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The significance of the relationship of counselors and administrators evidenced during solution-focused conversations seminars

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The significance of the relationship of counselors and administrators evidenced during
solution-focused conversations seminars

by

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A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF SCIENCE

Major: Education (Counselor Education)

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2004

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has met the thesis requirements of Iowa State University

Signatures have been redacted for privacy

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Abstract

The workshop “Teaming Principals and Counselors to Create Solution-Focused Schools” led by Dr. John M. Littrell and sponsoring agency, Area Education Association (AEA), formed the basis for this research project. Participants of this workshop series focusing on solution-focused conversations were school counselors and school administrators from central Iowa. Following a review of the literature regarding solution-focused conversations and solution-focused brief therapy, information was gleaned from three individual surveys completed by each participant. The comments and responses to the questions were analyzed in an effort to determine the significance of the relationship between counselors and administrators during the process of implementing solution-focused conversations into an educational setting. The limitations to this process include the inability to determine the significance of the relationship on a broader scale of overall school change. This is a possibility in further and more extensive research.

Introduction

As society becomes increasingly fast-paced, people are in search of equally fast resolutions to any problems that may arise throughout the course of their life. This desire to work within the time constraint is no different for those working in school settings. Counselors and administrators are often in search of more time or something quick to solve the problem at hand. Solution-focused conversations may play an important role in the resolution of the impending issue.

Although there has been previous work in the area of solution-focused conversations, also known as solution-focused brief therapy, this project explores the significance of and the development of a strong working relationship between the counselor and administrator in an individual school district with the implementation of solution-focused conversations.

The research which forms the basis for this paper was a three-part workshop series led by Dr. John M. Littrell titled, "Teaming Principals and Counselors to Create Solution-Focused Schools." Teams of counselors and administrators from schools in central Iowa were given an opportunity to participate in the workshop series. One of the purposes of the workshop series was to give counselors and administrators an opportunity to work as a team toward having solution-focused conversations as a part of their professional relationship.

This paper will begin by providing a comprehensive review of literature, including a history of solution-focused brief therapy, a description of the brief therapy model, and the use of solution-focused conversations in schools, as well as the benefits and limitations of solution-focused conversations. The method section of this paper will give a detailed description of the process of the research conducted by identifying the participants,

describing the workshop design, and outlining the feedback received and how it subsequently altered the seminar format.

The research question and the hypothesis developed regarding the significance of the role of the relationship between school counselors and school administrators will be presented. Next, the results obtained from the research will be presented and an overview of the identified significance of the relationship between counselors and administrators given. In addition, ideas of future research regarding solution-focused conversations will be discussed.

Review of Literature

The review of literature is provided to lay a foundation for an understanding of solution-focused conversations and the techniques involved in the use of this methodology. This review will also underscore the application of solution-focused conversations in an educational setting.

History and Overview

Although there has not been a great wealth of research conducted specifically on solution-focused conversations, particularly focused on school counselors and administrators, there is applicable research that has been done in the area of brief counseling. Generalizations about the usefulness of solution-focused conversations can be gleaned from this related literature.

For centuries, people have been intrigued with discovering the secrets of the change process. If there is one central idea in the counseling approach...it is that your focus should be on change. In particular, you are in the business of helping a mind to change. When people stubbornly resist change, they often say, "My mind is made up." Reluctant to change their minds, they then repeat the same behaviors over and over—with the same results. If they are getting the results they desire, they do not view themselves as having a problem. But often people repeat behaviors that do not get them what they want. (Presbury, Echterling, & McKee, 2002, p. 21).

Milton Erickson is believed to have said that clients presented with problems they were unable to solve (Presbury et al., 2002). One of his techniques included giving them problems they could solve, in essence, changing the problems they were facing into something that would be viewed as solvable and in essence would lead one to believe that

“problems are negotiable” (Presbury et al., 2002). During the late 1970s and early 1980s, it was discovered that nearly every problem contains a component of solutions (Berg & Steiner, 2003). It is merely a matter of discovering that element.

“Solution-focused brief counseling was originally conceptualized by de Shazer and colleagues as a set of clinical assumptions and strategies in response to the question, ‘What works in counseling?’” (Mostert, Johnson, & Mostert, 1997, p. 21). In the mid-1980s the first solution-focused model was presented, offering a focus on solutions rather than the problems themselves (Presbury et al., 2002). Walter & Peller (2000) discussed the historical configuration of therapy, including the idea of addressing the underlying structure of the problem and therefore solving the problem itself. Research indicated that the implementation of solution-focused approaches, the basis of therapy, shifted to the construction of solutions as opposed to a focus on the problem or unrelated issues (Walter & Peller, 2000). “While the focus shifted to the future and to solutions, the assumptions remained within a problem/solution configuration” (Walter & Peller, 2000, p. 62).

Solution-focused therapy, the roots of which lie within the brief strategic therapy movement, has, like its predecessor, founded itself upon the shaky rock of antirealism. Usually called “constructivism” or “social constructionism” outside the context of philosophy proper, antirealism is an epistemological doctrine that currently enjoys immense popularity in the social sciences and humanities. Its core claim about knowing is that the knower does not – indeed cannot – under any circumstances attain knowledge of a reality that is objective or independent of the knower – knowledge of how the world really is. The ability to attain such knowledge is, after all, a claim about knowing that is typical of the doctrine of realism. According to antirealism, all

knowers instead make or construct their own biased or subjective “realities” in language. (Miller, Hubble, & Duncan, 1996, p. 27)

A primary focus on solutions was formalized by de Shazer and the Milwaukee Group in 1986 (Walter & Peller, 2000). Walter & Peller (2000) discussed the shift that occurred in moving from the idea that solution-focused is merely a positive flip side of problem-focused strategies. The assumption developed that the solution process was independent of the problem process and problems were no longer considered an abnormality (Walter & Peller, 2000). Talking about a future when the problem was no longer a problem assisted in the development of solutions (Walter & Peller, 2000).

Solution-Focused Brief Therapy Model

Solution-Focused Brief Therapy is a nonpathology-oriented approach that assumes that people have the strengths and resources to find their own solutions but they have reached a point where they perceive themselves as stuck. Solution-Focused Brief Therapy considers individuals to be unique in their genetic heritage, social development, and perception of reality. It believes that language (verbal and non-verbal) is the source of personal and social reality and the means toward a future in which clients can perceive solutions. (Miller et al., 1996, p. 69).

Solution-focused brief therapy is viewed as a total model, including a way of thinking about how to achieve change and accomplish goals, a way of interacting with others, and a way of being involved in the development of solutions and not merely a set of techniques that are utilized throughout the counseling session (Presbury et al., 2002; Walter & Peller, 1992). Berg and Steiner (2003) described solution-focused brief therapy as beginning with an assessment of what the client wants and expects, as well as all possible solutions. The

approach of solution-focused brief therapy is a user friendly concept and was designed to assist clients in getting what they want (Walter & Peller, 1992). Solution-focused brief therapy is different from other techniques that employ an expert position of the therapist (Walter & Peller, 1992). The solution-focused approach is designed with the client as the expert, focusing exclusively on what he or she wants to achieve (Walter & Peller, 1992). Furman and Ahola (1992) emphasized that when clients are continually exposed to the technique of looking for solutions, they will become quite sharp in discovering the alternative solutions for themselves. The process itself continued to be viewed as an intervention enabling clients to move from the problem situation to a solution (Walter & Peller, 2000). “The concept of resolution also reflects the focus of brief therapies on helping clients in achieving a better outcome – a positive resolution – in the future” (Presbury et al., 2002, p. 6).

Walter & Peller (1992) addressed the concept of the solution-focused approach no longer focusing on gathering information. Practitioners of solution-focused techniques are viewed as a participant in the development of the solution and therefore gathering information is not as important as participating in a continuing conversation throughout which solutions develop and evolve (Walter & Peller, 1992). Facilitating rapport with clients is another identified advantage of focusing on positive solutions (Walter & Peller, 1992). Selekman (1993) describes the positive aspect of brief therapy to include focusing on when a change will happen instead of if the change will occur.

Another aspect of solution-focused therapy is that it is not about solutions (Miller et al., 1996). Being solution-focused would imply the need to fix a problem, and therefore the solutions are driven by the problem (Miller et al., 1996). Solution-focused therapy is about

“shifting attention to the life the client would prefer to lead” – a perspective that can be described as one in which “the future determines the past” (Miller et al., 1996, p. 46). The emphasis changed to the preferred life of the client and ultimately places the desire and the belief that a better life is possible, therefore allowing the client to form a central idea from which solutions can flow (Miller et al., 1996).

Solution-focused brief therapy is no longer identified as moving the client from a problem state to a solution state, and as a result we no longer work within the language of intervention (Walter & Peller, 2000). Walter & Peller (2000) described solution-focused brief therapists as facilitators of creative conversations which produce preferences and possibilities which evolve throughout the conversation. Littrell (1998) observes the comfort and reassurance felt by utilizing familiar techniques, however, he also conveys the idea that new frameworks allow for an increased potential in the response to the continuously evolving challenges which clients present. In addition, research indicates that brief counseling techniques allow individuals to reduce their concerns regarding the problem and continue to move closer to their desired outcome (Littrell, Malia, & Vanderwood, 1995).

Techniques

The techniques of brief counseling are not magic. They are not mysterious or secret, and they do not reflect some hidden, special, and spontaneous power within the helper. In other words, a brief counselor does not have a bag of magic tricks.

(Presbury et al., 2002, p. 58)

Being solution-focused and using brief therapy does not mean that the therapist has a specific set of techniques to be applied to every problem (Presbury et al., 2002). Brief therapy is

working with a client to move him or her towards a solution and assist in freeing that individual from their stuck position (Presbury et al., 2002).

Furman and Ahola (1992) discuss the concept of compromise and how when two people are in conflict there is rarely an acceptance of the other individuals' point of view. Additional alternatives create options that perhaps were not previously considered by the individuals involved in the conflict and, in essence, present an idea that is different than the original standpoints of the parties (Furman & Ahola, 1992).

Very few people will have a sudden breakthrough during their therapy process; often an individual must be content with steady progress as opposed to a dramatic and sudden change, and therefore it is important to continue to encourage clients throughout the counseling process because improvement does not occur as systematically as clients often want (Presbury et al., 2002). Research indicates that individuals become easily discouraged and often focus on a regression backwards, leading to the belief that the desired change is impossible (Presbury et al., 2002; Furman & Ahola, 1992).

Strengths and Goal Setting. An important component of change is identifying what an individual would like to change and how to achieve that change. "Essential to the process of setting goals is understanding what small changes can be made toward the objective. As many theorists of the solution-focused model have noted, it is critical to think small to secure immediate success" (Miller et al., 1996, p. 138). Individual goals should be stated with specificity and should be positive in nature. (Miller et al., 1996). Brief counseling is an avenue in which individuals can decrease their discomfort and work toward achieving their goals as quickly as possible (Littrell, 1998).

Utilizing the client's strengths and available resources enables them to engage in conversations promoting change can encourage changes to occur in the client's beliefs and behaviors (Selekman, 1993). "The subject of progress functions as a springboard for the discovery of new solutions." (Furman & Ahola, 1992, p. 116).

Focusing on progress and improvement is more than just a therapeutic technique of identifying factors contributing to a solution. It is a way of encouraging clients' optimism and helping them to adopt a more forward-looking approach to their problems – even life in general. (Furman & Ahola, 1992, p. 120).

To facilitate change in a positive direction, the focus must be on the future and the solution and ultimately, the primary focus should be on solution-oriented conversations rather than on problem-oriented conversations (Walter & Peller, 1992).

The future for the client holds many possibilities (Selekman, 1993). As counselors, we have the potential of becoming co-authors with clients, redefining the future and the changes they wish to occur (Selekman, 1993). It has been stated that individuals who are capable of visualizing a future of success will increase their success as opposed to those individuals who anticipate failure (Selekman, 1993).

Discussing positive visions of the future can be useful in many ways. They give people something to aspire to, they foster optimism, and they help in the setting of goals. With a positive vision of the future we are able to view our past as a resource, to recognize and value progress that is already underway, to see other people as allies rather than adversaries, and to think of our problems as ordeals that can contribute to the struggle to reach our goals. (Furman & Ahola, 1992, p. 106).

Inquiring about a client's goals allows the focus to be on the future and allows the client to think about the success that is possible (Miller, Hubble, & Duncan, 1996).

Viewpoints of Problem Solving. "If it works, don't fix it" (Walter & Peller, 1992, p. 37). If clients already are doing something that is successful for them, don't change it or suggest that they do something more (Walter & Peller, 1992). An efficient way to change something is to analyze what the individual is already doing that works, as well as find a time when things were better and analyze the aspects of what was done to solve the problem so they can be related into the current situation (O'Hanlon, 1999).

To solve a problem, it is also possible to look at the changes being made to solve previous problem and potentially, change what you are doing to solve it (O'Hanlon, 1999). In an effort to solve the problem, the individual must identify how they continue the problem pattern and begin to do something differently. (O'Hanlon, 1999). Walter & Peller (1992) believe that an individual has all that he or she needs to solve a problem.

Our culture is steeped in problem-orientation. We have an idea that when problems happen, they are caused or determined by the past and that things are just the way they are, set in concrete. If you simply do or think something different, however, many things can change. If you change your focus from problems to solutions, things can change even more quickly. (O'Hanlon, 1999, p. 78).

The future is generally connected to the past in some manner; therefore, people with a stressful past are generally those who have a hopeless view of the future (Furman & Ahola, 1992). In turn, those who have a negative view of the future exacerbate current problems (Furman & Ahola, 1992). It is fortunate that the opposite is also true. Having a positive view of the future promotes hope, and having hope assists an individual in coping with the current

problem situation and making the necessary changes to find a solution (Furman & Ahola, 1992).

The positive view of the future allows people to see the current problem as a stepping stone, where making changes puts them on a better path to success (Furman & Ahola, 1992). This perspective enables individuals to view the difficulties they are having as a valuable learning experience (Furman & Ahola, 1992). Problem solving is also viewed as a social process, and therefore those involved have the capability to either jeopardize or encourage change (Furman & Ahola, 1992). Furman & Ahola (1992) believe that many people are involved in the change process and by acknowledging their involvement they can share in the promoting and advocating a positive change. In addition, Walter & Peller (1992) believe that positive support can have an impact on the achievement of goals. Change often elicits feelings of fear or confusion and encouragement can be reassuring to a client (Walter & Peller, 1992).

Scaling. One form of scaling is giving a client the opportunity to rank their experience from 1 to 10; 1 generally being the worst and 10 being the best. Scaling allows the client to see the progress being made and helps them to realize that problem solving is a process that takes time (Presbury et al., 2002). Scaling has been often identified as a useful technique in helping clients. “Redefining a goal from a dichotomy (either/or, success/failure) to a range (1 to 10) allows for the discerning of small changes and the recognition of progress before finally achieving the goal” (Miller et al., 1996, p. 138). The questions utilized throughout the scaling technique are not designed to indicate normal or abnormal, rather it is intended to assess how a client rates the current problem situation (Berg & Steiner, 2003).

The Miracle Question. What would your life look like if you were to wake up tomorrow morning and a miracle had occurred...what would be different? The miracle question gives a client an opportunity to visualize what they would like to change about their life and allows them an avenue to discuss how they can get there.

A significant element of the goal setting process involves the miracle question (Miller et al.,1996). Selekman (1993) indicated that the miracle question was developed to move an individual into the future without problems. The miracle question is especially useful for obtaining goals and a detailed description of what the end result will look like from the client's perspective when the problem is (Selekman, 1993). By employing the miracle question, the counselor is trying to enable the client to see the changes (Presbury et al., 2002). Often, the miracle question elicits reports from the client of behaviors that they are capable of and may already be doing (Selekman, 1993). In addition, the miracle question frequently generates useful goals and changes (Selekman, 1993).

Some individuals may have difficulty verbalizing their miracle and what they would like to change about their life. In this case, drawing can be used to allow the individual to express themselves, as an additional medium through which counseling can be enhanced (Berg & Steiner, 2003; Kahn, 1999).

Relationships and Conversations of Counselors and Administrators

Both counselors and administrators have important leadership roles within a school environment. Therefore, it may be anticipated that the relationship between the counselor and administrator is key to the school becoming a solution-focused environment.

Solution-focused conversations are primarily forward-looking and therefore, explaining and interpreting the problem generally receives little attention; however, some

level of explanation is foreseeable (Furman & Ahola, 1992). Furman & Ahola (1992) believe that explanations can be helpful to the client without being conventional in nature. Using imagination in creating an explanation is often the catalyst for finding a solution.

Another approach to handling situations where there are two supposedly linked problems is that of turning the tables by reversing the cause and effect. Turning supposedly causal relationships upside-down is a way of discovering totally new ways of dealing with problems. (Furman & Ahola, 1992, p. 45)

Solution-focused brief therapy is a technique that can be used to open up the client to potential preferences and possibilities (Walter & Peller, 2000). It is necessary to explore the possibility of significance “when the conversation seems over-focused or confined, when the conversation seems to be going nowhere or in circles” (p. 90).

Walter and Peller (2000) view the intention of creating conversations as the desire to facilitate rapport where one can speak openly and honestly about concerns, desires, and preferences. This concept relates well to counselors and administrators, and the implementation of solution-focused conversations in an educational setting. Communication provides solutions and allows for new ways of thinking and interacting with others (Walter & Peller, 2000). As one would assume, a conversation is when two or more individuals talk with each other. A conversation occurs when individuals feel comfortable enough to share what they are thinking and feeling without fear of judgment by others. Oftentimes, during a positive conversation, individuals are able to be more open which in turn allows for a more positive direction of the conversation (Walter & Peller, 2000).

Paull and McGrevin (1996) discussed the idea of school administrators as conversational leaders and the importance of their role in the school as agents of change for

the entire population. Because of their heightened role in the solution process, conversational skills become of great importance. In addition to their conversational skills, both administrators and counselors must have the ability to foster relationships in order to effectively communicate the need and desire for change.

Interpersonal skills are an important aspect of communication and specifically solution-focused conversations. “When you interact with another person, you have no choice but to make some impact, stimulate some ideas, arouse some impressions and observations, or trigger some feelings and reactions” (Johnson, 2003, p. 5). As a result, it is possible that people may react to your behavior in a different manner than you would like them to react (Johnson, 2003). Johnson (2003) stated that the ability to formulate and the outcome of relationships depend on interpersonal skills as those skills are the connection to other individuals. These interpersonal skills are the key component of acting appropriately in accordance with the norms of a specific situation. In order to increase the quantity and quality of our relationships Johnson (2003) identified that we must first improve our interpersonal skills in that “Interpersonal skills are the sum total of your ability to interact effectively with other people” (p. 7).

There are many components of a successful relationship. Because of the heightened importance of the relationship component in solution-focused conversations, the various components of successful relationships should be addressed to facilitate understanding. As Johnson (2003) has stated, relationships are a journey from beginning to end and the openness of a relationship relates directly to an individual's willingness to participate, including being open about their ideas, thoughts and feelings. Although sharing can at times be difficult, it is allowing others to utilize your resources in an effort to achieve their goals.

“On a professional basis, relationships among collaborators who are working to achieve mutual goals tend to be quite open, while relationships among competitors who are seeking advantages over each other tend to be quite closed” (p. 45).

Good relationships bring us joy and affirmation. To develop a good relationship, trust must be established. On the interpersonal level, trust is the foundation for building and maintaining a caring and productive relationship. It is necessary for effective cooperation. Trust is especially necessary for open communication. When we have a high degree of trust in the other person, we tend to communicate accurate, relevant, and complete information and we tend to be willing to share our thoughts, feelings, and ideas. Trust simplifies our interactions by giving us confidence in other people's words and deeds. (Johnson, 2003, p. 93)

Another aspect of successful relationships is trust. An individual must be able to trust another in order to be effective and efficient in their participation in solution-focused conversations. Trust is a vital component of open communication (Johnson, 2003). Individuals with an increased level of trust are more likely to be accurate, and complete in their discussion of the problem. In addition, individuals who trust will be more open to sharing their thoughts, feelings and ideas (Johnson, 2003).

The client-therapist relationship has been a major focus of the study of the change process (Miller, Hubble, & Duncan, 1996). Research indicates that the client's perception of the client-therapist relationship correlates directly with the level of improvement achieved (Miller et al., 1996). In addition to the client perceptions of the relationship, previous research outlines the growing emphasis on collaborative relationships of school personnel in the school as the educational system evolves. (Murphy, 1994).

Selekman (1993) discussed cooperative working relationships, the benefits of working with others, and fostering those relationships so they will be productive. Therefore, working in collaboration with others can be a beneficial learning experience in which brief therapists are able to generate alternative possibilities for challenging clients (Selekman, 1993). It would appear from the research that there is an increased importance to the relationship between counselors and administrators and the effect that their relationship has on the implementation of solution-focused conversations into their educational setting.

Use of Solution-Focused Conversations in Schools

Murphy and Duncan (1997) believe that the most efficient manner with which to assess change from someone else's perspective is to ask them personally. Progress can be something that is individual, and therefore each individual reports their level of progress differently. Walter & Peller (2000) added that we generally accept the clients' statements of problems as well as their reports of change. This, in essence, is one method to access change. An individual has ultimate control and may only require direction in order to acquire a solution that fits for them.

Peterson and Littrell approached the topic of a delicate balance between counselor and administrator teaming in the school climate. The counselor who was the focus of their ethnographic research credited success in positively changing the school's climate in part to her open relationship with the administrator (Littrell & Peterson, 2005; Peterson & Littrell, 2000). This is another piece of evidence regarding the importance of the underlying relationship between the counselor and the administrator of a school.

Brunham and Jackson (2000) discussed the differences between the idea of brief counseling in a school and the actual utilization of those skills. The model of brief counseling

involves consultation, collaboration and referral for services (Brunham & Jackson, 2000). Counselors and administrator are both extremely busy individuals and have little time to devote to each separate issue that may arise. Therefore, some researchers indicated that it is imperative to focus on solutions to decrease the amount of time necessary to “solve” a problem (Littrell, 1998).

Because change is ultimately the underlying theme for the research conducted for this study as well as the information reviewed for this paper, it is equally important to identify and review similar research to formulate a basis for understanding of the significance of change. Mostert, et al.’s 1997 study, similar in design to the study conducted for this project, showed that the participants believed the trainings to be helpful; however, they also indicated they would prefer more practical application in the workshops, including role playing and modeling (Mostert et al.,1997). Their study initially involved approximately 20 counselors; however, following the completion of the initial workshop, only 5 of the 20 counselors agreed to continued participation in their study. This same study provided information regarding the counselors’ perspective and the time constraint they were facing during the course of their duties and how, with the solution-focused therapy, they were more focused on their professional direction (Mostert et al.,1997). The research reviewed demonstrated that the solution-focused methodology was useful with not only the student involved directly in the study, but also parents and co-workers (Mostert et al.,1997).

Benefits

There are a variety of benefits to solution-focused conversations, including the efficient use of time (Littrell et al.,1995). “School counselors faced with mounting duties and heavy caseloads should find this approach particularly attractive because of its effectiveness

and brevity” (Thompson & Littrell, 1998, p. 66). The ability to transition quickly in order to identify useful resources allows the client to address the issue and find what works and start moving forward (Littrell, 1998).

Another benefit includes clients’ ability to take control and make choices that will have a positive impact on their life and the journey they have begun. Allowing clients to take control of their circumstances empowers them and gives them the opportunity to play a role in the change that is occurring in their lives. Prochaska’s “Stages in the Journey of Change” offer an outline for brief counselors to identify and understand where in the journey they client is and what they need to move on to the next level in order to reach their goals (Prochaska, Norcross, & DiClemente, 1994). These researchers discussed five stages of change: Precontemplation, before an individual recognizes their needs; Contemplation, when an individual recognizes their need for change; Preparation, getting ready to take action; Action, when the individual begins to take action regarding their needs; and Maintenance, when the individual has reached a goal plateau and works to maintain their success in reaching the goal. Moving through the stages of change can be time consuming and requires a commitment by the individual.

Limitations

Although there are many benefits of solution-focused conversations, limitations are also present. Even though solution-focused therapy primarily focuses on change for future benefit, this does not mean that the past should not be dealt with (O’Hanlon, 1999).

O’Hanlon (1999) stated that it is imperative that the client keep the past in perspective throughout the solution-focused process. Keeping perspective does play an important part in the progression toward a solution to the presenting issue. It may be detrimental to the client

to focus on one specific concern too quickly, which may lead to possibly ignoring an equally important issue (Littrell et al., 1995).

Research Focus

This research focuses on the relationship between counselors and administrators and the significance of that relationship in regards to solution-focused conversations. As the intended goal of this seminar series was to implement solution-focused conversations into schools on a broader scale, this research is laying the foundation for further understanding of the significance of the counselor-administrator relationship as well as its effect on successful implementation of solution-focused conversations.

Research Hypothesis

The hypothesis is that the underlying relationship between the counselor and administrator team will play a significant role in the success of the implementation of solution-focused conversation strategies.

Method

Participants

This workshop series was designed for school counselors and administrators located in school districts in central Iowa. The sponsoring agency was the Heartland Area Education Association (Heartland AEA). They provided the seminar series and the accompanying materials free of charge to the participants. Advertisements regarding the seminar series was sent to central Iowa school districts by means of mailings and internet postings.

The solution-focused conversations project began with 30 individual participants from 14 central Iowa schools. Each of the participants voluntarily registered to attend the seminar series. The initial intent of the research was to encourage participation of a counselor and an administrator from each building in order to comprise a “team” in an effort to obtain both perspectives from a school environment and create a stronger working relationship. Many of the teams were, in fact, pairs of counselors and administrators; however, two of the larger schools sent two counselors and one administrator to participate in the seminars. The study began with 15 school counselors and 15 school administrators. The final sample for this study consisted of 24 individuals. This sample consisted of 14 school counselors, including 3 males and 11 females, and 10 administrators comprised of 2 males and 8 females. Additional demographics of the individual participants include the fact that all of the participants were Caucasian and within the ages of 30 to 55 years old.

The schools involved in the study represented participants from public and private schools, from elementary and secondary schools, from rural and urban communities. The actual size of the schools ranged from 210 to 1,000 students. As a result, the population was diverse and represented various perspectives, which enhanced the research.

Workshop Design

This solution-focused conversations project was designed in conjunction with the Heartland Area Education Association (Heartland AEA) in central Iowa, as the sponsoring agency to assist counselor and administrator teams from central Iowa schools in their development of solution-focused conversation skills. The original format included three seminars, to be held at a public library. The dates of the seminars were February 12, 2004, April 8, 2004, and May 4, 2004. Sessions lasted from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Handouts distributed at the first and second workshops are provided in Appendix A.

The seminars were designed to provide an overview of solution-focused conversations and the techniques that would enable counselors and administrators to participate in such conversations. An overview of resources was provided as well as examples of implementation of the skills being taught. The seminar series was designed as a comprehensive overview of the skills necessary to participate in solution-focused conversations. For the purposes of this study, the information taught is identified as the intervention to be examined throughout the results section of this paper.

Feedback and Seminar Alterations

Following the first seminar in the series, the participants completed survey number one (See Appendix C) regarding general feedback about the workshop. Although the overall opinion of the first workshop was positive, participants voiced some concerns. Included in their concerns was uneasiness with role playing. Many of the participants had a desire to learn the skills and techniques, but preferred not to be called on to perform them in front of the group. It was suggested that the three research assistants participate in the role playing exercises.

Many of the participants indicated the stress of committing three full days to the seminar series. As key individuals in their schools, the counselors and administrators were making a significant commitment of time when agreeing to participate for three days during the spring semester.

As a result of the overwhelming time requirement, a change in the schedule was proposed during the course of the second day of the seminar. Dr. Littrell suggested that in lieu of the third full day seminar, each school receive a private consultation at their school in which he would answer questions regarding solution-focused conversations. In addition, he promised to participate in a live example in which he would have a solution-focused conversation with an individual (e.g., student, teacher, parent) selected by the counselor-administrator team.

Research Component

At the beginning of seminar number one, three research assistants were introduced by the representative from Heartland AEA. The research assistants included Meredith Steele, Sarah Majoros and Reese Hendricks. The research aspect of this seminar series was not publicized prior to the beginning of session one; therefore, it was during the beginning of this session that the participants were informed that there would be a research component. The participants were told that they could decline participation in the study if they elected to do so.

Data Collection

The participants were guaranteed anonymity for both their individual responses and their school affiliation in return for their participation in the project. Each of the participants from which any information was obtained completed an informed consent form that allows

the researchers to utilize the information acquired. A copy of the informed consent form is found in Appendix B.

During seminar number one, Dr. Littrell presented the basics of solution-focused conversations, the “miracle question,” interrupting skills and scaling. Each participant was given the book *Brief Counseling in Action* (Littrell, 1998) as a resource and guide for solution-focused conversations.

Following seminar number one, each of the teams was contacted via telephone and/or email correspondence and a 15-minute interview was scheduled. During this interview, each of the participants completed an informed consent form, a brief survey, and four short, open-ended, questions requiring verbal responses. The survey was designed to solicit information regarding knowledge and understanding of the skills and techniques presented during seminar number one. Survey number one is found in Appendix C. There were five questions, including four subsections on each of the first four questions, which employed a 7-point Likert-type scale format (1 = not at all knowledgeable or the equivalent, and 7 = very knowledgeable or the equivalent). Number one referred to the negative while number seven was a positive response. Each question had available space for any comment the participants felt necessary to explain their response. The first survey was distributed and retrieved during the 15-minute interview with the team.

Seminar number two reviewed the materials from seminar number one and Dr. Littrell addressed any questions the participants had following their implementation of their knowledge and skills between the seminar dates. Additionally, seminar number two introduced three patterns: (1) “doing one thing different” in order to break a destructive behavior pattern, (2) reframing, and (3) “you must have a good reason for....” There was also

a discussion regarding how to handle situations when students said “I don’t know,” and what to do when an individual was stuck in this stance.

During the course of the second seminar, it was decided by the leaders of the program that the third day would be better utilized if each individual team received a private consultation in their school setting as discussed in a previous section. The participants agreed to the change in the contents of the course.

The second survey (See Appendix D) was distributed via e-mail to the participants. The survey consisted of seven question and inquiring about the participants’ knowledge, skill, use and comfort level with each identified skill and technique presented during seminar number two. Also included in the survey were two open-ended questions soliciting responses regarding experience and benefits of solution-focused conversations.

Prior to the final consultation at each school, the participants were mailed the final comprehensive survey (See Appendix E), so that they might have time to complete the survey prior to their meeting time.

As previously indicated, the third seminar was cancelled in lieu of individual consultations at each specific school setting. Dr. Littrell and a research assistant scheduled appointments and visited each school. During the course of the final consultation, the participants were encouraged to ask any questions regarding the implementation of solution-focused conversations that they may have had or anticipated having. Additionally, Dr. Littrell demonstrated with an individual (e.g., parent, teacher, student) chosen by the participants of the workshop the skills and techniques he had taught during the course of the seminars. His demonstrations gave participants a first-hand look at the implementation of the skills and techniques into a conversation that was not a role play.

Following the completion of the on-site consultation, the final survey was collected from the participants. However, the final survey was not completed in time to be picked up at each of the schools and therefore, a portion of the surveys were mailed back to the research assistants.

Results

From a qualitative standpoint, there was a plethora of information obtained throughout the course of this solution-focused conversations project. Both survey number one and survey number two gleaned valuable information from the participants regarding their knowledge, use, skill, and comfort level with the many techniques associated with solution-focused conversations. Although this research project was multifaceted, an underlying theme that continually emerged was the relationship between the counselors and the administrators. Comments during the initial interview indicated that the relationship was of great importance because the success of the actual implementation of solution-focused strategies depended on the cooperation between the team members and working toward a common goal. Counselors and administrators were now more aware of how important it is to be on the same page when working toward a goal. Specifically, one counselor and administrator team discussed the importance of working together in terms of communicating affectively with students, parents and other colleagues. Being on the same page enabled the counselor and administrator to be both effective and efficient in their daily duties. In essence, the counselor and administrator teams were focusing on the same goal of working towards the best interest of the children they serve as well as have respect for their individual opinions. Another counselor and administrator team indicated that they felt it was important to continue to develop the relationship between the counselor and the administrator. Fostering the relationship between the counselor and the administrator had made for a more solution-focused work environment in their school.

Section number five on the final survey is dedicated to obtaining information specifically about the relationship between the members of the solution-focused

conversations teams. Numerically, the results of this portion of the survey indicated that the team relationship was important to the implementation of solution-focused conversations; however, the majority of the information utilized in analysis of the issue of the relationship between counselors and administrators was obtained in the interviews, comments, and discussions with participants.

Many of the counselors and administrators expressed opinions regarding the solution-focused conversations, including the example given by Dr. Littrell of water over a stone producing a gradual change. One particular team discussed the benefits of being able to work together and process through situations. According to one counselor, "Having someone to work through an issue with and be supportive of the final decision makes a difference in the work environment" The ability to do this gave the team a more cohesive relationship as well as a more thoroughly designed goal in becoming solution-focused conversationalists.

Section five of the final solution-focused conversations survey specifically addressed the issues of teams and obtained information regarding the significance of the relationship. In the numerical evaluation of two specific questions, the significance of the relationship between counselors and administrators is evident. Question (c) is "I gain support from my Solution-Focused Conversation team members." Question (d) is "My Solution-Focused Conversation team has enabled me to be more productive in dealing with students and the issues they present with." Numerically, the answers translated as follows with 1 = Strongly Disagree and 7 = Strongly Agree. The participating counselors and administrators were asked to rate their agreement or disagreement with the proposed questions. The responses are calculated and evaluated as follows:

Table 1. Evaluation of support and productivity of solution-focused conversations.

Question	Counselors' Mean	Administrators' Mean	Cumulative Mean
Question (c)	5.18	5.17	5.18
Question (d)	5.00	5.33	5.12

As evidenced by the responses given for survey number three, the significance of the relationship between the counselor and administrator appears to be equally important to both the counselor and the administrator involved. This is a beneficial piece of information, not only for the completion of this study, but also for future research in the area of solution-focused conversations in schools. A number of comments throughout the interview and survey process indicated that having a team that is equally involved in the implementation of solution-focused conversations assists in providing effective and efficient solution-focused conversations.

Bringing all of the information obtained together would prove to be a somewhat intensive task due to the significant amount of information received and the course changes throughout the project. From a qualitative standpoint, this was not inhibiting; however, in analyzing the relationship between the counselors and the administrators initially involved in the project, there are some very specific inferences that can be made as a result of the comments made to the researchers.

Specifically, two administrators began participation in the projects with their respective counselors as a team member. Although each dropped out of the project at differing stages, the contents of their opinions were quite similar. Each administrator indicated that the materials being presented did not apply to them and their position and they

were no longer interested in participating in the project. In contrast, the counselor members of these teams expressed their satisfaction with the seminars and the information they were learning throughout the course of the project. One of the counselors stayed to complete the seminar series without the administrator; the other counselor withdrew after the first seminar. During the course of conversation with these counselors, each indicated that their administrator was not interested in the project and in turn was not interested in working as a team. Although not documented in the written information obtained, each counselor made reference to the relationship they had with their administrator. The conclusion drawn is that the relationship between the counselor and administrator was not a solid and strong working relationship in which both worked toward the implementation of solution-focused conversations. Without the support of one another, the implementation of solution-focused conversations in an effort to eventually influence school climate change would prove challenging.

On the contrary, the majority of teams completing the entire program were teams with a strong counselor-administrator team relationship. One team in particular indicated their process of working together toward school change. They, as a team, interacted with students in their individual roles as either counselor or administrator, but the simple fact is that they are both involved in the process, whether discipline or praise. It was evident in the brief interview that the relationship between the counselor and administrator was strong and that they were both working toward the common goal of implementing solution-focused conversations in their school and affecting school change.

Discussion

Summary

The qualitative research completed for this solution-focused conversations project reinforces the belief that a strong working relationship is necessary to productively implement change. “In problem-solving negotiations the goal is to discover an agreement that benefits everyone involved” (Johnson, 2003, p. 261). The same is true for the relationship between the counselor and administrator teams during the implementation process. It will be more beneficial overall if the counselor and administrator are working toward a common goal. School change can be more positively affected when all parties are in agreement as to the change desired.

O’Hanlon (1999) discussed how solution-focused therapy acknowledges the problem and continues various changes until the goal is met. This process works with clients/students as well as the individuals that are utilizing the solution-focused approach. The primary focus is to be on what is working (O’Hanlon, 1999; Walter & Peller, 1992). Counselors and administrators have an opportunity to positively change a school toward being more solution-focused, which would lead one to believe that there would be a decrease in the amount of conflict. Further, and more extensive, research would need to be conducted to evaluate the level of school change achieved as a result of the implementation of solution-focused conversations.

Limitations

Throughout the course of the project, nine participants withdrew for a variety of reasons. One of the participating schools withdrew from the project due to a school crisis that required the full attention of both the counselor and the administrator. Another of the

participating teams withdrew following the first seminar because of the potential loss of their jobs. Two of our administrators declined further participation in the research project as they indicated that they felt the material was not applicable to their particular position. One of the counselors, a member of the team in which the administrator declined further participation, completed the seminar series and one of the counselors discontinued their participation along with the administrator. Each of the teams withdrawing from the project completed varying stages of the research process.

In addition, it was addressed late in the research project that one of the teams questioned their prior knowledge of participation in a research study. This team member indicated that there may have been some coercion in offering a free seminar, yet expecting individuals to participate in all of the components of a research study.

Future Research

The solution-focused conversation project provided insight into the working relationship between counselors and administrators; however, additional steps could be taken to enhance the quality of information obtained from the participants. Prior to participation in the workshops, it would be advisable that the counselors and administrators complete a pre-test in regards to their knowledge, skill, and use of solution-focused conversations and the techniques utilized therein. The pretest would provide a basis from which personal knowledge and growth can be determined as well as allow the researcher further data on the efficacy of the training provided.

It is also recommended that a more effective and efficient method of surveying be implemented. During the course of this study, the surveys were distributed by three different methods: personal deliver, e-mail, and regular mail. The continuous change created some

confusion and is believed to have adversely affected the response rate by some participants. It should be recommended that a survey method that is continuous throughout the course of the study be selected in an effort to increase the return rate. Perhaps a brief period of time could be set aside at each of the seminars for the participants to complete the survey.

In conclusion, this research paper has discussed solution-focused conversations, their history, techniques and applications to educational settings. It has reviewed the literature and previous research regarding solution-focused brief therapy identifying numerous benefits as well as recognizing the limitations. It is believed that the significance of the relationship between counselors and administrators was evidenced throughout the course of this research project; however, relationships are subjective and open to interpretations. Therefore, with the suggestions for future research, a more conclusive study can be developed and implemented.

Appendix A – Workshop Handouts

Teaming Principals and Counselors to Create Solution-focused Schools



Sponsored by **Heartland**
Area Education Agency 11

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WHAT? Solution-focused conversations emphasize people's strengths and resources, *their* goals, and *their* methods to achieve those goals. When key people (e.g., administrators & counselors) within a school begin to engage in more solution-focused conversations—rather than problem-focused ones—these key people begin to create solution-focused schools.

WHO? Teams composed of an administrator and school counselor working together.

WHEN? February 12, 2004; April 8, 2004; & May 4, 2004 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

WHERE? Johnston Public Library, Johnston, Iowa.

WHY? Students, parents, teachers, support staff, administrators, and community leaders, have many more strengths and resources than they realize. When these strengths and resources are tapped through solution-focused conversations, energy, enthusiasm, and a clear sense of direction emerge.

HOW? This workshop offers you an opportunity to work as a team to:

1. Learn new ways to hold solution-focused conversations.
2. Practice solution-focused conversations in a workshop setting.
3. Work as a team in taking the new learning into your schools.
4. Receive feedback about your impact in creating a more solution-focused school.

Three-Part Program

Part 1: The Foundations of Solution-focused Conversations—February 12

- What is solution-focused dialogue/conversation?
- Setting the stage for focusing on solutions
- Modeling of solution-focused strategies
- Connecting the pieces—resiliency, strength-based, solution-focused research
- Learning and practicing as a team

Part 2: Solution-focused Conversations—Learning and Practice—April 8

- Processing Day 1 and follow-up, “How are we doing?”
- Modeling of solution-focused strategies
- Adding new strategies and techniques to our toolbox
- Practicing strategies that work through solution-focused conversations
- Learning and practicing the fine art of “reframing”
- Looking at a framework for solution-focused that fits your school

Part 3: Creating a Solution-focused School—May 4

- Processing Day 2 and follow-up, “Progress over time”
- Tapping the strengths to solve problems and implement new solutions
- Tips in implementing your solution-focused framework
- Consultation and practice using solution-focused conversations
- Refining your toolbox to fit your needs
- The future—your need for follow-up and support

Part 1: The Foundations of Solution-focused Conversations

But before we begin...Activity 1: Giving your Team a “WOW” name.

- Teams need names that are **INSPIRING** as they set forth on their WOW Projects of creating a more solution-focused schools. (For example, Passionate Purple Cow Cohort).
- Working together as a team, brainstorm your new name. (5 minutes)
- Our Team's name is _____

1. Our BIG Goal: *creating solution-focused schools.*

2. Our Method: *DO ONE THING DIFFERENT* and *TAKE SMALL STEPS.*

Question: *What is one small step to begin achieving this BIG GOAL?*

Answer: *Engaging in more Solution-focused Conversations.*

What do problem-focused schools and solution-focused schools look like?

Table 1. A Comparison of Problem-focused Schools Versus Solution-focused Schools

Littrell, J. M., & Peterson, J. S. (in press, June 2004). *Portrait and model of a school counselor*. Houghton Mifflin/Lahaska Press.

Problem-focused Schools	Solution-focused Schools
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adult-driven. • Punishment. • Externally imposed discipline. • Focus on what does not work. • Competitive, noncollaborative. • Unit expected to change: only the individual. • Peer isolation. • Problems are “controlled” by adults using discipline, threats, paddle, and behavior modification. • Children deal with problems by swearing, hitting, and threats. • Children are not empowered to change themselves and to help others change. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student-driven. • Learning new skills. • Self-imposed discipline. • Focus on problem solving and solutions. • Cooperative, collaborative. • Unit expected to change: the individual, the group, and the community. • Peer support. • Problems are resolved by adults using dialogue, positive interactions, cooperation, and a problem-solving model. • Children try to solve problems by the problem-solving model and peer support. • Children are empowered to change themselves and to help others change.

1. What is a solution-focused conversation?

- ◆ *Problem-focused conversation*: a deficit-based, pathology-oriented conversation that dwells on what a person does not have, cannot do, and past failures. The focus tends to be on the past.
 - Short demonstration.
 - What are your thoughts, feelings, and actions when you are involved in problem-focused conversations? Does your energy level go up or down?
- ◆ *Solution-focused conversation*: a strength-based conversation that dwells on what a person does have, can do, and successes. The conversation highlights a person's strengths and resiliencies. The focus is on the present and future.
 - Short demonstration.
 - What are your thoughts, feelings, and actions when you are involved in problem-focused conversations? Does your energy level go up or down?

2. Setting the stage for focusing on solutions.

- ◆ Assumptions of solution-focused conversations.
 - Solution-focused language drives the process. Questions play a powerful role in solution-focused conversations.
 - Questions that explore strengths, not satisfy our curiosity.
 - Open-ended questions (e.g., how).
 - Focusing on the positive, on solutions, and on present and future goals facilitates change in the desired direction.
 - **Miracle Question**: "Suppose you go home tonight and you go to bed, and while you are sound asleep a miracle happens and all of your problems are solved. When you wake up the next day, how will you be able to tell that a miracle really happened?" (Selekman, 1997, p. 58).
 - **Scaling Question**: "On a scale from "0" to "10," with "10" standing for how things are the day after the miracle and "0" standing for how things were at the point you called and arranged for this appointment, where would you say things are right at this moment?" "Based on what you understand of your situation, what would be a reasonable goal to set for yourself?"

- **Into-the-Future Question:** "Imagine that we have moved forward in time to [a specific future time, e.g., three weeks from now]. You have resolved this situation to your satisfaction. Describe to me how you are thinking, feeling and acting now that you have accomplished your goal.
- Students, parents, and teachers have the resources to resolve their concerns, and solutions are achievable when they define their own goals.
 - Assume people have many more resources, both internal and external, than they are aware of.
 - Don't take "I don't know" for an answer.
 - Often we set goals for others, rather than finding out what their goals are and what they want.
 - "What are 5 internal strengths that you have? "What are 5 external strengths that you have? Tell me about them."
- Change is constant. A small change in one part of a system is frequently all that is necessary to effect change in other parts of the system. Complex problems do not necessitate complex solutions.
 - "...no matter how awful and how complex the situation, a small change in one person's behavior can make profound and far-reaching differences in the behavior of all persons involved." (de Shazer, 1985, p. 16)
- If an intervention works, do more of the same. If an intervention does not work, do something different. Solutions to current concerns develop from past successes.
 - "How did you do that?" – repeated as many times as useful.
- Exceptions, i.e., those times when the concerns or problems are not occurring, guide us to potential solutions.
 - "When is this not a problem?"
 - "What happens when the problem is a little less of a problem?"

3. Modeling of solution-focused strategies

- ♦ Videotape: *Brief Counseling: A Skills Approach to Living with Physical Challenge*.
 - Validation: paraphrasing, summarizing, reflections of feelings.
 - Open-ended questions.
 - Questions focused on her strengths.
 - Mirroring of her non-verbal hand movements.

- ♦ Demonstration of solution-focused conversation with a real situation in which the person is very problem-focused.
 - Volunteer needed. I select people who avoid eye contact with me.
 - First, I will demonstrate problem-focused conversation before moving to a solution-focused conversation.

4. Connecting the places—resiliency, strength-based, solution-focused research

Search Institute's 40 Developmental Assets

The Search Institute has identified the following building blocks of healthy development that help young people grow up healthy, caring, and responsible.

External Assets

Support

1. **Family Support**—Family life provides high levels of love and support.
2. **Positive Family Communication**—Young person and her or his parent(s) communicate positively, and young person is willing to seek advice and counsel from parents.
3. **Other Adult Relationships**—Young person receives support from three or more nonparent adults.
4. **Caring Neighborhood**—Young person experiences caring neighbors.
5. **Caring School Climate**—School provides a caring, encouraging environment.
6. **Parent Involvement in Schooling**—Parent(s) are actively involved in helping young person succeed in school.

Empowerment

7. **Community Values Youth**—Young person perceives that adults in the community value youth.
8. **Youth as Resources**—Young people are given useful roles in the community.
9. **Service to Others**—Young person serves in the community one hour or more per week.
10. **Safety**—Young person feels safe at home, school, and in the neighborhood.

Boundaries and Expectations

11. **Family Boundaries**—Family has clear rules and consequences and monitors the young person's whereabouts.
12. **School Boundaries**—School provides clear rules and consequences.
13. **Neighborhood Boundaries**—Neighbors take responsibility for monitoring young people's behavior.
14. **Adult Role Models**—Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behavior.
15. **Positive Peer Influence**—Young person's best friends model responsible behavior.
16. **High Expectations**—Both parent(s) and teachers encourage the young person to do well.

Constructive Use of Time

17. **Creative Activities**—Young person spends three or more hours per week in lessons or practice in music, theater, or other arts.
18. **Youth Programs**—Young person spends three or more hours per week in sports, clubs, or organizations at school and/or in the community.
19. **Religious Community**—Young person spends one or more hours per week in activities in a religious institution.
20. **Time at Home**—Young person is out with friends "with nothing special to do" two or fewer nights per week.

Internal Assets

Commitment to Learning

21. **Achievement Motivation**—Young person is motivated to do well in school.
22. **School Engagement**—Young person is actively engaged in learning.
23. **Homework**—Young person reports doing at least one hour of homework every school day.
24. **Bonding to School**—Young person cares about her or his school.
25. **Reading for Pleasure**—Young person reads for pleasure three or more hours per week.

Positive Values

26. **Caring**—Young person places high value on helping other people.
27. **Equality and Social Justice**—Young person places high value on promoting equality and reducing hunger and poverty.
28. **Integrity**—Young person acts on convictions and stands up for her or his beliefs.
29. **Honesty**—Young person "tells the truth even when it is not easy."
30. **Responsibility**—Young person accepts and takes personal responsibility.
31. **Restraint**—Young person believes it is important not to be sexually active or to use alcohol or other drugs.

Social Competencies

32. **Planning and Decision Making**—Young person knows how to plan ahead and make choices.
33. **Interpersonal Competence**—Young person has empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills.
34. **Cultural Competence**—Young person has knowledge of and comfort with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds.
35. **Resistance Skills**—Young person can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations.
36. **Peaceful Conflict Resolution**—Young person seeks to resolve conflict nonviolently.

Positive Identity

37. **Personal Power**—Young person feels he or she has control over "things that happen to me."
38. **Self-Esteem**—Young person reports having a high self-esteem.
39. **Sense of Purpose**—Young person reports that "my life has a purpose."
40. **Positive View of Personal Future**—Young person is optimistic about her or his personal future.

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What is Resiliency?

Resiliency is the ability to spring back from and successfully adapt to adversity. An increasing body of research from the fields of psychology, psychiatry, and sociology is showing that most people—including young people—can bounce back from risks, stress, crises, and trauma and experience life success.

Our favorite definition of resiliency, in fact, was given by a 15-year-old high school student who, after a semester of resiliency training, described resiliency as:

“Bouncing back from problems and stuff with more power and more smarts.”

Researchers are concluding that each person has an innate capacity for resiliency, “a self-righting tendency” that operates best when people have resiliency-building conditions in their lives.

You Can Best Help Yourself or Someone Else Be More Resilient by...

1. **Communicating the Resiliency Attitude:** “What is right with you is more powerful than anything that is wrong with you.”
2. **Focusing on the person’s strengths** more than problems and weaknesses, and asking “How can these strengths be used to overcome problems?”
3. **Having patience...**successfully bouncing back from a significant trauma or crisis takes time.

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(Copies can be made for educational purposes only)

5. Learning and practicing as a team.

- ◆ Each member of the team is to generate 3 recent challenging conversations that he/she has had because the other person slipped into a problem-focus and stayed there—sometimes tenaciously.
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
- ◆ Taking turns, each team member is to role play their Problem-focused Person for the other team member. The Solution-focused Helper is to assist the Problem-focused Person by first validating their problem and then moving the conversation in a solution-focused way.

- ◆ Reverse roles.
- ◆ Process of the challenges, opportunities that arose in the role plays.
- ◆ Choose a new partner not on your team. Taking turns, each team member is to role play a Problem-focused Person for the other team member. The Solution-focused Helper is to assist the Problem-focused Person by first validating their problem and then moving the conversation in a solution-focused way.
- ◆ Reverse roles.
- ◆ Process of the challenges, opportunities that arose in the role plays.

6. Going forth to practice in your school.

- ◆ From now until we meet again on April 8th, practice each day having solution-focused conversations with the people you encounter in your job. These conversations can be with students, parents, teachers, administrators, staff, etc. Record in a small notebook your observations about the conversation:
 - What you said in your solution-focused intervention and how it worked.
 - The impact on the person you talked with.
 - Difficulties you experienced in keeping the conversation solution-focused.
- ◆ Hold a weekly team meeting—complete with coffee and cookies—to discuss your recent interviews. These can be as short as 10-15 minutes but meet weekly. Model your team meetings using a solution-focused conversation. Validate each other. Share your successes. Turn those “problem” encounters into opportunities to learn new things.
- ◆ The research team of Meredith Steele and Sarah Majoros will be setting up an appointment with your team for a short interview. Impress them with how diligent you have been as individuals and as a team in practicing. We will be seeking your permission to interview you by having you sign Informed Consent Forms. Hopefully, you will sign.
- ◆ Read the following chapters in your copy of *Brief Counseling in Action*.
 - Chapter 4—Trusting Clients' Expertise
 - Chapter 6—Accentuating Resources
 - Chapter 7—Co-authoring the Future
 - Chapter 8—Encouraging Action
 - Chapter 9—Acknowledging Fun
- ◆ We wish you a wonderful time practicing solution-focused conversations.

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Teaming Principals and Counselors to Create Solution-focused Schools



Sponsored by **Heartland**
Area Education Agency 11

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Day 1: The Foundations of Solution-focused Conversations—February 12

- What is solution-focused dialogue/conversation?
- Setting the stage for focusing on solutions
- Modeling of solution-focused strategies
- Connecting the pieces—resiliency, strength-based, solution-focused research
- Learning and practicing as a team

Day 2: Solution-focused Conversations—Learning and Practice—April 8

- Talking about Day 1 and follow-up, "How are we doing?"
- Demonstrations of solution-focused strategies in problematic and challenging situation
- Discussion of the chapters in *Brief Counseling in Action*
- Adding three new strategies and techniques to your toolbox
- Practicing strategies that work through solution-focused conversations
- Going forth to practice in your school.

Day 3: Creating a Solution-focused School—May 4

- Processing Day 2 and follow-up, "Progress over time"
- Tapping the strengths to solve problems and implement new solutions
- Tips in implementing your solution-focused framework
- Consultation and practice using solution-focused conversations
- Refining your toolbox to fit your needs
- The future—your need for follow-up and support

Day 2: Solution-focused Conversations—Learning and Practice

1. Talking about Day 1 and follow-up, “How are we doing?”

- ◆ “What is better, even a little bit?” or “What is different?” (Berg & Steiner, p. 197)

- ☒ Miracle Questions
- ☒ Scaling Questions
- ☒ Into-the-Future Questions
- ☒ Alternatives responses to “I don’t know”
- ☒ Goal Setting
- ☒ Searching for Internal and External Strengths
- ☒ Exploring and Amplifying Exceptions

- ◆ What are examples of difficulties you encountered during solution-focused conversations? When do you get frustrated or discouraged and/or say to yourself, “This doesn’t work like John said it would.”

- ☒ Miracle Questions
- ☒ Scaling Questions
- ☒ Into-the-Future Questions
- ☒ Alternatives responses to “I don’t know”
- ☒ Goal Setting
- ☒ Searching for Internal and External Strengths
- ☒ Exploring and Amplifying Exceptions

2. Demonstrations of solution-focused strategies in problematic and challenging situation

- ☐ Miracle Questions
- ☐ Scaling Questions
- ☐ Into-the-Future Questions
- ☐ Alternatives responses to "I don't know"
- ☐ Goal Setting
- ☐ Searching for Internal and External Strengths
- ☐ Exploring and Amplifying Exceptions

3. Discussion of the chapters in *Brief Counseling in Action*

- ◆ Chapter 4—Trusting Clients' Expertise
- ◆ Chapter 6—Accentuating Resources
- ◆ Chapter 7—Co-authoring the Future
- ◆ Chapter 8—Encouraging Action
- ◆ Chapter 9—Acknowledging Fun

4. Adding three new strategies and techniques to your toolbox

- ◆ "Do one thing different" (Oprah videotape)
- ◆ Reframing—the fine art of seeing the world differently
- ◆ "You must have a good reason for..." (Berg & Steiner, 2003, p. 204)

5. Practicing strategies that work through solution-focused conversations

- ◆ Think about a recent challenging conversation that you have had because the other person slipped into a problem-focus and stayed there—sometimes tenaciously.
- ◆ Taking turns, one person becomes a **Problem-focused Person** for another person in this room. The **Solution-focused Helper** is to assist the **Problem-focused Person** by first validating his/her problem and then moving the conversation in a solution-focused way.
- ◆ Talk about the challenges and opportunities that the **Solution-focused Helper** faced.
- ◆ Reverse roles and repeat the exercise.
- ◆ Again, talk about the challenges and opportunities that the **Solution-focused Helper** faced.

6. Going forth to practice in your school.

- ◆ From now until we meet again on May 4th, practice having solution-focused conversations with the people you encounter in your job. These conversations can be with students, parents, teachers, administrators, staff, etc. Record in a small notebook (or on the 3x5 cards) your observations about the conversation:
 - What you said in your solution-focused intervention and how it worked.
 - The impact on the person you talked with.
 - Difficulties you experienced in keeping the conversation solution-focused.
- ◆ Hold team meetings—complete with coffee and cookies—to discuss your recent interviews. These can be as short as 10-15 minutes but meet at least once weekly. Model your team meetings using a solution-focused conversation. Validate each other. Share your successes. Turn those “problem” encounters into opportunities to learn new things.
- ◆ The research team of Meredith Steele and Sarah Majoros will be setting up an appointment with your team for a short interview. Impress them with how diligent you have been as individuals and as a team in practicing. We will be seeking your permission to interview you by having you sign *Informed Consent Forms*. Hopefully, you will sign.
- ◆ Read the following chapters in your copy of *Brief Counseling in Action*.
 - Chapter 10—Scaling Problems to Size
 - Chapter 13—Learning to Interrupt
 - Chapter 16—Case 1: Lights! Camera! Action!
 - Chapter 17—Case 2: More Poohish
- ◆ We wish you a wonderful time practicing solution-focused conversations.
- ◆ Return on May 4 with wonderful stories about how you engaged in solution-focused conversations to help people have more choices than before.

References

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- De Jong, P., & Berg, I. K. (2003). *Interviewing for solutions* (2nd ed.). Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.
- Dilts, R. (1999). *Slight of mouth: The magic of conversational belief change*. Capitola, CA: Meta Publications.
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Appendix B – Informed Consent Document

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Title of Study: Solution-Focused Conversations: Workshop Evaluation and Skill Implementation in Schools
Investigators: John M. Littrell, Ed.D.
Sarah R. Majoros, A.S., B.A.
Meredith E. Steele, B.S.

This is a research study. Please take your time in deciding if you would like to participate. Please feel free to ask questions at any time.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to discover the impact Solution-Focused Conversations have on a school when learned about and utilized by teams of administrators and counselors. The study will explore the team relationship and the use of skills taught in a three-part workshop conducted by Dr. John M. Littrell. You are being invited to participate in this study because of your decision to participate in the workshop.

DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate in this study, your participation will last for three months and will involve three visits from one or both of the research assistants, Sarah Majoros and Meredith Steele. The first two visits will last for no longer than one half-hour and will involve a short interview and completion of a brief survey regarding the skills taught in the most recent workshop. The third visit will involve an interview lasting no more than one half-hour and leave a more lengthy survey with participants to be completed and mailed back to the researcher assistants. You will also be asked for your willingness to be contacted for a follow-up interview and/or survey in the fall of 2004.

We may request to do an audio recording of the interviews, of which you may decline if it makes you feel uncomfortable. You may also skip any question on the written surveys that you do not wish to answer or that makes you feel uncomfortable.

RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks at this time from participating in the study.

BENEFITS

If you decide to participate in this study there may be no direct benefit to you, other than the opportunity to learn and practice new skills and have the time to reflect on the impact those skills have on your school environment.

COSTS AND COMPENSATION

You will not have any costs from participating in this study, nor will you be compensated for participating in this study.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. If you decide to not participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Any interview data you provide will be kept confidential. Edited and completely disguised transcripts of the interviews may be used in professional research presentations and publications. Any such transcripts will be edited so as to insure your complete anonymity. Audiotapes of all sessions will be erased by May 15, 2005. The members of the research team will be the only people with access to the data. All are bound to follow the ethical standards of the American Counseling Association when conducting research.

QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study. For further information about the study contact Dr. John M. Littrell, principal investigator and major professor for both research assistants, at 515-294-5746. If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the Human Subjects Research Office, 2810 Beardshear Hall, (515) 294-4566; austingr@iastate.edu or the Research Compliance Officer, Office of Research Compliance, 2810 Beardshear Hall, (515) 294-3115; dament@iastate.edu

SUBJECT SIGNATURE

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Subject's Name (printed) _____

(Subject's Signature)

(Date)

INVESTIGATOR STATEMENT

I certify that the participant has been given adequate time to read and learn about the study and all of their questions have been answered. It is my opinion that the participant understands the purpose, risks, benefits and the procedures that will be followed in this study and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

(Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent)

(Date)

Appendix C – Survey No. 1

Solution-Focused Conversations Seminar 1 – Survey

The following questions are designed to ascertain your level of understanding and use of Solution Focused Conversations following the completion of the first seminar in the series.

1. **The “miracle question.”**

a. Your **KNOWLEDGE** of the “miracle question.”

Not at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very knowledgeable
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Comments:

b. Your **SKILL** in using the “miracle question.”

Not at all skilled	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very skilled
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Comments:

c. Your **USE** of the “miracle question.”

Never use	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Use extensively
-----------	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	-----------------

Comments:

d. Your **COMFORT LEVEL** with the “miracle question.”

Not at all comfortable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very comfortable
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Comments:

2. **Interrupting skills.**

a. Your **KNOWLEDGE** of interrupting skills.

Not at all knowledgeable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very knowledgeable
--------------------------	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	--------------------

Comments:

b. Your **SKILL** in using interrupting.

Not at all skilled	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very skilled
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Comments:

c. Your **USE** of interrupting skills.

Never use	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Use extensively
-----------	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	--------------------

Comments:

d. Your **COMFORT LEVEL** with interrupting skills.

Not at all comfortable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very comfortable
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Comments:

3. **Scaling questions.**

a. Your **KNOWLEDGE** of scaling questions.

Not at all knowledgeable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very knowledgeable
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Comments:

b. Your **SKILL** in using scaling questions.

Not at all skilled	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very skilled
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Comments:

c. Your **USE** of scaling questions.

Never use	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Use extensively
-----------	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	--------------------

Comments:

d. Your **COMFORT LEVEL** with scaling questions.

Not at all comfortable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very comfortable
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Comments:

4. **Solution-Focused Conversations.**

a. Your **KNOWLEDGE** of Solution-Focused Conversations.

Not at all knowledgeable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very knowledgeable
-----------------------------	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	-----------------------

Comments:

b. Your **SKILL** in using Solution-Focused Conversations.

Not at all skilled	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very skilled
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Comments:

c. Your **USE** of Solution-Focused Conversations.

Never use	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Use extensively
-----------	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	--------------------

Comments:

d. Your **COMFORT LEVEL** with Solution-Focused Conversations.

Not at all comfortable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very comfortable
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Comments:

5. How **EFFECTIVE** are Solution-Focused Conversations.

Not effective	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Highly effective
------------------	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---------------------

Comments:

6. Your **UNDERSTANDING** of the use of Solution-Focused Conversations.

Not clear at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very clear
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Comments:

Appendix D – Survey No. 2

Solution-Focused Conversations

Seminar 2 – Survey

The following questions are designed to ascertain your level of understanding and use of Solution Focused Conversations following the completion of the second seminar in the series.

NOTE: To select the checkboxes below, double click on the box you would like to check, change the default value to “checked” and click on OK. Thank you.

1. “Reframing.”

a. Your **KNOWLEDGE** of “reframing.”

Not at all knowledgeable 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very knowledgeable

b. Your **SKILL** in using “reframing.”

[illegible]

c. Your **USE** of “reframing.”

[illegible]

d. Your **COMFORT LEVEL** with “reframing.”

Not at all comfortable 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very comfortable

Comments about “reframing”: (text box will expand as you type in it)

2. “Do One Thing Different.”

a. Your **KNOWLEDGE** of “doing one thing different.”

Not at all knowledgeable 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very knowledgeable

b. Your **SKILL** in using “doing one thing different.”

Not at all skilled 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very skilled

c. Your **USE** of “doing one thing different.”

[illegible]

d. Your **COMFORT LEVEL** with “doing one thing different.”

Not at all comfortable 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very comfortable

Comments about “doing one thing different”:

3. **“You must have a good reason for...”**

a. Your **KNOWLEDGE** of “you must have a good reason for...”

Not at all knowledgeable 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very knowledgeable

b. Your **SKILL** in using “you must have a good reason for...”

Not at all skilled 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very skilled

c. Your **USE** of “you must have a good reason for...”

Never use 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Use extensively

d. Your **COMFORT LEVEL** with “you must have a good reason for...”

Not at all comfortable 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very comfortable

Comments about “you must have a good reason for...”:

7. Combating the “I don’t know.”

a. Your **KNOWLEDGE** of combating the “I don’t know.”

Not at all knowledgeable 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very knowledgeable

b. Your **SKILL** in combating the "I don't know."

Not at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very
skilled	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	skilled

c. Your **COMFORT LEVEL** with combating the "I don't know."

Not at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very
comfortable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	comfortable

Comments about combating the "I don't know.":

4. **Solution-Focused Conversations.**

a. Your **KNOWLEDGE** of Solution-Focused Conversations.

Not at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very
knowledgeable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	knowledgeable

b. Your **SKILL** in using Solution-Focused Conversations.

Not at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very
skilled	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	skilled

c. Your **USE** of Solution-Focused Conversations.

Never use	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Use
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	extensively

d. Your **COMFORT LEVEL** with Solution-Focused Conversations.

Not at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very
comfortable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	comfortable

Comments about Solution-Focused Conversations:

5. **How EFFECTIVE** are Solution-Focused Conversations.

Not	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Highly
effective	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	effective

Comments:

6. Your **UNDERSTANDING** of the use of Solution-Focused Conversations.

Not clear at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very clear
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Comments:

8. What has been your experience in reaching students utilizing different modalities (i.e., drawing, physical change, movement, etc.)?

9. What are the benefits you have experienced with further use of Solution-Focused Conversations?

Appendix E – Survey No. 3 (Final Survey)

Solution-Focused Conversations Final Survey

*Part I: Your Thoughts About
Solution-Focused Conversations*

- a. Solution-Focused Conversations in schools is more effective than other types of communication.

Strongly <u>Disagree</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
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- b. Solution-Focused Conversations is not an improvement over other communication styles.

Strongly <u>Disagree</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
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- c. Other communication approaches are more suited to schools than Solution-Focused Conversations.

Strongly <u>Disagree</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
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- d. I believe that Solution-Focused Conversations are better than other approaches to communication that I have tried.

Strongly <u>Disagree</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
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- e. Other communication approaches are quite compatible with Solution-Focused Conversations.

Strongly <u>Disagree</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
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- f. I can easily shift gears from another approach to Solution-Focused Conversations and vice versa.

Strongly <u>Disagree</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
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- g. Solution-Focused Conversations are one of several useful tools in the counselors and administrators repertoire.

Strongly <u>Disagree</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
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- h. Solution-Focused Conversations are relatively difficult in practice.

Strongly <u>Disagree</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
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- i. While Solution-Focused Conversations look fairly easy, its practice is not.

Strongly <u>Disagree</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
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- j. Proficiency in Solution-Focused Conversations takes a lot of practice.

Strongly <u>Disagree</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
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- k. Solution-Focused Conversations do not take long to learn.

Strongly <u>Disagree</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
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- l. Solution-Focused Conversations are really relatively easy.

Strongly <u>Disagree</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
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- m. It takes too long to learn Solution-Focused Conversations.

Strongly <u>Disagree</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
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- n. Learning how to do Solution-Focused Conversations can be done in small trials.

Strongly <u>Disagree</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
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- o. I have tried doing some parts of Solution-Focused Conversations as a way to learn about it.

Strongly <u>Disagree</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
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- p. Practicing Solution-Focused Conversations on a small scale has helped me learn more about it.

Strongly <u>Disagree</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
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- q. I have had the opportunity to see Solution-Focused Conversations demonstrated.

Strongly <u>Disagree</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
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- r. In the last 6 months I have talked with another counselor or administrator about Solution-Focused Conversations.

Strongly <u>Disagree</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
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<p><i>Part II: Opinions About Solution-Focused Conversations.</i></p>

- a. I avoid reading about Solution-Focused Conversations.

Strongly <u>Disagree</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
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- b. I avoid Solution-Focused Conversations workshops.

Strongly <u>Disagree</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
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- c. Solution-Focused Conversations are just a fancy packaging of other types of communication.

Strongly <u>Disagree</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
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- d. Knowing about Solution-Focused Conversations will not really help the students that I work with.

Strongly <u>Disagree</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
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- e. Solution-Focused Conversations practitioners are the kind who jump on the latest bandwagon.

Strongly <u>Disagree</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
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- f. If I were asked, "Who are Solution-Focused Conversations good for?" I would answer, "Nobody."

Strongly <u>Disagree</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
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- g. I cannot think of many good reasons to learn about Solution-Focused Conversations.

Strongly <u>Disagree</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
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- h. I sometimes think about using Solution-Focused Conversations, but I have not yet tried it.

Strongly	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly
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Disagree

Agree

- i. I am waiting for the right time to being practicing Solution-Focused Conversations.

Strongly <u>Disagree</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
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- j. I wish I could use Solution-Focused Conversations without having to learn more about it.

Strongly <u>Disagree</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
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- k. I worry that I could mess up students' lives if I were to use Solution-Focused Conversations.

Strongly <u>Disagree</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
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- l. I get upset with myself when I think about not learning more about Solution-Focused Conversations.

Strongly <u>Disagree</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
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- m. Lately, my confidence to use Solution-Focused Conversations has been increasing.

Strongly <u>Disagree</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
-----------------------------	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	-------------------

- n. I actively seek out opportunities to learn more about Solution-Focused Conversations.

Strongly <u>Disagree</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
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- o. At a conference, I would sign up for a Solution-Focused Conversations workshop or speaker.

Strongly <u>Disagree</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
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- p. I believe that Solution-Focused Conversations will help me to more effectively help students.

Strongly <u>Disagree</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
-----------------------------	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	-------------------

- q. I believe that Solution-Focused Conversations will help me to more effectively communicate with administrators, counselors, teachers and staff.

Strongly <u>Disagree</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
-----------------------------	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	-------------------

- r. I have set a specific goal to learn more about Solution-Focused Conversations.

Strongly <u>Disagree</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
-----------------------------	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	-------------------

- s. For me, learning about Solution-Focused Conversations is a priority.

Strongly <u>Disagree</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
-----------------------------	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	-------------------

- t. I have told others I am interested in learning more about Solution-Focused Conversations.

Strongly <u>Disagree</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
-----------------------------	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	-------------------

- u. I would be happier if I learned more about Solution-Focused Conversations.

Strongly <u>Disagree</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
-----------------------------	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	-------------------

- v. If the situation is appropriate, I practice Solution-Focused Conversations.

Strongly <u>Disagree</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
-----------------------------	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	-------------------

- w. I remind myself to practice Solution-Focused Conversations.

Strongly <u>Disagree</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
-----------------------------	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	-------------------

- x. While maintaining strict confidentiality, I share my experience in practicing Solution-Focused Conversations with appropriate others.

Strongly <u>Disagree</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
-----------------------------	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	-------------------

- y. I informally evaluate how my practice of Solution-Focused Conversations is going.

Strongly <u>Disagree</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
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- z. Using Solution-Focused Conversations is now second nature to me.

Strongly <u>Disagree</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
-----------------------------	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	-------------------

- aa. I consistently use Solution-Focused Conversations when it is appropriate.

Strongly	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly
----------	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----------

Disagree

Agree

- bb. People in my school would identify me as the resident expert in Solution-Focused Conversations.

Strongly
Disagree

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

Strongly
Agree

- cc. The types of problems my students face are not appropriate for Solution-Focused Conversations.

Strongly
Disagree

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

Strongly
Agree

*Part III: Stage in Practicing
Solution-Focused Conversations*

Given your current involvement or lack of involvement with Solution-Focused Conversations, which one of the following are you most likely to do? (Check only ONE.)

- ☐ I would have to do some more thinking about Solution-Focused Conversations prior to getting ready to try it.
- ☐ I am looking for opportunities to use Solution-Focused Conversations on a small scale to see if I like it.
- ☐ I tend to ignore the topic of Solution-Focused Conversations completely.
- ☐ I have fully integrated Solution-Focused Conversations into my practice of helping others.
- ☐ I continually incorporate Solution-Focused Conversations into my practice of communication when appropriate.

Which of the following statements best describes your current relationship to the topic of Solution-Focused Conversations. (Check only ONE.)

- ☐ I have been actively practicing Solution-Focused Conversations less than six (6) months.
- ☐ For six (6) months or more I have been actively practicing Solution-Focused Conversations.
- ☐ I am seriously preparing to practice some Solution-Focused Conversations.
- ☐ I have been doing some thinking about Solution-Focused Conversations.
- ☐ I avoid thinking much about Solution-Focused Conversations.

Which of the following statements best describes your current goal related to Solution-Focused Conversations. (Check only ONE.)

- ☐ I really do not want to learn about Solution-Focused Conversations.

- ☐ I ignore opportunities to learn about Solution-Focused Conversations.
- ☐ If I were asked when I will learn more about Solution-Focused Conversations, my causal answer might be “maybe someday.”
- ☐ I think about Solution-Focused Conversations occasionally, but I am not ready to try yet.
- ☐ You could say I think about Solution-Focused Conversations, but that is about it.
- ☐ I am currently looking for a chance to try Solution-Focused Conversations within the next month.
- ☐ Within the next month, I will find an opportunity to try Solution-Focused Conversations.
- ☐ In less than half a year I will practice some Solution-Focused Conversation techniques.
- ☐ I am definitely intending to use Solution-Focused Conversations within the next six (6) months.

<p><i>Part IV: Solution-Focused Conversations and You</i></p>

1. Your **KNOWLEDGE** of Solution-Focused Conversations.

Not at all knowledgeable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very knowledgeable
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2. Your **SKILL** in using Solution-Focused Conversations.

Not at all skilled	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very skilled
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3. Your **USE** of Solution-Focused Conversations.

Never use	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Use extensively
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4. Your **USE** of “interrupting skills” in Solution-Focused Conversations.

Never use	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Use extensively
-----------	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	--------------------

5. Your **USE** of the “miracle question” in Solution-Focused Conversations.

Never use	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Use Extensively
-----------	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	--------------------

6. How **EFFECTIVE** are Solution-Focused Conversations.

Not	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Highly
-----	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	--------

effective

effective

7. Your **UNDERSTANDING** of the use of Solution-Focused Conversations.

Not clear at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very clear

<i>Part V: Solution-Focused Conversations Teams</i>

- a. I have enjoyed working with my Solution-Focused Conversations team.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

- b. My team meets regularly to discuss our use of Solution-Focused Conversations.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

- c. I gain support from my Solution-Focused Conversations team members.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

- d. My Solution-Focused Conversations team has enabled me to be more productive in dealing with students and the issues they present with.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

- e. My Solution-Focused Conversations team regularly utilizes Solution-Focused Conversations.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

- f. Utilizing Solution-Focused Conversations has improved our school environment.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

- g. Utilizing Solution-Focused Conversations has improved our resolution of conflict in our school.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

- h. All of my team members have actively participated in Solution-Focused Conversations.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

- i. All of my team members use Solution-Focused Conversations when an appropriate situation arises.

Strongly <u>Disagree</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
-----------------------------	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	-------------------

- j. The use of Solution-Focused Conversations has enabled me to deal more effectively with students.

Strongly <u>Disagree</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
-----------------------------	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	-------------------

- k. The use of Solution-Focused Conversations has enabled me to deal more effectively with parents.

Strongly <u>Disagree</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
-----------------------------	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	-------------------

- l. The use of Solution-Focused Conversations has enabled me to deal more effectively with administrators.

Strongly <u>Disagree</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
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- m. The use of Solution-Focused Conversations has enabled me to deal more effectively with counselors.

Strongly <u>Disagree</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
-----------------------------	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	-------------------

- n. The use of Solution-Focused Conversations has enabled me to deal more effectively with teachers.

Strongly <u>Disagree</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
-----------------------------	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	-------------------

- o. The use of Solution-Focused Conversations has enabled me to deal more effectively with other staff members.

Strongly <u>Disagree</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
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<p><i>Part VI: Growth and Involvement as a Professional</i></p>

In the last two (2) years, I have been a member of the following **state** organizations. Check all that apply.

- ☐ Iowa School Counselor Association (ISCA)
- ☐ School Administrators of Iowa (SAI)
- ☐ Other: _____ (specify)
- ☐ Other: _____ (specify)

In the last two (2) years, I have attended one or more of the following **state** conferences. Check all that apply.

- ☐ Iowa School Counselor Association Conference
- ☐ Iowa School Counselor and Administrators Conference
- ☐ School Administrators of Iowa Conference
- ☐ Other: _____ (specify)
- ☐ Other: _____ (specify)

In the last two (2) years, I have been a member of the following **national** organizations. Check all that apply.

- ☐ American Counseling Association (ACA)
- ☐ American School Counselor Association (ASCA)
- ☐ American Association of School Administrators (AASA)
- ☐ Other: _____ (specify)
- ☐ Other: _____ (specify)

In the last two (2) years, I have attended one or more of the following **national** conferences. Check all that apply.

- ☐ American Counseling Association Conference (ACA)
- ☐ American School Counselor Association Conference (ASCA)
- ☐ American Association of School Administrators Conference (AASA)
- ☐ Other: _____ (specify)
- ☐ Other: _____ (specify)

In the last two (2) years, I have lobbied one or more legislators on educational issues.

☐ Yes.

☐ No.

I regularly attend Area Educational Agency (AEA) gatherings for counselors and/or administrators.

☐ Yes.

☐ No.

I have a close colleague who practices Solution-Focused Conversations.

☐ Yes.

☐ No.

There is another individual in my school district who I am impressed with you regularly utilizes Solution-Focused Conversations.

☐ Yes.

☐ No.

A respected individual in my school district advocates for the use of Solution-Focused Conversations in schools.

☐ Yes.

☐ No.

I personally know an expert in Solution-Focused Conversations.

☐ Yes.

☐ No.

I have participated in a Solution-Focused Conversations class or workshop.

☐ Yes.

☐ No.

I have read one or more books about Solution-Focused Conversations.

☐ Yes.

☐ No.

I have watched a live demonstration of Solution-Focused Conversations.

☐ Yes.

☐ No.

I have viewed at least one videotape of Solution-Focused Conversations being demonstrated.

☐ Yes.

☐ No.

Part VII: Demographic Information

Profession (check one) Counselor _____ Administrator _____

What is your gender? Female _____ Male _____

What is your age? _____

To which ethnic group do you belong? (circle one)

1. White or European
2. African American
3. Hispanic of Latino
4. Asian American
5. Native American
6. Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
7. Other (specify) _____

Where is the primary location of your school setting? (circle one)

1. Rural
2. Urban
3. Suburb

What is your highest level of education completed? (circle one)

1. Bachelors
2. Masters
3. Doctorate

In what year did you receive your degree for counseling or administration? _____

From what educational institution did you receive your degree? _____

In which school settings are you currently a counselor or administrator? (circle as many numbers as apply)

1. Elementary School
2. Middle School or Junior High School
3. High School

Years you have worked as an administrator? _____

Years you have worked as a counselor? _____

In how many different schools do you currently work? _____

Total number of students you are responsible for? _____

What is the ethnic diversity of your school population?

_____ %	White or European
_____ %	African American
_____ %	Hispanic or Latino
_____ %	Asian American
_____ %	Native American
_____ %	Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

In my job as a counselor or administrator, I typically work _____ hours per week. My time is divided in the following way. (use hours)

_____	Counseling individuals
_____	Facilitating groups
_____	Dealing with budget/financial issues
_____	Providing classroom guidance
_____	Coordinate testing/assessment
_____	Disciplining students
_____	Teaching classes
_____	Doing paperwork/clerical tasks
_____	Consulting with teacher, parents, others
_____	Other duties (specify) _____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	=Total Hours

Additional Comments:

<i>Part VIII: Continued Participation</i>

May we contact you for a short interview about the topic of this research?

NO Do not complete the following, but return the survey to us.

YES Complete the following, plus return the survey to us.

Name:

Address:

Phone (day):

Email:

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