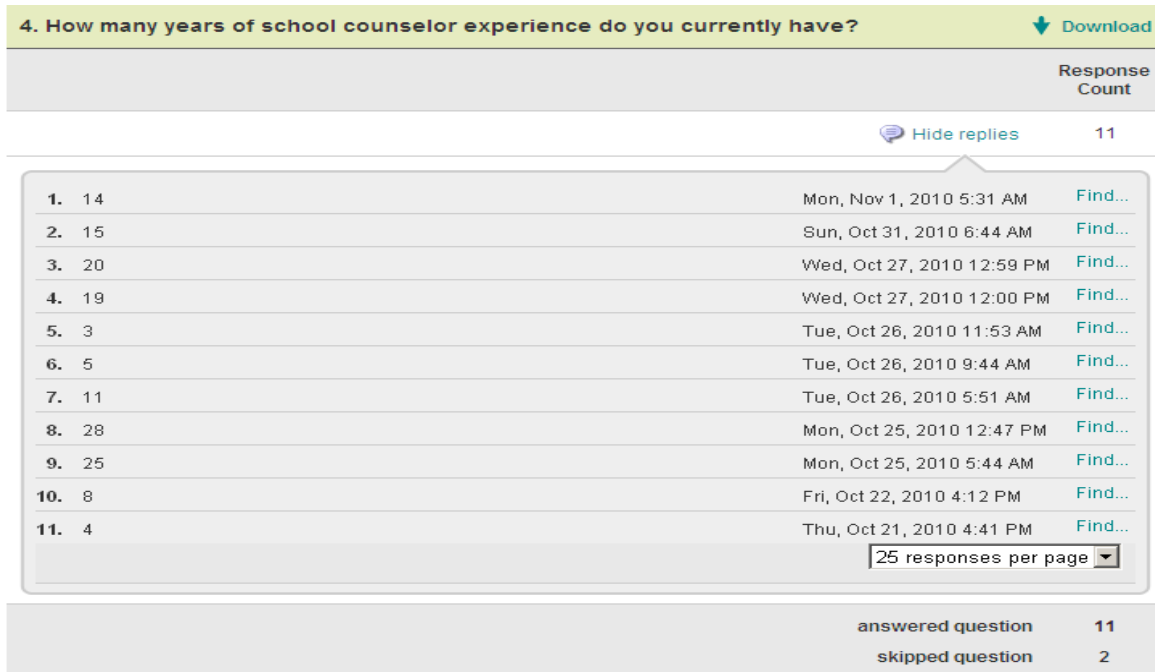


Figure 4.4 Demographics of Counseling Experience

Demographics by Year Degree was Completed

The question pertaining to the participants receiving their degree was collected using a free response method as well. For the purpose of this study, the collected responses were placed in five years increments. Three participants reported that they completed their degree between the years of 1976 and 1980. One participant reported that they completed their degree between the years of 1986 and 1990. One participant reported that they completed their degree between the years 1991 and 1995. Two participants reported that they completed their degree between the years of 1996 and 2000. Two participants reported that they completed their degree between the years of 2001 and 2005 and two participants reported that they completed their degree between the years of 2006-2010. Figure 4.5 illustrates the years the school counselors received their degrees.

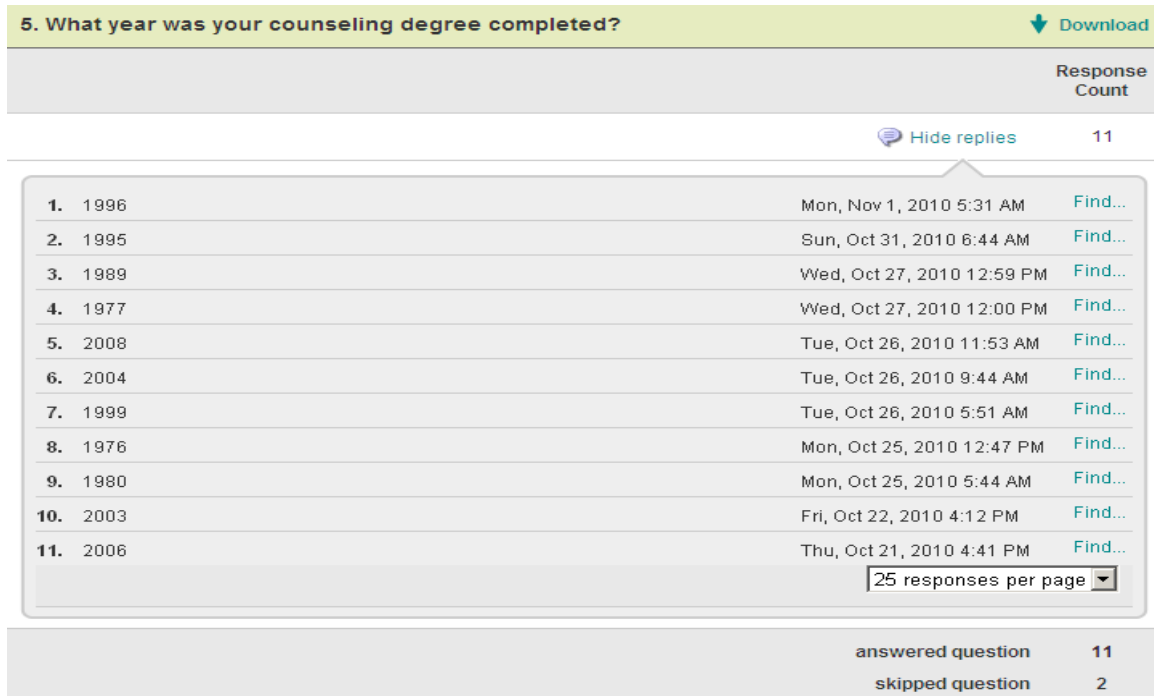


Figure 4.5 Demographics by Year Degree was Completed

Demographics of the School Setting

The participant's school setting information was collected using a forced choice method. For the purpose of this study, the collected responses were placed into categories of elementary, middle, and high school. Eight participants reported that they work in an elementary school. Three participants reported that they work in a middle school. One participant reported that they work in a high school. Two participants skipped this question. Figure 4.6 illustrates the school setting.

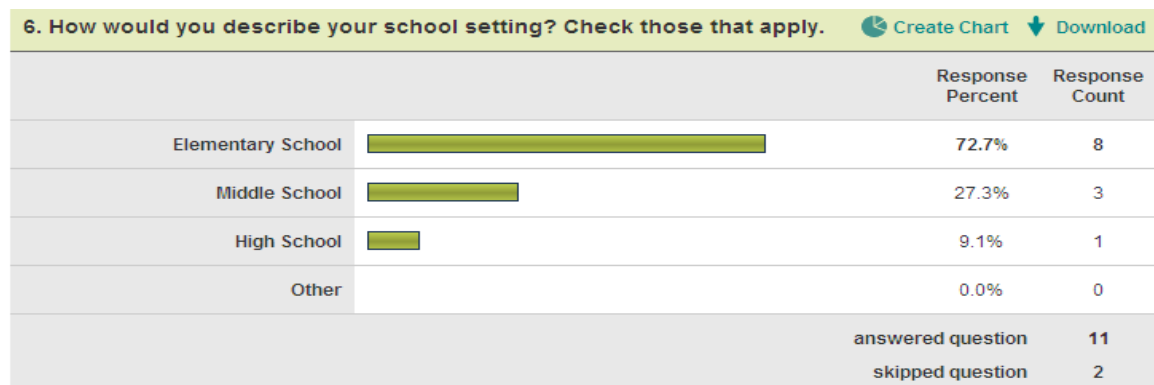


Figure 4.6 Demographic of the School Setting

Demographic by Grade Levels

School counselors were asked to check all that apply regarding the grade levels that are offered at their schools. Eight participants reported that they work in a school that includes grades K-6. Three participants reported that they work in a school that includes 7th and 8th grade. One participant reported that they work in a school that includes 9th thru 12th grade. Two participants skipped this question. Figure 4.7 illustrates the grade level.

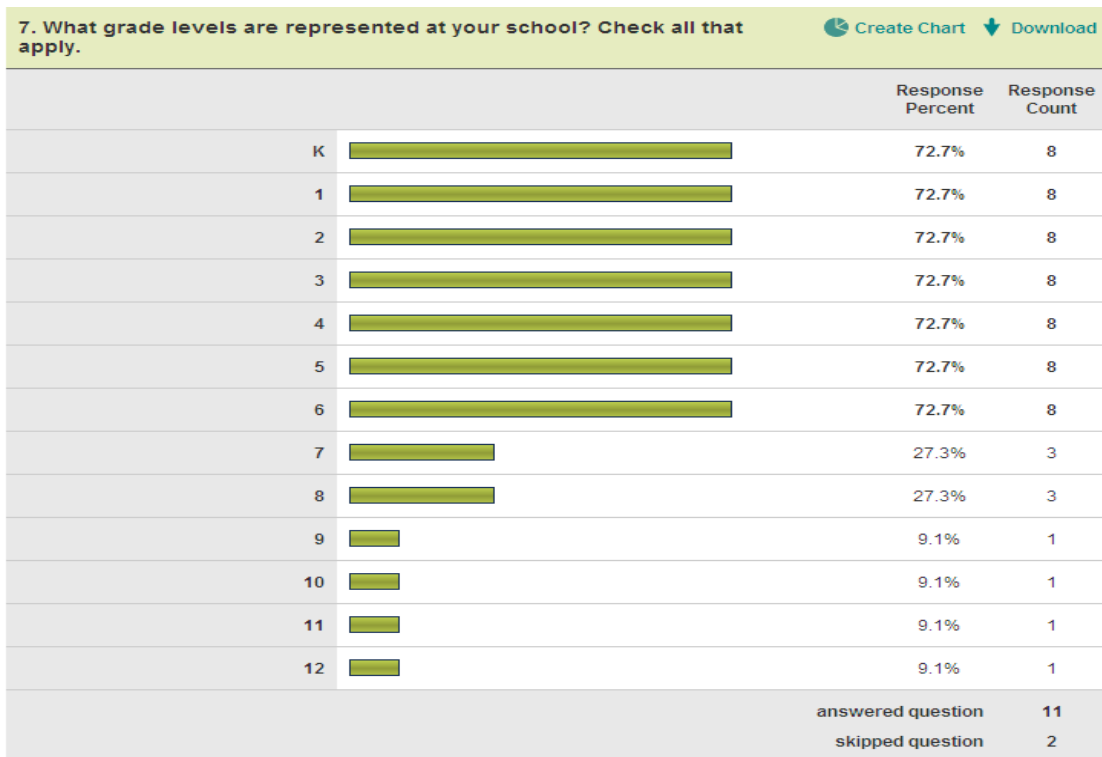


Figure 4.7 Demographic by Grade Levels

Demographics of Student Enrollment

School counselors were asked about student enrollment at their schools. Participants were asked to select a range by which their enrollment would fall. Five participants reported that they had between 401-500 students. One participant reported

that they had between 501-600 students. Two participants reported that they had between 701-800 students. Two participants reported that they had between 801-900 students and one participant reported that they had over 1,000 students. Two participants skipped this question. Figure 4.8 illustrates student enrollment.

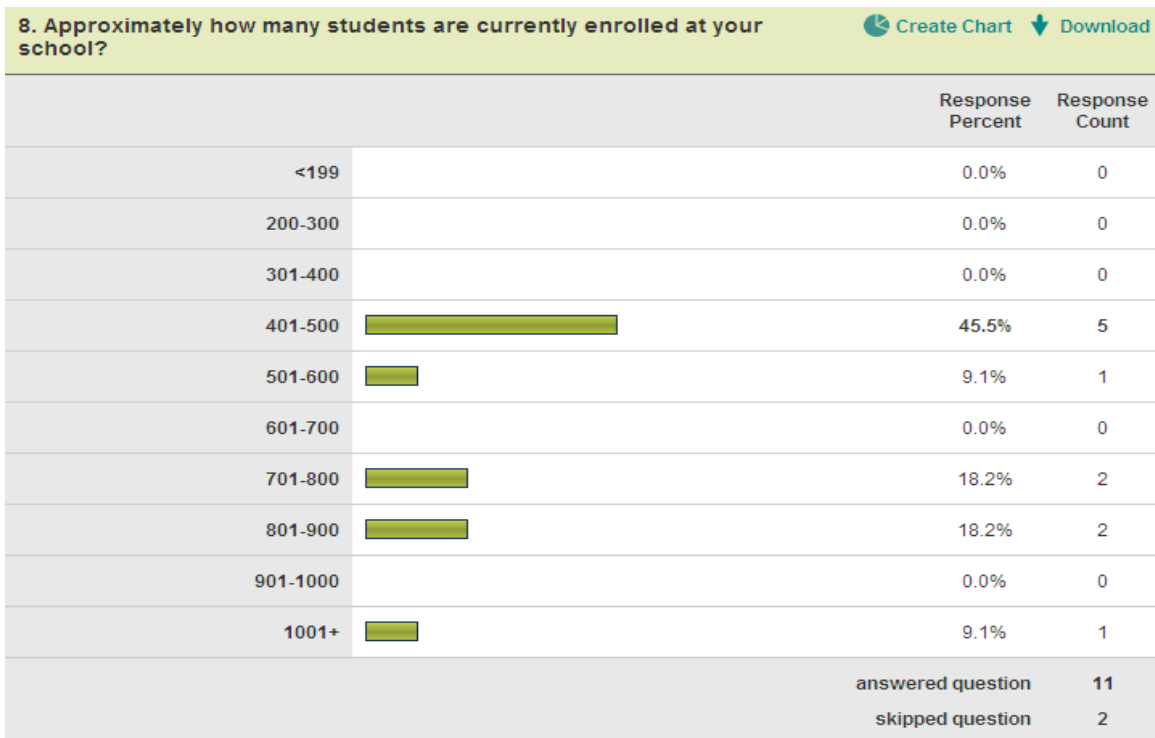


Figure 4.8 Demographic of Student Enrollment

Demographics on Attendance at a Solution-Focused Training

The participants in this study were asked in the demographic portion of the questionnaire if they had attended trainings on Solution-Focused Brief Counseling, the delivery method, and the reason behind taking the training. Participant responses were collected using a forced choice method. When asked if they had attended any training on Solution-Focused Brief Counseling, eight participants reported “yes” and three reported “no”. Two participants skipped this question. Figure 4.9 illustrates the attendance at Solution-Focused Brief Counseling trainings.

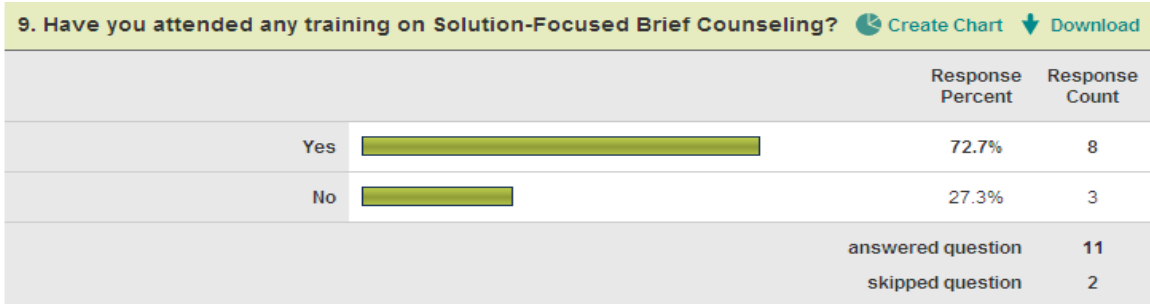


Figure 4.9 Demographics on Attendance at SFBC Training

Demographics by Training Delivery Methods

Participants were asked to select as many delivery methods that were applicable during previous trainings that they had received. One participant reported that they watched a video. Eight participants reported that they attended a lecture. One participant took an on-line seminar/course and three reported that they received training through clinical supervision. Five participants skipped this question. Figure 4.10 illustrates the training delivery methods.

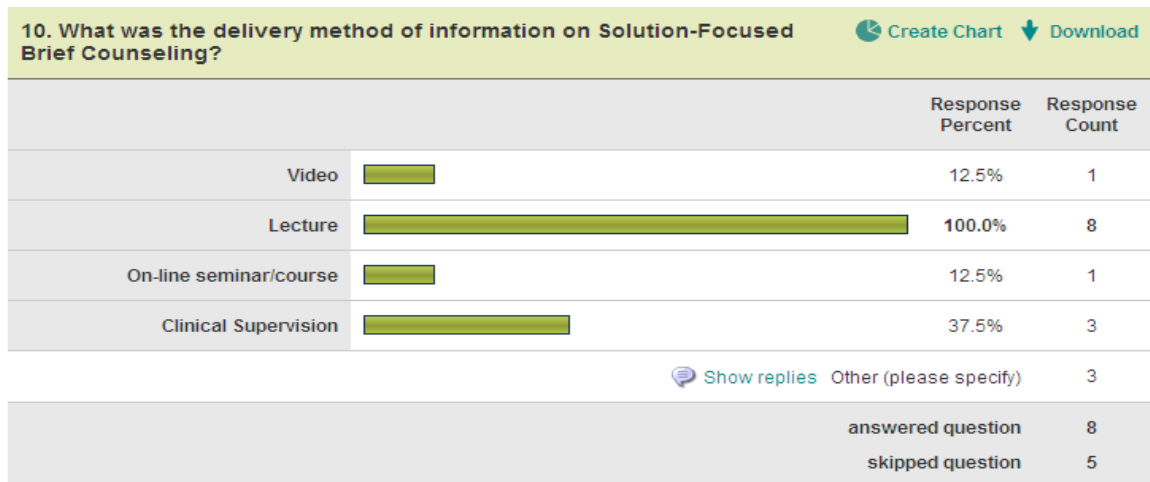


Figure 4.10 Demographics by Training Delivery methods

Demographics on Reason for Trainings

Participant responses re: reasons for training were collected using the forced choice method. Four participants responded that they attended trainings for the purpose of continuous education. Four reported that the training was part of a college course and five participants reported that they were trained on the Solution-Focused approach due to a personal interest. Five participants skipped this question. Figure 4.11 illustrates the reasons for the training.

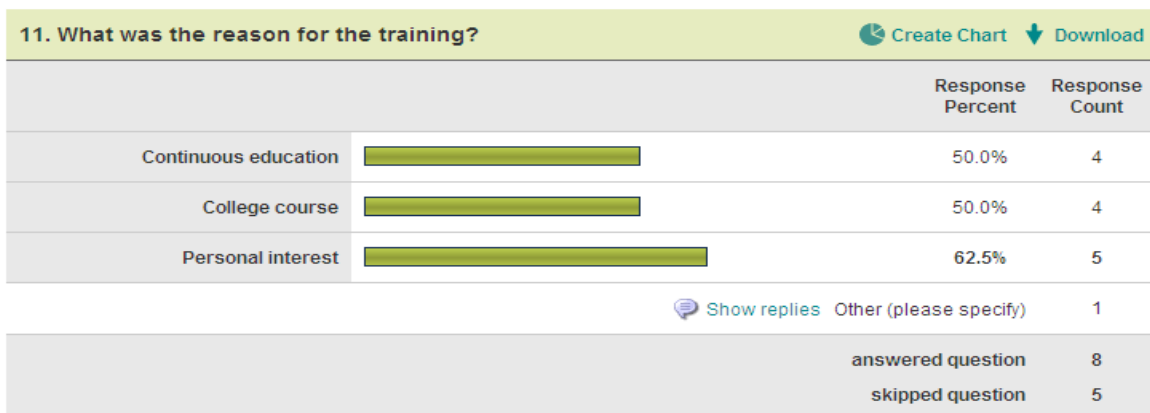


Figure 4.11 Demographics on Reasons for SFBC Trainings

Demographics of Number of Counseling Sessions per Student

The participants' responses to the number of counseling sessions that are offered per student when using Solution-Focused Brief Counseling were collected using a free response method. For the purpose of this study, the collected responses were placed in increments of five. Three participants reported that they typically have 1-5 sessions with a student. Five participants reported that they have 6-10 sessions with a student. One replied that they did not use this specific approach with their students. Four participants skipped this question. Figure 4.12 illustrates this number of counseling sessions per student.

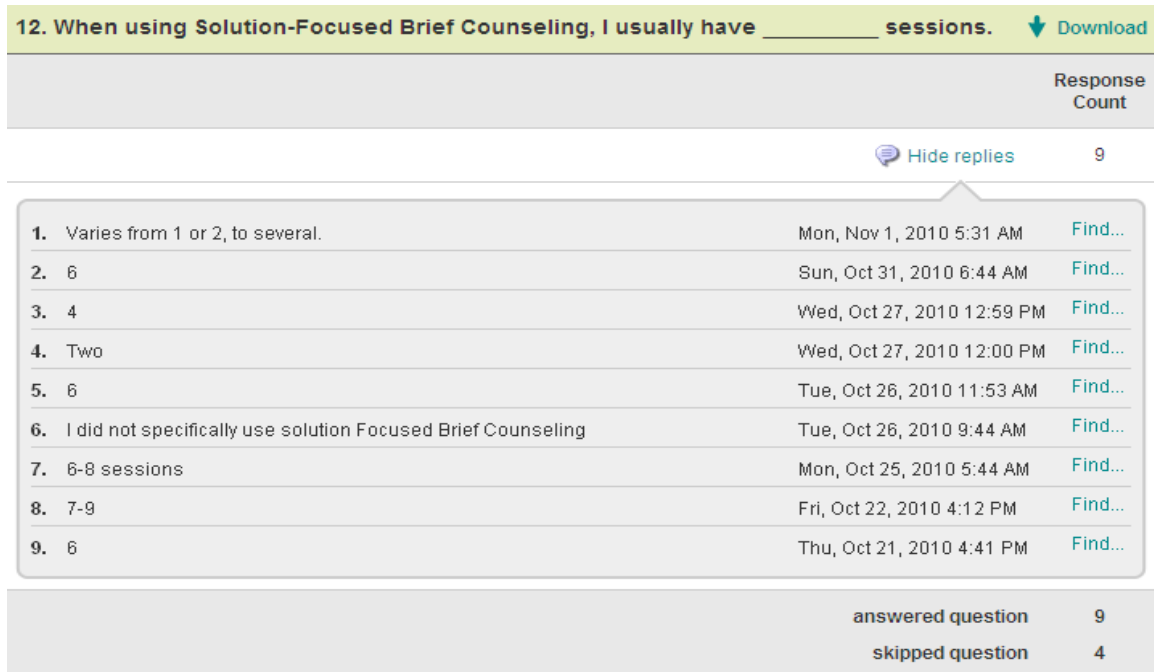


Figure 4.12 Demographics on Number of Counseling Sessions per Student

Demographics on Group Facilitation

The participant responses to whether or not they currently facilitate small group counseling sessions using the solution-focused approach were forced choice. Four participants reported “yes” and six reported “no” to the question. Three participants skipped the question. Figure 4.13 illustrates group facilitation.

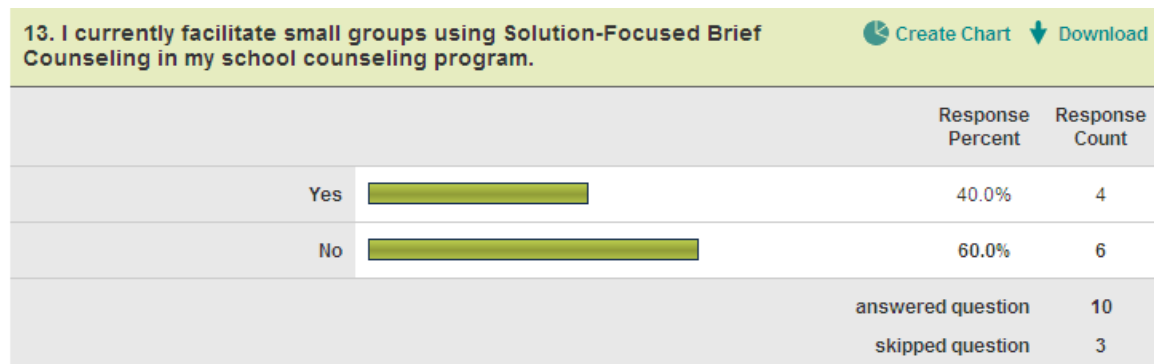


Figure 4.13 Demographics on Group Facilitation

Qualitative Results

Data Analysis

Eighteen potential participants expressed an interest in this study. Ten school counselors committed to the research study by completing the questionnaire in its entirety.

School Counselor Perceptions of Solution-Focused Brief Counseling

Major Themes	Sub-Themes	Descriptions
Time	Counselor Time Restraints	Counselor time is limited due to nature of the job and other assigned duties.
	Student Schedule	Students are out of class less often. More time for academic learning.
	Brief Counseling	Fewer Sessions
Support	Group Counseling	Students in groups can get support from others that have similar counseling issues.
	Individual Counseling	Counselor offers support to students that are having a difficult time in school, home or in the community
Future Orientation	Future Focused	Students focus on the future not the past.
	Exceptions	Students focus on the times when the problem does not exist.
Goal Attainment	Scales	Students rate their progress on a scale of 1-10.
	Goal Development	Students set their goals using a realistic frame of mind.

Figure 4.14 Major Themes and Sub-Themes

Principal investigator statement

Data analysis was conducted using the approach of Moustakas which reduces the amount of data and breaks it down into themes that emphasize the essence of the participant's experience (Patton, 2002). Moustakas' approach to phenomenology emphasizes that the investigator maintain a position of Epoche in order to reduce biases and validate the data. I initially began the analysis by bracketing any preconceived notions and perceptions that I may have had prior to data collection (Moustakas, 1994). Prior to the data collection process I had open discussions with fellow school counselors that also use Solution-Focused Brief Counseling with students in need of a counseling component at their school. The school counselors that I engaged in conversation were not current members of the American School Counselor Association; therefore, they could not participate in the study.

I found it very difficult waiting on completed responses to be submitted by participants. I had to maintain a sense of composure and patience during the research window. The responses came in rather slow and incomplete during the initial phase. Seventy-two school counselors viewed the questionnaire only to have ten schools complete the questionnaire in its entirety. A reminder email was sent to potential participants after the first two weeks had expired.

The next step was to thoroughly read through the answers of the questionnaire and become familiar with the responses in order to create themes based on the experience of the school counselors. Data analysis was completed manually without the use of software programs. Tables and charts were created for visual representation of the data.

The data analysis led to the formulation of five major themes which provided the conceptual framework for the description of the school counselor experiences using Solution-Focused Brief Counseling. The five themes are Time, Support, Future Orientation, Goal Attainment, and the Importance of the Resiliency Factor. The following sections will present the themes and sub-themes that emerged through the process of data analysis.

Time

Most counselors in the public school system have very limited time in their schedule to see students for matters other than testing, classroom guidance, covering classes, and other assigned duties, even though the American School Counselor Association National Model recommends that 30-40% of an elementary or middle school counselor's time be spent in responsive services (Williams, 2000). While most of the interventions that are performed by school counselors are considered responsive services, there is limited time to provide long-term counseling. Through data analysis, the concept of Time emerged as a major theme in this study.

Counselor Time Restraints. The sub-theme Counselor Time Restraints was expressed by participants to be an important factor in counseling students. Counselor time is limited do to the nature of the job and other assigned duties. In general, most of the participants were optimistic about using Solution-Focused Brief Counseling with their students because they found it to be conducive to the time restraints placed on them. For example, Participant 10 stated, "If I have time to counsel students, I have to use brief counseling strategies." Participant 9 then continued, "It takes less time from their academics as well as it takes less time from me which allows me to see more students."

These comments support current literature regarding counseling strategies that are conducive to the amount of time counselors have to address student needs. In response to the pressures of society for expedient treatment and situational limitations, short-term therapy models have moved into the forefront during the last two decades (Steenbarger, 1992). Due to these time limitations and resources, school counselors are looking for interventions that are brief, effective, and focus on results (Williams, 2000).

Student Schedules. The sub-theme Student Schedules was expressed by participants to be an important factor in counseling students because the students have an obligation to their academics as well as their mental health. To support this theme, Participant 8 stated, “Students need to be in class learning, so if I can be effective in a short period of time, it is better for the students, and I can work with more students.” Participant 6 agreed with participant 8 when it was stated, “It is effective and respectful of their time out of class.” Furthermore, Participant 9 reported, “It takes less time from their academics as well as it takes less time from me, which allows me to see more students.”

Brief Counseling. The sub-theme Brief Counseling was expressed by the participants as an important factor because of the benefits of being brief. Progress is made in fewer counseling sessions. Participant 4 explained, “I appreciate the briefness of it as well as focus on the positive.” Participant 6 continued, “It helps students acquire coping and life learning skills in a much shorter time,” and was joined by Participant 10 who stated, “If I have time to counsel students, I have to use brief counseling strategies.”

A study by Bruce and Hopper (1997), supports participant responses regarding brief counseling when they compared the effectiveness of brief counseling to a more

traditional counseling approach used by school counselors. It was found that during a four week treatment period, students demonstrated healthy changes in cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains regardless of the therapeutic approach. The difference between counseling approaches was that the students that received brief counseling maintained the improvements for a longer period of time.

Support in Counseling

Another major theme that emerged from school counselor responses was support from group counseling and from others in the school. Solution-Focused Brief Counseling has been found to be effective with individuals as well as with groups in many different situations (McKeel, 1996; Singer 2005; Wubbolding, 2007).

Group Counseling. Group counseling has been shown to be beneficial to students because it shows them that they are not as different as they may perceive themselves to be from others, they receive additional support from someone other than the counselor, and they are able to help others in similar situations (Singer 2005; Wubbolding, 2007). Research supports that small group counseling and classroom interventions work well with children exhibiting school-related counseling issues (Franklin, Biever, Moore, Clemens, & Scamardo, 2001). Participant 9 shared, “Every student needs to be resilient and a group support system can play a key part to that resiliency.” Participant 6 piggy-backed on that statement and said, “I saw students becoming engaged in the process, helping each other out, realizing they can work in a group...” Meanwhile, Participant 9 was quoted in saying, “Solution-Focused Brief Counseling seems to be most effective in my small group settings.” Participant 12 expanded on the specific groups that are included when using this approach by stating, “I

use this approach with my social skills groups, anger management groups, and with the victims of bullying.” Participant 5 supported this further with, “I use Solution-Focused Brief Counseling with divorce groups to help them forecast upcoming events and how they might cope with them.”

Counselor comments regarding individual counseling is supported by previous research. The group model provides many purposes for all students. It gives the students a sense of connectedness and supports them as they transition through elementary school into junior/senior high school and beyond. Group counseling provides the opportunity for students to utilize their newly established social skills, communicate feelings with others, assist in the formulation of essential identity attributes, and to give and receive feedback (Corey, 1997).

Individual Counseling. The sub-theme Individual Counseling was expressed as an important factor because students who do not fit the group profile would still benefit from the use of a brief strategic approach to counseling. Participant 10 stated, “I use SFBC in my military support groups...I also use it with bullies and the victims” and participant 2 stated, “I use SFBC with students in individual and group counseling sessions.”

Future Orientation

Another major theme that emerged from the data was Future Orientation. Solution-Focused Brief Counseling is a model that represents a further shift to future-orientated thinking. In this approach, the counselor uses respectful curiosity to invite the client to envision their future (Woods & Moore, 2008). Solution-Focused Brief Counseling is a future-focused approach that utilizes questions designed to identify

exceptions, (times when the problem does not occur) and *solutions* (a description of what life would be like if the problem did not exist).

Future Focused. Participants provided the following responses in the questionnaire in regards to the sub-theme Future Focused. Participant 2 stated, “Students are able to see their future,” and participant 2 explained, “Solution-Focused Brief Counseling is future oriented.” Participant 10 was quoted in saying, “Solution-Focused Brief Counseling enables students to focus on the future not the past,” and Participant 10 agreed by stating, “This approach is future oriented and non-blaming.”

Exceptions. A sub-theme to Future Orientation was the theory of exceptions to the problems. Counselors have the students reflect on the times when the problem is non-existent. Participant 8 shared that Solution-Focused Brief Counseling allows students to, “Identify strengths and strategies that have worked in the past,” and Participant 13 stated, “Solution-focused counselors help student find times when the problem does not exist.”

The solution-focused approach focuses on the client’s strengths and resiliencies examining previous solutions and exceptions to their problems, and then, through a process of interventions, the clients are encouraged to do more of these positive behaviors (Trepper et al., 2006).

Goal Attainment

Solution-Focused Brief Counseling is goal-directed. Students create their own personal goals under the guidance of the school counselor. Students are in charge of follow through and successful goal attainment.

Goal Development. Students are taught by counselors through the solution-focused model to set realistic goals that they can achieve in a short amount of time. Time

and future orientation play a large part in the creation of goal setting for students.

Participants took time to express their thoughts regarding the sub-theme Goal Development in the following statements. Participant 10 stated, “I assist them in setting goals for a more positive future, and participant 10 was also quoted in saying, “They are able to set goals and follow through with them.” Participant 5 made the statement, “It helps students develop specific goals,” and Participant 2 agreed by stating, “Students are able to set their own goals.” Participant responses are supported through current literature.

To support these statements, current literature states that well-developed goals are created through the collaboration of the client and the counselor. Typically, clients do not formulate any type of goal prior to the initial counseling session. The counselor and client work together on goal development (DeJong, Berg & Miller, 1995).

Scales. A sub-theme that was expressed by participants in the study was Scales. Scales are used to measure the client’s current progress level toward a solution and to reveal the behaviors that are necessary to achieve or maintain future progress. Throughout the questionnaire, participants responded on the sub-theme Scales by stating the following. Participant 10 stated, “I use likert scales, the miracle question, visuals, and I use verbal and written reinforcements to encourage them to move toward their goals.”

Participant 5 stated, “Once specific goals are established, the barriers/signposts and timelines are brought into view.” Participant 2 commented, “It is goal oriented.” Participant 10 was quoted in saying, “SFBC has many strategies to guide students in the right direction toward their goals,” and Participant 9 added that, “It helps get them an immediate plan of action.”

The importance of using scales and other such strategies is backed-up in recent literature. This brief approach to therapy utilizes the imagination of the child by asking a miracle question, scaling questions, problem-free talk, exception questions, goal setting, and giving compliments. Berg and Dolan (2001) stated that the use of numbers seems to trigger some cognitive ability to calmly observe or assess one's own situation. Counselors can also create this into a visual form for students to identify with more easily if necessary.

The Importance of the Resiliency Factor

To bring about the satisfaction of autonomy, students are encouraged to develop their own personal goals, while hope is being created through personal resilience and through the solution-focused approach. (Stams et al., 2008). Resiliency is defined as the capacity to survive, rebound, persevere, and successfully adapt in the face of adversity (Dekel, 2005) and develop social, academic, and vocational competence despite exposure to severe stress or simply to the stress inherent in today's world (Henderson & Milstein, 1996). Although community/environmental, family, and individual factors all contribute to resiliency, previous research only focused on the family or individual factors. Several authors, however, also reported that schools can also be influential in promoting resiliency in students (Rutter & Maughan, 2002). Fostering resiliency in children is a long-term project rooted in the belief that what we do every day around children makes a difference in their lives (Bernard, 1995). Henderson and Millstein (1992) proposed a six strategy model for encouraging resiliency in the school environment as: (a) finding opportunities for meaningful student participation, (b) communicating high expectations,

(c) providing a caring and supportive attitude, (d) increasing social bonding, (e) setting clear and consistent boundaries, and (f) teaching student's life skills.

Regarding the questions about resiliency, participants responded on the importance of resiliency when working with diverse student populations. Participant 1 stated, "Resiliency is the student's persistence to use different strategies to find an effective solution to a problem." Participant 2 stated, "Resiliency is needed to overcome life's hardships. Resilient students are able to overcome social stigmas easier." Participant 4 stated, "Resiliency is important for all children." and Participant 8 expanded on this by saying, "...because the self-esteem of an individual and the outside support that fuels resiliency helps ensure success." Participant 7 commented, "Understanding a person's level of resiliency will help the counselor gage their interactions and interventions." Participant 4 was quoted as saying, "Helping students recognize their ability to work toward solutions to their problems fosters resiliency. Focusing on positives and strengths also promotes resiliency." Participant responses regarding the impact of resiliency are corroborated by the literature. Current literature states that to bring this satisfaction of autonomy, students are encouraged to develop their own personal goals, while hope is being created through personal resilience and through the solution-focused approach (Stams et al., 2008).

Chapter Summary

Chapter IV presented themes that emerged from the data analysis. This qualitative study explored the lived experiences of school counselors using Solution-Focused Brief Counseling with students to promote resiliency. The primary focus of this

research sought to understand the phenomenon of using a solution-focused approach with students.

Eighteen potential participants initially began the questionnaire with only ten completing it in its entirety. The five themes that were extracted using data analysis were: Time, Support, Future Orientation, Goal Attainment, and the Importance of the Resiliency Factor. The following sub-themes were found in the data were Counselor Time Restraints, Student Schedules, Brief Counseling, Group Counseling, Individual Counseling, Future Focused, Exceptions, Goal Development and Scales. The themes were supported by descriptive language in the form of quotes extracted from the questionnaire. The quotes that were selected from the participant responses were counselor perceptions of their experiences using Solution-Focused Brief Counseling to promote resiliency in students. From the ten participants, data was collected and analyses using Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological approach to qualitative research. Data analysis was completely manually and any biases were ruled out. Chapter V contains the purpose and significance of the study, the limitations of the study, a restatement of the methodology, discussion of the findings, conclusions of the research study, implications for future studies, and the chapter summary.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

Introduction

Educators today are facing significant challenges in meeting the diverse needs of students who require responsive services in schools while budgets and therapeutic resources are decreasing (Hawken & Hess, 2006). School counselors are being called upon to assist students that are not conforming to school-wide rules and expectations. Responsive services and interventions are part of what makes counselors unique in the schools. They are able to touch a wide range of students that are in need of these services. The challenge is finding the time and support needed from the administration and teachers to assist the students in becoming better students all around.

The literature review provided a summary of the theoretical approaches to counseling used in this research. Solution-focused Brief Counseling and the Resiliency Theory were explored and they guided this study in relation to the school counselor's experiences in providing necessary counseling services to student in the school system. Much of the literature was aimed at the role of the school counselor and not at what therapeutic approach they found to be effective when working with students on various counseling issues.

Substantial literature exists regarding school counselors and the nature of the counseling interventions that are being utilized in the public school setting but not necessarily Solution-Focused Brief Counseling (Schmidt, 1993). Common to all authors who have used solution-focused approaches in the public schools is their concern that more empirical investigations of this approach are required due to the limited evidence of its effectiveness in the school systems (Stobie et al., 2005). Research using a solution-

focused approach in the public schools is limited though it is favorable especially in the elementary schools (McKeel, 1996). The literature review lacked sufficient data based on current research studies to solidify the arguments that solution-focused approaches to counseling are effective with diverse student populations in promoting resiliency. Even though Solution-Focused Brief Counseling has been in the forefront of postmodern therapies since the early 1980's, it continues to lack the recognition in the school systems as a successful therapeutic approach as other modern behavioral therapies.

The theory of resiliency also plays a part in this research. As literature on resiliency has become more popular in education (Lambie, Leone, & Martin, 2007) positive outlooks to view at-risk children have been clarified (Lambie et al., 2007). For example, Lewis (2006) describes the progressive shift in practice from a "deficit-focused model" to a model that views students as a promise rather than a risk. Lambie et al., (2007) discussed the challenges of increasing the number of students who fall into the resilient category. There is a need for interventions and the involvement of school counselors as change agents across systems (i.e., home, school, and the community).

The rationale leading to the development of guidance and counseling services in the United States commenced in the 1890s with the social reform movement. The difficulties of people living in urban low socio-economic housing areas and the widespread use of child labor outraged many citizens (Beesley, 2004). One of the consequences was the compulsory education movement and shortly thereafter the vocational guidance movement, which, in its early days, was concerned with guiding people into the workforce to become productive members of society. A primary role of

counselors was to prepare students to go to work, and vocational counselors could assist in the sorting of students into the appropriate work paths (Gysbers, 2001).

The history of the school counselor as a therapeutic service provider within the field of education is relatively new. The 1980's saw the development of training standards and criteria for the school counseling program. Schools had to provide adequate educational services to meet the ever growing needs of the student population (Baker, 2001; Gysbers, 2001). At this same time, the roles and responsibilities of the counselor changed. Counselors started finding themselves as gatekeepers to Individualized Education Programs (IEP) and Chairpersons of the Child Study Teams as well as consultants to special education teachers, especially after the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990.

Summary of the Study

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to qualitatively explore how school counselors describe their counseling experiences and perceptions of Solution-Focused Brief Counseling techniques to promote resiliency within the diverse student populations who exhibit school-related counseling issues. There were two primary research questions used to guide this study. They considered the different perceptions of school counselors using Solution-Focused Brief Counseling to promote resiliency. The following research questions were explored in this study: How do school counselors use Solution-Focused Brief Counseling with diverse student populations? How does Solution-Focused Brief Counseling promote resiliency in students?

Significance

Various research studies have focused on the theoretical side of Solution-Focused Brief Counseling (McKeel, 1996; Singer 2005; Wubbolding, 2007). Researchers have paid attention to its effects in multiple counseling situations to include but not limited to groups, schools, therapeutic programs, family therapy, etc. (McKeel, 1996; Singer 2005; Wubbolding, 2007). Literature indicates that this approach has been used with diverse population in several different types of situations and settings specifically in situations of domestic violence (Lipchik & Kubicki, 1996), substance abuse (Osborn & Collison, 1998), abuse victims (Dolan, 1994), and with juvenile delinquents (Clark, 1996).

More specific research needs to be done using Solution-Focused Brief Counseling to promote resiliency in students. The research that this researcher has completed on the topic is minuet considering the number of possible school counselors that actually use this approach that did not complete the questionnaire.

Restatement of the Methodology

Qualitative inquiry and questioning requires a research design that is based on previous knowledge, observation, and a sense of curiosity about a specific phenomenon or population (Creswell, 1994). This study used a qualitative design to describe the lived experiences of school counselors who have utilized Solution-Focused Brief Counseling in the school environment, to describe the counselor's perceptions of the strengths and limitations of the approach and its techniques in promoting resiliency in their students. The goal of this researcher was to describe as specifically as possible the phenomenon, avoiding any pre-given framework, but remaining true to the facts (Welman & Kruger, 1999, p. 189).

This study was informed by phenomenology. Phenomenology is a philosophical movement that was originated with the work of Edmund Husserl in the early twentieth century. It focuses on phenomena, the way the world appears to us (Chiari & Nuzzo, 1996). The use of phenomenology involves the understanding that individuals have their own interpretation of “truth” in a given situation. Phenomenology was probably the most significant philosophical movement of the twentieth century, as far as the social sciences are concerned (Nichols & Schwartz, 2001).

This researcher explored the lived experiences of school counselors that used Solution-Focused Brief Counseling to promote resiliency in their students. The following research questions were explored in this study: How do school counselors use Solution-Focused Brief Counseling with diverse student populations? How does Solution-Focused Brief Counseling promote the resiliency in students?

Upon receiving approval from the Barry Institutional Review Board, a recruitment flyer was sent out via the American School Counseling Association (Appendix A). This researcher used purposeful sampling for the study. The participants in this research study were school counselors that were current members of the American School Counselor Association, specifically the ASCA SCENE. At the initial stage of the research, there were 13,396 members of ASCA SCENE that were purposely selected to participate in the study. Seventy-two counselors reviewed the questionnaire without responding. Eighteen counselors initially agreed to participate after reading the Letter of Anonymous Study (Appendix B) and started the process of answering the demographic questions (Appendix C) only to opt out prior to completion. Fourteen participants completed this portion of the questionnaire. Of the fourteen participants that continued

on to the free response questions, only ten completed the questionnaire in its entirety. The other four participants opted-out of the study without penalty.

The initial point of contact with the counselors was via email through a recruitment letter which was posted on the SCENE. The on-line questionnaire was made available by clicking on a link that took participants to the SurveyMonkey™ website. Participants were asked in the Letter of Anonymous Study to complete a demographics questionnaire as well as explore their lived experiences using Solution-Focused Brief Counseling. Participants that agreed to participate were sent the Consent for Anonymous Study (Appendix B) describing the purpose of the study. Those that agreed to participate were asked to click on the “I Agree” statement to acknowledge their understanding of the terms for participation. If a participant opted out of the questionnaire at any time or declined the opportunity, a thank you screen (Appendix D) was automatically sent to them and they were removed from the study.

Participants that continued on in the study were asked to complete a questionnaire that included open-ended, forced choice, yes/no, and free responses questions. The questions were written to elicit school counselor perceptions of their experiences. Participants had a two week window to respond to the questionnaire before a second email was sent reminding them of their opportunity to be apart of this research study.

This researcher assured potential participants that their anonymity would be maintained and secure in the Letter of Consent for Anonymous Study. The results have been placed in a password secured file on this researcher’s personal computer. The data will be stored until it is destroyed no later than January 1, 2016.

In qualitative research, the researcher is one of the primary data collection instruments (Moon, Dillon, & Sprenkle, 1990). The central part of the process enabled this researcher, as the instrument, to delineate knowledge in the present study. Data analysis required: Epoche, bracketing, phenomenological reduction, and the cluster of meanings and essences (Moustakas, 1994). The theory of phenomenology often leads to the seeking out units of meaning.

At the end of the two week period, this researcher gathered the information and looked for common concepts and themes in participant responses in order to capture the essence of the overall lived experiences of the school counselors. After a grueling two weeks of waiting for completed questionnaires, ten was the final count.

Corbin and Strauss (2008) stated, “The first initial step in any analysis is to read data collections from beginning to end” (p 163). While reading through the material, the researcher, “placed the collected data in front of her and studied the material” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 118). Data analysis began once this researcher’s own beliefs and experiences were described and bracketed. This was also done to validate trustworthiness of the data analysis. This process allowed for the study to be free of biases and judgments.

After the data was collected and read over several times for a more complete understanding of the participant’s perception to the phenomenon of using solution-focused approaches with students in the schools, clustered themes and meaning units were extracted and categorized using descriptive notes. This researcher examined the responses to determine how the participants experienced the topic. The data was categorized by using Moustakas’ (1994) Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction

Process. This researcher created lists and tables that included significant statements from the free response questions relating to their lived experiences of the phenomenon. This is the process known as horizontalization of the data; “this treats each statement equally and works to develop a list of non-repetitive and non-overlapping statements” (Creswell, 1998, p.146). The data was weighed and examined horizontally for similar patterns. Data was placed into clustered meaning units. Five themes emerged from the responses in the questionnaires: Time, Support, Future Orientation, Goal Attainment, and the Importance of the Resiliency Factor.

Limitations

Within the subjective nature of qualitative, phenomenological research, comes limitations. The limitations to this research study are as follows: The first limitation was that the participants must actively work in elementary, middle, or high schools and be current members of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) in order to be surveyed. There are school counselors who are not members of the association or they have not renewed their membership that may in fact use Solution-Focused Brief Counseling with their students. The counselors must also be a member of the SCENE which is networking site within the American School Counselors Association website. It was found that several school counselors had never heard of the SCENE and therefore were not able to be participants in this research study.

Second, I was not able to contact the participants to expand on their answers to the questionnaire. It is important to remember that depending on the extent of the training and utility of the solution-focused techniques, this may suggest a need to approach the results of this study with caution. Several of the participants wrote simple

nondescript responses. This researcher believes that face-to-face interviews would have elicited more detailed responses.

Finally, the sample size consisting of a maximum of 12 participants may be considered small for this research study (Patton, 2002). Out of the 72 school counselors that reviewed the questionnaire, only 10 counselors completed it in its entirety. The questionnaire was posted twice on ASCA SCENE to recruit participants. Data was slow to emerge during the research period.

Discussion of the Findings

The findings of this research study resulted from utilizing Moustakas' (1994) approach to data analysis of the free responses questions (Appendix C). A maximum of twelve participants were purposely selected. Of the eighteen potential participants, ten completed the questionnaire in its entirety. The over-arching research question of the study questioned; what perceptions of school counselors are regarding their lived experiences using Solution-Focused Brief Counseling with students to promote resiliency? Five major themes emerged from the data analysis process. The five major themes are; Time, Support, Future Orientation, Goal Attainment, and the Importance of the Resiliency Factor. The following section will present the themes and sub-themes that emerged through the process of data analysis.

Discussion

Time. Through the process of data analysis, the concept of Time emerged as a major theme in this research study. Nine out of the ten participants stated that time is an issue when it comes to counseling students at school. Counselor time, student schedules, and the briefness of the approach emerged as sub-themes in the study.

The sub-theme Counselor Time Restraints was expressed as a means to understand the lived experiences of the school counselor when having an opportunity to put their skills into action. Participants 9 and 10 provided the following responses regarding why they use Solution-Focused Brief Counseling with their students:

“If I have time to counsel students, I have to use brief counseling strategies.”

“It takes less time from their academics as well as it takes less time from me which allows me to see more students.”

The sub-theme Student Schedules was found to be important to the nature of counseling in the schools. School counselors stated that by using Solution-focused brief counseling approaches, students are out of class less often and results are seen in less time. Student Schedules were expressed by participants to be an important factor in counseling students because the students have an obligation to their academics as well as their mental health. Participants 6, 8, and 9 provided the following responses:

“Students need to be in class learning, so if I can be effective in a short period of time, it is better for the students, and I can work with more students.”

“It takes less time from their academics as well as it takes less time from me which allows me to see more students.”

“It is effective and respectful of their time out of class.”

Another sub-theme that emerged from the data was the brevity of Solution-Focused Brief Counseling. Results are seen in a shorter amount of time than most therapeutic approaches which is very conducive to the time restraints placed on counselors and student schedules. Participants 4, 6, and 10 articulated the following responses:

“I appreciate the briefness of it as well as focus on the positive.”

“It helps students acquire coping and life learning skills in a much shorter time.”

“If I have time to counsel students, I have to use brief counseling strategies.”

Support in Counseling. Another major theme that emerged from school counselor responses was support from group counseling and from others in the school. Solution-Focused Brief Counseling has been found to be effective with individuals as well as with groups in many different situations (McKeel, 1996; Singer 2005; Wubbolding, 2007).

The sub-theme Group Counseling has been expressed as beneficial to students because it shows them that they are not as different as they may perceive themselves to be from others, they receive additional support from someone other than the counselor, and they are able to help others in similar situations (Singer 2005; Wubbolding, 2007). Participants 5, 6, 9, and 12 provided the following responses regarding group counseling:

“Every student needs to be resilient and a group support system can play a key part to that resiliency.”

“I use this approach with my social skills groups, anger management groups, and with the victims of bullying.”

“I saw students becoming engaged in the process, helping each other out, realizing they can work in a group...”

“Solution-Focused Brief Counseling seems to be most effective in my small group settings.”

“I use Solution-Focused Brief Counseling with divorce groups to help them forecast upcoming events and how they might cope with them.”

The sub-theme Individual Counseling was mentioned because students who do not fit the group profile would still benefit from the use of a brief strategic approach to counseling. Participants 2 and 10 made the following statements regarding individual counseling:

“I use SFBC in my military support groups...I also use it with bullies and the victims.”

“I use SFBC with students in individual and group counseling sessions.”

Future Orientation. A major theme that emerged from the data was Future Orientation. Solution-Focused Brief Counseling is a model that represents a further shift to future-orientated thinking. In this approach, the counselor uses respectful curiosity to invite the client to envision their future (Woods & Moore, 2008). Solution-Focused Brief Counseling is a future-focused approach that utilizes questions designed to identify *exceptions*, (times when the problem does not occur) and *solutions* (a description of what life would be like if the problem did not exist).

A sub-theme that was found to be important to counselors working with student in the schools was Future Focused. For counselors to promote resiliency in students, they have to assist the students in seeing a positive future. Participants 2 and 10 provided the following responses in the questionnaire in regards to the sub-theme Future Focused:

“Students are able to see their future.”

“Solution-Focused Brief Counseling enables students to focus on the future not the past.” “This approach is future oriented and non-blaming.”

“It is future oriented.”

A sub-theme to Future Orientation was the theory of exceptions to the problem. Counselors have the students reflect on the times when the problem is non-existent. Each of us generates our own “rules” and “mental models,” which we use to make sense of our experiences (Myers 2009). Learning, therefore, is simply the process of adjusting our mental models to accommodate new experiences. The solution-focused approach focuses on the client’s strengths and resiliencies examining previous solutions and exceptions to their problems, and then, through a process of interventions, the clients are encouraged to do more of these positive behaviors (Trepper et al., 2006). Participants 8 and 13 responded in the follow statements in regards to the sub-theme Exceptions:

“It defines the times when the problem is not taking place.”

“Solution-focused counselors help student find times when the problem does not exist.”

Goal Attainment. Solution-Focused Brief Counseling is goal-directed. Students create their own personal goals under the guidance of the school counselor. Students are in charge of follow through and successful goal attainment.

Goal Development was extracted as a sub-theme through data analysis. Students are taught by counselors through the solution-focused model to set realistic goals that they can achieve in a short amount of time. Time and future orientation play a large part in the creation of goal setting for students. Participants 2, 5, and 10 took time to express their thoughts regarding the sub-theme Goal Development in the following statements:

“They are able to set goals and follow through with them.”

“It helps students develop specific goals.”

“I assist them in setting goals for a more positive future.”

“Students are able to set goals.”

A sub-theme that was expressed by participants in the study was Scales. Scales are used to measure the client’s current progress level toward a solution and to reveal the behaviors that are necessary to achieve or maintain future progress. Throughout the questionnaire, Participants 2, 5, 9, 10 responded on the sub-theme Scales by stating the following:

“Once specific goals are established, the barriers/signposts and timelines are brought into view.”

“SFBC has many strategies to guide students in the right direction toward their goals.”

“It helps get them an immediate plan of action.”

“It is goal oriented.”

“I use likert scales, the miracle question, visuals, and I use verbal and written reinforcements to encourage them to move toward their goals.”

The Importance of the Resiliency Factor

Students are encouraged to develop their own personal goals, while hope is being created through personal resilience and through the solution-focused approach (Stams et al., 2008). Resiliency is defined as the capacity to survive, rebound, persevere, and successfully adapt in the face of adversity (Dekel, 2005) and develop social, academic, and vocational competence despite exposure to severe stress or simply to the stress inherent in today’s world (Henderson & Milstein, 1996). Fostering resiliency in children is a long-term project rooted in the belief that what we do every day in the presence of children makes a difference in their lives (Bernard, 1995).

By placing a focus on resiliency and the future, students can benefit from short-term counseling in individual and small group settings. When using the solution-focused approach with student, the counselor takes a non-blaming stance to assist students in seeing the future and moving forward. Some of the Participants 1, 2, 4, 7, and 8 responded by stating:

“Resiliency is the student’s persistence to use different strategies to find an effective solution to a problem.”

“Resiliency is needed to overcome life’s hardships. Resilient students are able to overcome social stigmas easier.”

“Resiliency is important for all children.”

“...because the self-esteem of an individual and the outside support that fuels resiliency helps ensure success.”

“Understanding a person’s level of resiliency will help the counselor gage their interactions and interventions.”

“Helping students recognize their ability to work toward solutions to their problems fosters resiliency. Focusing on positives and strengths also promotes resiliency.”

Conclusion

According to the responses in the research questionnaire, schools counselors seem favorable to using Solution-Focused Brief Counseling with their students. They saw the approach to be positive, supportive, effective in a limited amount of time, and purposeful. The majority of them stated that the solution-focused approach helps to promote resiliency in students. Participants 1 and 4 responded by making statements such as:

“Resiliency is the student’s persistence to use different strategies to find an effective solution to a problem,” and “Helping students recognize their ability to work toward solutions to their problems fosters resiliency. Focusing on positives and strengths also promotes resiliency.”

According to de Shazer, change takes place in everyday life.

Influenced heavily by the work of Milton Erickson and the Mental Research Institute (MRI) Team, Solution-Focused Brief Counseling is characterized by several assumptions: (1) Solution-Focused Counseling’s emphasis is on wellness, whereby the individual is seen as having the resources to solve their own problem, (2) assumes that Solution-Focused Brief Counseling is future-oriented so to not focus on the cause of the problem, (3) Solution-Focused Brief Counseling is considered cooperative and collaborative, (4) Solution-Focused Brief Counseling states that problems do not require a specific amount of time to solve related to their complexity, (5) resistance is seen as an artifact stemming from the difficulties that counselors may have while establishing goals for the client, (6) Solution-Focused Brief Counseling assumes that problems and their solutions can be seen, measured, and described.

The time efficiency of the brief approach seems to be of importance to school counselors. With busy work days and limited resources, school counselors must attempt to meet the needs of each student that is facing a significant stressor whether at school, home, or in the community. Its use of identification of already established resources within the student limits the need for learning new strategies and skills to make positive changes in their life. Participants 8 and 9 commented on the importance of time in the questionnaire as:

“It is effective and respectful of their time out of class”

“It takes less time from their academics as well as it takes less time from me which allows me to see more students.”

The results of this study provide support that school counselors do in fact use Solution-Focused Brief Counseling in the school setting when time allows. Although 10 participants is a small sample size, information that was extracted from the responses solidifies that this approach has been beneficial to both school counselors and students in terms of time, goal setting, future orientation, goal attainment, and promoting resiliency. It is through the school counselor’s experiences and perceptions of Solution-Focused Brief Counseling that this information was available to this researcher. It is important to interpret these findings cautiously due to the limited number of participants and the other aforementioned limitations mentioned previously in this research study.

Recommendations

The five major themes that emerged from the data analysis provide insight as to how school counselors perceive their experiences of Solution-Focused Brief Counseling when working with students to promote resiliency. Unfortunately, an existing literature review revealed limited research involving school counselors using this particular approach during group and individual counseling with students in the schools. School counselors are in need of support from their administrations in order to have ample time to use brief therapy approaches with students.

Implications for Practice

The results of this investigation may provide important implications for future school counselors in the field of education. The information gained in this research may

be beneficial to understanding the possible need for future school counselor trainings on brief theoretical approaches, program effectiveness, what specific techniques and strategies are helpful to use with student in the school environment, and how to promote resiliency in students.

When considering the findings pertaining to the current themes of Time, Support, Future Orientation, Goal Attainment, the Importance of the Resiliency Factor, this researcher has come to the conclusion that school counselors need to do what's necessary to promote brief counseling in schools specifically Solution-Focused Brief Counseling. The responses communicated by the participants solidifies that this approach is effective in the school environment with all ages whether as an individual or in a group setting. As an educator and counselor in the public school system, this research understand the problems that classroom teacher.

Future Research

Currently, there is a tremendous amount of pressure on school counselors from teachers, administrator, and parents to assist students in making the right choices, in dealing with any problems that may arise in the school environment. Counselors are asked to fix the “square pegs” that do not naturally fit into the classroom’s “round holes” all the while not discounting any of the current responsibilities that need to be addressed in the average workday. An existing literature review revealed limited research involving school counselors using a solution-focused approach during group and individual counseling with students. The research that is available supports that small group counseling and classroom interventions work well with children exhibiting school-related counseling issues (Franklin, Biever, Moore, Clemens, & Scamardo, 2001). Research

using a solution-focused approach in the public schools with students is limited, but it has been found to have a positive impact, particularly in the elementary schools (McKeel, 1996). Common to all authors who have studied solution-focused approaches in the public school system is their concern that more empirical investigations of this application are warranted since limited evidence of its effectiveness in the school systems exists (Stephan et al., 2007; Stobie, Boyle, & Wolfson, 2005).

The results of this qualitative study and previous studies can benefit school counselors and their counselor's efforts. The research thus far on Solution-Focused Brief Counseling has been favorable in the school settings. More research is needed to determine which strategies are more effective with diverse student populations when promoting resiliency.

In order to have more reliable and valid research in the future, one must take a few recommendations into consideration: The first recommendation would be to allow more time to elicit responses to the on-line questionnaire. It was very difficult to recruit school counselors when this researcher could not make contact with potential participants. In a future study, it would be interesting to consider including follow-up interviews via the telephone that were initially completed on-line, if not anonymous, to elicit more information on the topic. The majority of the participants gave simple statements in regards to the free response questions. This researcher requested in the questionnaire that participants be as specific as possible when answering the questions. Only a small percentage of the school counselor's responses were answered in detail. Not being able to follow-up with participants to obtain more information potentially hurt the outcome of this research. This researcher feels that there was more that could have

been stated in the responses but effort was not put forth and follow-up with the participants was not an option due to the anonymity of the research.

Another recommendation for future studies would be to purposely sample school counselors from the American Counseling Association (ACA) as well as the American School Counselor Association (ASCA). While speaking with fellow school counselors, it was noted that several of them were not current members of the American School Counselor Association. A drawback that may arise with recruiting school counselors from the American Counseling Association may be the potential of participants that are not in the school counseling field completing the questionnaire which may cause the results to be skewed.

The present study explored the perceptions of school counselor on their experiences using Solution-Focused Brief Counseling with students to promote resiliency. To piggy-back on the current research study, it would be interesting to study the phenomenon through the perspectives of the students that have received Solution-Focused Brief Counseling from their school counselor. Also building on this research would be finding out what solution-focused strategies are more effective with specific issues not limited to anger management, coping skills, self-esteem, social phobias, and bullying.

Chapter Summary

Chapter five provided an overview of this qualitative, phenomenological research study and the process involved in data collection. The findings were elicited from responses provided by school counselors that are current members of the American School Counseling Association. This study was concerned with the lived experiences

and perceptions of school counselors that have utilized Solution-Focused Brief Counseling in the public school setting to meet the needs of their students. The study also took a look at how Solution-Focused Brief Counseling plays a role in fostering resiliency in children and adolescents.

This study acknowledges the following possible limitations: participants had to be current members of the American School Counseling Association, specifically ASCA SCENE; this researcher was not able to contact participants to elicit a more detailed response to the questions; and the small sample size of ten participants.

Five major themes emerged from the process of data analysis. They were; Time, Support, Future Orientation, Goal Attainment, and the Important of the Resiliency Factor.

There continues to be a need for further research on school counselor use of Solution-Focused Brief Counseling. The benefits in regards to how this approach helps promote resiliency in students and which populations of students would be better served using this approach is also in need of future research. Perhaps a fresh perspective from the students regarding their lived experiences with Solution-Focused Brief Counseling will provide important findings and add to the body of already established research.

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Appendices

APPENDIX A

Barry University

Participant Recruitment Letter

Dear School Counselor,

My name is Stephanie Spain Anderson and I am a doctoral candidate in the Adrian School of Education at Barry University. I am looking for 12 school counselors who currently work in an elementary, middle, or high school and are willing to share their perceptions of their experiences using Solution-Focused Brief Counseling with their students. The data that is collected and reported will be completely anonymous and will not include participant names, e-mail addresses, or personal internet identifiers.

If you elect to participate in this research study, you will be asked to do the following:

- Go to the link listed below that connects to the on-line questionnaire.
- After thoroughly reviewing and reading the Cover Letter of Anonymous Study, you will have two options. You can either confirm your participation in this research study or you can decline. If you choose not to participate, a thank you letter will be sent and you will exit the study. Should you choose to participate in this voluntary study, your anonymity will be secure at all times. You also have the option to discontinue the study at any time.
- Once you have selected the *Yes, I agree to participate in the anonymous study*; you will be presented with a demographics questionnaire. Once this is completed, you will move into the on-line anonymous questionnaire that is comprised of forced choice, yes/no, and narrative responses.
- The first 12 completed responses will be included in this study.
- The on-line questionnaire should take no more than 30 minutes to complete.

Thank you for participating in this research study.

Stephanie Spain Anderson

Doctoral Candidate and Primary Researcher

APPENDIX B
Barry University

Cover Letter for Anonymous Study

Dear Research Participant:

Your participation in a research study is requested. The title of this study is *School Counselor Perception of Solution-Focused Brief Counseling in Promoting Resiliency*. The research is being conducted by Stephanie Spain Anderson, a doctoral student in the Counseling Department at Barry University in the Adrian Dominican School of Education, and it is seeking information that will be useful in the field of school counseling. The aim of the research is to explore school counselor perceptions of their experiences when using Solution-Focused Brief Counseling to promote resiliency with diverse student populations.

If you decide to participate in this anonymous research study, you will be asked to do the following: Complete a demographics questionnaire and an on-line open ended, forced choice, and narrative response questionnaire. The participants are school counselors who are currently working in either elementary, middle or high school. I anticipate the number of participants to be twelve. The questionnaire is estimated to take no more than 30 minutes to complete.

Your consent to be a research participant is strictly voluntary and should you decline to participate or should you choose to drop out at any time during the study, there will be no adverse effects.

As a research participant, information you provide will be collected and reported anonymously by the primary researcher, that is, no names, e-mail addresses or any other personal identifiers will be collected. SurveyMonkey.com™ allows researchers to suppress the delivery of IP addresses during the downloading of data, and in this study no IP address will be delivered to this researcher. The web-based questionnaire prevents the researcher from acquiring any personal or identifying information of the participants. However, SurveyMonkey.com™ does collect IP addresses for its own purposes. If you have concerns about this you should review the privacy policy of SurveyMonkey.com™ before you begin. The data will be stored until it is destroyed no earlier than January 1, 2016.

By completing and submitting this electronic survey you are acknowledging that you are at least 18-years-old and that you voluntarily agree to participate in the study.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the study or your participation in the study, you may contact me at stephanieanderson10@yahoo.com, my supervisor, Dr. Christine Sacco-Bene, by phone at (321) 235-8411 or by email at csacco-bene@mail.barry.edu. You may also contact the Institutional Review Board point of contact, Barbara Cook, by phone (305) 899-3020 or by email at bcook@mail.barry.edu.

If you are willing to participate in this research study, please consent by choosing one of the options below.

Voluntary Consent

I acknowledge that I have been informed of the purpose of this research study conducted by Stephanie Spain Anderson and that I have reviewed, read, and understand the information presented above. I have also received a copy of this Letter of Anonymous Study for my personal records. I give my voluntary consent to participate in this research study.

Please select one of the options below:

- Yes, I agree to participate in the anonymous research study.
- No, I do not wish to participate.

Thank you for your participation.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Spain Anderson

Print this page if you need proof of participation.

APPENDIX C

SurveyMonkey.com™

Demographics Questionnaire

Demographics:

1.) What is your gender?

Female

Male

2.) Cultural Self-identification. Check all that apply.

Caucasian

African American

Hispanic, Latino/Latina

Asia, Pacific Islander

Other not specified _____

3.) What state do you reside? _____

4.) How many years of school counselor experience do you currently have? _____

5.) What year was your counseling degree completed? _____

6.) How would you describe your school setting?

Elementary School

Middle School

High School

Other _____

7.) What grade levels are represented at your school? Check all that apply.

K

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

8.) Approximately how many students are currently enrolled at your school?

< 199

200-300

301-400

401-500

501-600

601-700

701-800

801-900

901-1000

1000+

9.) Have you attended any training on Solution-Focused Brief Counseling?

Yes

No

10.) What was the delivery method of information on Solution-Focused Brief Counseling?

Video

Lecture

On-line seminar/course

Clinical Supervision

Other _____

11.) What was the reason for the training?

Continuous education

College course

Personal interest

Other _____

12.) When using Solution-Focused Brief Counseling, I usually have _____ sessions.

13.) I currently facilitate small groups using Solution-Focused Brief Counseling in my school counseling program.

Yes

No

APPENDIX C

SurveyMonkey.com™

Questionnaire

Please respond to the following items.

13.) Please describe in detail why you use Solution-Focused Brief Counseling with your students?

14.) How does this approach benefit you and your students? Please thoroughly explain.

15.) What do your students see you doing when you use Solution-Focused Brief Counseling? Please explain.

16.) In your professional opinion, what part does resiliency play when working with diverse student populations in a counseling setting? Please explain.

17.) What would you recommend school counselors do when implementing Solution-Focused Brief Counseling so to maximize its potential in promoting resiliency? Please be specific.

19.) Please use the space below to share your experiences using Solution-Focused Brief Counseling in promoting resiliency with diverse student populations (including but not limited to exceptional education, social skills training, anger management, minority students, bullying programs etc.).

20.) Please use the space below to share additional thoughts regarding your perceptions of your experiences using Solution-Focused Brief Counseling that may not have been addressed in the questionnaire.

APPENDIX D

Thank You Screen

Dear School Counselor,

Thank you for participating in this research study. Your participation will allow me to gather information regarding your experiences and perceptions of Solution-Focused Brief Counseling when promoting resiliency in diverse student populations. Collected data from this study will hopefully add to the body of research regarding school counselor's use of this brief counseling approach in the schools systems.

If you have elected not to participate in this study, thank you for your time thus far and have a great school year.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Spain Anderson

PhD Candidate, Primary Researcher

APPENDIX E

