

**Perceptions of Elementary School Counselors
Regarding the Utility of Solution-Focused Brief Counseling
In the School Setting**

Janet B. Kegley

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in
Counselor Education

Claire Cole Vaught, Chair
Thomas Hohenshil
Hildy Getz
Kusum Singh
Lou Talbutt

September 14, 2000
Blacksburg, Virginia

Keywords: School Counseling, Solution-Focused Brief Counseling

Copyright 2000, Janet B. Kegley

**PERCEPTIONS OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL COUNSELORS
REGARDING THE UTILITY OF SOLUTION-FOCUSED BRIEF COUNSELING
IN THE SCHOOL SETTING**

Janet B. Kegley

(ABSTRACT)

This study examined the perceptions of elementary school counselors regarding their experience in using solution-focused brief counseling for meeting the demanding responsibilities of their job and the particular needs of the students they serve. Specifically, the four research questions addressed the school counselors' perceptions regarding: (1) use and importance of particular solution-focused techniques; (2) effectiveness of solution-focused strategies in addressing specific student issues; (3) training in solution-focused brief counseling; and (4) use of this approach in settings other than the counseling office.

The data for this study were collected from elementary school counselors in Virginia who had previously received training in solution-focused brief counseling. This training was provided by their school systems as inservice and was conducted by the same workshop leader in all instances. The school counselors were sent a questionnaire that was developed by the researcher. The survey contained a selection of Likert-style scale questions, yes/no items, rank-order items, and open-ended questions. The final section contained questions designed to obtain demographic information about the respondent and the school and students they served. The researcher conducted a follow-up interview with several school counselors to supplement the survey data. The data analysis was descriptive and relational in nature.

The findings of the study indicate that elementary school counselors who have received training in solution-focused brief counseling philosophies and techniques find it important and useful for working with children. The majority of

the school counselors indicated that they use all of the solution-focused techniques listed in the survey to at least some degree. Their responses to the survey indicated the perception that this approach is effective with various student issues. The school counselors reported the perception that they have some proficiency with solution focused brief counseling and that they have interest in pursuing more training. The school counselors also indicated that they were able to use solution-focused brief counseling philosophies in school settings other than the counseling office.

In summary, school counselors appear to have a relatively positive perception of solution-focused brief counseling as an approach for working with elementary age school students. Recommendations for practice and future research are presented.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated
to my son, David.

His kind heart and gentle encouragement helped me get
through this process more than he will ever know.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to express my gratitude to Dr. Claire Cole Vaught. Thank you for all of your encouragement and practical guidance from our initial meeting several years ago when I first considered entering the program, throughout the program as my advisor, and now as my doctoral committee chairperson. Your support and advice have always rung true.

I would also like to thank my dissertation committee members for their time, encouragement, and knowledge: Dr. Tom Hohenshil, Dr. Kusum Singh, Dr. Hildy Getz, and Dr. Lou Talbutt. Thank you all for the insights and redirections during this process.

Thank you also to Vicki Meadows for her support throughout the program. Thanks for always having or finding an answer for me.

Finally, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my family for their encouragement and patience during my involvement in this program. For reading and offering editorial advice on initial chapters and for always extending computer, statistical, and emotional support, I wish to thank Rob Kegley. For providing no-nonsense advice and eternal encouragement the way only a sister can, I thank Carol. Lastly, warmest thanks to my son, David, for always having good sleep habits(so I could sit at the computer from 8:00 to 12:00) and especially for being so generous with smiles and hugs.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	ii
Dedication.....	iv
Acknowledgements.....	v
Table of Contents.....	vi
List of Tables.....	vii
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Need for the Study.....	7
Statement of the Purpose.....	8
Research Questions.....	8
Methodology.....	8
Definition of Terms.....	9
Limitations.....	9
Summary.....	10
Chapter 2: Review of Literature.....	11
Overview.....	11
Counseling in the Schools.....	11
Issues Facing School Counselors.....	13
History and Description of Solution-Focused Brief Therapy.....	15
Research Related to Solution-Focused Brief Therapy.....	19
Solution-Focused Brief Counseling in the School Setting.....	21
Summary.....	25
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	26
Population.....	26
Instrumentation.....	26
Pilot Study.....	29
Data Collection.....	30
Interview Procedure.....	30
Method of Analysis.....	31
Chapter 4: Results.....	33
Introduction.....	33
Response Rate.....	33

Survey Results.....	33
Part 1 - Perceptions Regarding Use and Importance.....	34
Part 2 - Checklists of Specific Student Issues.....	41
Part 3 - Perceptions of Training in Solution-Focused Brief Counseling...	45
Part 4 - Use of SFBC Philosophies Beyond Counseling Situation.....	48
Part 5 - Demographics.....	50
Follow-up Interviews.....	58
Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations.....	65
Introduction.....	65
Summary.....	65
Summary of Interviews.....	69
Conclusions.....	70
Recommendations for Practice for School Counselors.....	72
Recommendations for Practice for Counselor Educators.....	73
Recommendations for Future Research.....	74
Final Remarks.....	76
References.....	77
Appendices.....	84
Appendix A - Questionnaire.....	84
Appendix B - Pilot Study Questions.....	88
Appendix C - Letter to Superintendents.....	89
Appendix D - Endorsement Letter from Trainer.....	90
Appendix E - Postcard To Superintendents.....	91
Appendix F - Cover Letter to Accompany Questionnaire.....	92
Appendix G - Prompting Postcard to Respondents.....	93
Appendix H - Interview Protocol.....	94
Appendix I - Informed Consent for Follow-up Interview.....	95
VITA.....	96

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	Elementary School Counselor Rating for Use and Importance of Solution-Focused Brief Counseling with Children.....	36
Table 2	Percent of Elementary School Counselors Choosing Each Item Regarding Use of Solution-Focused Brief Counseling Techniques When Working with Children.....	38
Table 3	Percent of Elementary School Counselors Choosing Each Item Regarding Importance of Solution-Focused Brief Counseling Techniques When Working with Children.....	40
Table 4	Percent of Elementary School Counselors Who Indicated Solution-Focused Brief Counseling Strategies Were Perceived As Effective or Not Effective with Particular Issues in Individual Counseling Situations.....	43
Table 5	Percent of Elementary School Counselors Who Indicated Solution-Focused Brief Counseling Strategies Were Perceived As Effective or Not Effective with Particular Issues in Group Counseling Situations.....	44
Table 6	Percent of Elementary School Counselors Regarding Their Perceptions of Training Needs in Solution-Focused Brief Counseling.....	47
Table 7	Frequencies and Percentages for Elementary School Counselors Regarding the Use of Solution-Focused Brief Counseling Philosophies Beyond the Counseling Setting.....	49
Table 8	Demographics.....	55

Chapter 1

Introduction

Elementary school students today come to school with a myriad of concerns which can potentially interfere with their ability to focus on the business of learning. With an ever growing at-risk population, counselors are faced with an increasing number of students in need of assistance but with no more time in the school day. The school counselor's functioning is influenced by several factors: caseloads, extraneous school responsibilities, and limited resources. Their roles can further vary depending on the specific needs of the children, the school counselor's training, and the school administrator's perspective of the counselor's role. Ideally, all counselors are able to provide individual and group counseling. The American School Counselor Association promotes counseling as one of three helping processes of the school counselor in its most current role statement (ASCA, 1990). While early in the life of the profession school counselors provided primarily vocational guidance, the dominant professional role of the school counselor seems to have shifted to counseling services (Gysber, 1990). This shift is partially in response to our changing world. School counselors face evolving demands as society moves into a new century (Coy, 1999; Gerler, Ciechalski, & Parker, 1990; Sears & Coy, 1991). This study proposed to research to what extent elementary school counselors use one particular approach, solution-focused counseling, to meet these demands.

Some differences in the role of the school counselor are dependent on their school placement. Elementary counselors may provide classroom and small group counseling on social skill and personal awareness, while secondary counselors might focus more on conflict mediation, curriculum advisement, and scheduling concerns. Students approach or are referred to counselors with issues regarding, among other things, relationship issues, interpersonal problems, academic concerns, and identity or self-esteem issues. They are often not self-referred, being referred to the school counselor by teachers, parents, or administrators due to perceived difficulties. They may, therefore, be less than

receptive to intervention in some cases, perhaps diminishing their commitment to the process (Sklare, 1997).

Many influences have impacted the role of the school counselor. It is influenced by state certification standards, counselor education programs, school system regulations, professional organizations and administrator perception about counselors. As society becomes increasingly more complex, effective school counselors will need to take a greater role in the lives of students and their families. They must be prepared to work with increasing numbers of children from single-parent and low-income families and students from minority and immigrant groups. The greater use of technology in school and workplace and more frequent career changes will also have an effect on students today. Also, increasing violence in schools, families, and communities may necessitate changes in the school counselor's work-day or in their training (Paisley & Borders, 1995). The challenges which face school counselors and the demands on their time will continue to grow (Sears & Coy, 1991; Gerler, 1991).

There is often limited opportunity for ongoing, long-term counseling in the school setting due to high demands for individual counseling and limited time for these services (Myrick, 1993). Due to the nature of the setting, timely resolution of a student's concern is optimal to assure that each student is able to focus on the business of learning. School counselors need an approach that is goal directed and positively oriented. Solution-Focused Brief Counseling techniques are viewed as an effective approach in the school setting (Bonnington, 1993; Bruce & Hopper, 1997; LaFountain, Garner, & Eliason, 1996; Mostert, Johnson, & Mostert, 1997; Murphy, 1994).

Brief counseling is described by Bruce (1995) as an approach which requires four components for promoting change. The four elements are: a nonjudgmental acceptance of the student's worldview; awareness of and use of a student's available strengths and resources; a positive connection between the counselor and the student; and the identification of clear and concrete goals. Solution-focused brief counseling follows several basic assumptions (Mostert, Johnson, & Mostert, 1997). First, it highlights the resources and strengths that

are already available to individuals which can be used in solving their own problems. The belief is maintained that problems do not necessarily suggest underlying pathology. Second, solution-focused brief counseling is goal-oriented to resolve the current complaint as opposed to finding the cause of the problem. The focus for solutions is guided by the use of an orienting question called the “miracle question” which promotes thought about aspects of behavior if the problem no longer existed. Third, the solution-focused brief counseling approach dictates that the problem’s complexity and the time required to solve it are not necessarily proportional. Fourth, the counselor/client relationship is viewed as cooperative as the counselor does not attempt to persuade the client in the determination of significant goals. Fifth, the client is placed on a continuum with regard to acceptance of the problem in need of change. A client may acknowledge the existence of it and be invested in its resolution, acknowledge it but believe its resolve requires someone else to change, or not acknowledge the existence of a problem. Finally, solution-focused counseling assumes that problems are contextual and can be observed, described, and measured.

Professionals using brief strategic interventions concentrate on the set patterns of interaction where problem behavior exists when attempting to elicit change (Amatea, 1989). Through the exploration of how the client behaves differently when the problem is not occurring, the “exceptions” to the problem are highlighted. This aids in the clarification of the client’s goals (Kiser, Piercy, & Lipchik, 1993) by illustrating which behaviors are goal-oriented and which behaviors perpetuate the problem. Because it is often difficult to determine all of the details of a problem situation, using solution-focused techniques allows more productive use of the client and counselor’s efforts as the specific details of the problem’s origination are not a necessity, enabling those involved to focus on solutions and not causes. Students’ own words are used, making counseling easier for students to understand as their own language personalizes counseling. When the students are able to communicate in a familiar way and it is apparent to them that they are understood, a more comfortable situation is created (Sklare, 1997). The student’s involvement in the task of problem-solving promotes

ownership of the corrective behaviors, and there is a positive emphasis where the capabilities of the student are highlighted (Metcalf, 1995). DeShazer (1985) describes an approach which assists clients in altering behaviors with a desired outcome in mind. The focus is placed on what clients are already doing that they perceive as successful and they are then encouraged to draw from their own strengths (DeShazer, 1987; Berg & DeJong, 1996). DeShazer (1987) suggests that by highlighting the behaviors, thoughts, and feelings that are within a client's repertoire, the client/counselor cooperation is increased and therefore, the actual time spent in the counseling process is more productive. Hutchins and Vaught (1996) suggest that the helper should avoid taking the "expert role," emphasizing the client's abilities and resources. Through the exploration of what the client does differently when the problem is not prominent, help is provided in clarifying the client's goals.

The sequence of behavior change steps for the solution-focused approach is:

1. The client/student selects the problem to be addressed.
2. The client/student identifies the change or coping goal as it relates to the problem.
3. The client/student is asked to search for exceptions to the problem.
4. The client/student is requested to identify strengths in his/her behavior repertoire.
5. Emphasis is placed on assisting the client/student in developing and carrying out a plan to have more success with this specific problem (Downing & Harrison, 1992).

According to Metcalf (1995), counseling in the school environment using solution-focused techniques need not promote insight to be helpful. This reflects the belief that in-depth exploration of the causes and origins of the problem is not necessary for goal generation (Sklare, 1997). It suggests that it is not necessary to know everything about a complaint in order to promote change and that complex problems do not always require complex solutions. The helper should always attempt to see the situation

through the student's world view. This will enhance cooperation and lessen frustration. These points can be applied to direct work with students and also to the counselor's consultations with teachers, administrators, and parents.

Often a counselor is requested by parents and teachers to assist in the development of behavior modification systems for students encountering difficulty in the classroom. The solution-focused approach appears to differ from traditional behavior modification in that it presents the student as the expert on his/her own behavior. This again may enhance a student's motivation to work cooperatively toward change. Scaling questions utilize a device which might be helpful in focusing on small gains (DeShazer, 1985). Scaling questions are used to assist the client in rating the problem on a scale of one to ten where one represents the worst the problem has been and ten represents the attainment of the client's goal (McKeel, 1996). Daily scaling questions can be used to illustrate short- or long-term success. This technique may be helpful in charting progress through counseling and may provide opportunities for accountability documentation which has become an issue of prominent concern of late (Fairchild, 1993).

When acting as a consultant, the school counselor is able to provide information and assistance to many individuals in an effort to develop skills that make them more effective in working with students (ASCA, 1990). In parent conferences, counselors can gather information, search for exceptions to specific problems, attempt to change problem-thinking into solution-thinking (Paull & McGrevin, 1996), and assist in development of tasks for solutions. These solution-focused behaviors are also valuable in school committee work. In meetings designed to assist students experiencing difficulties, the conversation typically centers around the student's behavioral or academic problem areas. The school counselor may be looked upon to facilitate the group process. Through a solution-focused approach, the counselor may effectively set a

conversational tone that is expectant of change by attending to the present and the future needs of the student. From this point, the counselor might then assist in preliminary goal-setting and facilitate the search for exceptions to the problem. O'Hanlon and Weiner-Davis (1989) suggest that even with the most chronic problems, there are fluctuations in intensity that can be stressed as possibilities for change in the future. DeShazer (1991) relates that in the solution-focused approach, problems are seen as being maintained by the client's belief that the problem is always happening. Therefore, through illustrating exceptions, the client is empowered to use his or her own previous successes upon which to build.

The use of a positive language, free of labels that suggest pathology, across the school environment is a necessary step toward restructuring the way that problems are approached (Paull & McGrevin, 1996). As educational settings concentrate on the academic, social, and developmental acquisitions of students, counselors using a solution-focused approach are also interested in competencies. This approach allows an alternative to labeling or solving problems for students, parents, and staff. The focus is redirected toward the solution and away from blame or feelings of failure (Metcalf, 1995).

In order to reframe the way that individuals meet the world, Metcalf (1995) provides some guidelines for thinking differently. First, it is necessary to determine and acknowledge the resources in oneself and those around the client, who must consider daily what has worked previously in a given situation. Second, the client must escape from labels that serve only to describe a problem and must search for new descriptions which are "solvable". Third, the counselor learns to cooperate with the differences, personalities, and interests of students. Less resistance occurs when there is cooperation.

Murphy (1994) suggests that there are several reasons for school counselors to utilize the solution-focused concept of finding exceptions. He relates that the competency-based perception of people as resourceful

and capable fosters a cooperative relationship between school staff and parents and students. The focus on the present and the future in this method releases the counselor from the lengthy research necessary in more traditional treatment approaches. The idea of determining and attempting to attain small and concrete changes in any aspect of a problem situation may be more realistic for school counselors.

A solution-focused approach to solving problems is well suited to the school environment. It relies on the “natural forces” of a situation, emphasizing the strengths and resources of an individual to create solutions. In classrooms or during consultation, counselors, administrators, and teachers need simple, yet meaningful strategies for influencing behavioral change (Kral, 1995).

Need for the Study

Very limited information is available through the relevant literature regarding the perceptions of school counselors about the utility of solution-focused counseling techniques within the school setting. The research presently available examines the process of solution-focused procedures (Adams, Piercy, & Jurich, 1991) and there are a few outcome studies from the Brief Family Therapy Center, the most recent of which are reviewed by DeJong and Hopwood (1996). There are at least two studies available regarding the use of solution-focused brief counseling specifically in the school setting.

Practicing school counselors need new and better techniques for working with the children of today. They need approaches which offer a quicker resolution to the problem so that students are able to focus on learning. The perception of school counselors regarding what they believe is and is not effective in the school setting is important information with regard to the need for more or different training opportunities.

The perceptions of school counselors regarding the utility of solution-focused counseling techniques has not been thoroughly

documented beyond an initial study involving only five counselors. School counselors are in need of effective counseling approaches through which to assist students.

Statement of Purpose

This study was designed to investigate the perceptions of elementary school counselors regarding the use of solution-focused brief counseling techniques in the school setting. Data were gathered from elementary school counselors who had been previously trained in solution-focused brief counseling. They were surveyed about their perceptions of specific solution-focused counseling techniques, their beliefs about its benefit to students, and their attitudes about their training in the techniques.

Research Questions

Of particular interest are the following questions which were addressed in this investigation:

1. Do elementary school counselors believe that solution-focused brief counseling techniques are important in use with children?
2. Do elementary school counselors believe that solution-focused brief counseling strategies are useful with particular student issues in individual and/or group counseling situations in a school setting?
3. What are elementary school counselors' attitudes about training in solution-focused brief counseling techniques?
4. In what instances/situations do elementary school counselors believe that solution-focused brief counseling philosophies are applicable within the overall school setting?

Methodology

Elementary school counselors in several Virginia school districts who have previously been trained in solution-focused brief counseling were surveyed for

information for this study. The questionnaire was comprised of Lickert-type scale questions, open-ended questions, yes/no items, rank order items, and demographic questions. The researcher conducted follow-up interviews with several of the respondents. Analysis of the data was descriptive and relational in nature.

Definition of Terms

1. School counselor: The Virginia State Board of Education (1996) describes a school counselor's role to be the school board employee who creates and implements programs designed to "promote the academic mission of public education and aid student achievement" (p. 1). They make available to students academic guidance, career guidance, and personal/social counseling.
2. Solution-focused brief counseling: A brief counseling approach which promotes the utility of the client's own strengths and resources in a collaborative process of goal setting to work toward the desired change.
3. Belief: Dillman (1978) defines a belief as a person's current perception of reality.
4. Attitude: An attitude is described as assessment of value of and feelings toward persons, groups, or other objects which are learned through experience and relatively constant over time (Vogt, 1993).

Limitations

The school counselors involved in this study were drawn from a limited number of school systems(seven) in Virginia. They were all trained in solution-focused brief counseling theory and techniques by the same trainer who generally presented the same material in each instance. By targeting this group an effort was made to promote more standardization for the response group. Solution-focused brief counseling is likely being used in more school systems throughout the state and the school counselors in those systems likely received training through other venues. Therefore, the generalizability of these findings to

other situations is uncertain. Those surveyed work with elementary age students and again generalizability to other school levels may be limited. The opinions of this group may also not generalize to the beliefs of counselors using solution-focused brief counseling in private or agency settings. It is also important to recognize that a one-day training in any counseling theory is not likely to produce significant and lasting knowledge or skills for use without practice and supervision. This may suggest a need to approach the findings of this study with caution. It is also possible that the current political climate in Virginia may promote the adjustment of attention away from the needs of individual children and onto system and state priorities.

Summary

Through this study, the perceptions of school counselors who have had training opportunities in solution-focused brief counseling were investigated. The study provides information about their beliefs regarding the applicability and utility of solution-focused brief counseling techniques in the elementary school setting by school counselors and contributes to the limited information currently available about its use in the elementary school setting.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Overview

For this chapter, significant areas of the literature are summarized. The history and evolution of school counseling are reviewed and the issues which currently face school counselors are highlighted. The major tenets of and the philosophy behind solution-focused brief counseling are described. Finally, the available research on solution-focused brief counseling in various settings is reviewed.

Counseling in the Schools

The role of the elementary school counselor is often influenced by the social, economic, and political factors facing the country. Coy (1999) traces the fluctuation in the definition of the role of the school counselor over the last one hundred years. The first documented school counseling programs included career and moral guidance in high schools. These programs concentrated on assisting the students who were leaving school in making career choices. The next thrust was the measurement of personality and aptitude which was introduced to guidance programs. This development took place around the time of the Great Depression. Soon, the awareness of the developmental aspect of individual students and their guidance needs was in place and created a major change in the guidance movement. The training of school counselors became a national priority following the launching of Sputnik in 1957. The National Defense Educational Act was passed in 1958 and provided funding for school counselors who were enlisted to promote coursework in the maths and sciences to better prepare students for a college track. Finally, in the 1950s, a movement to develop certification requirements for school counselors began. Its purpose was to insure standardization of training for school counselors.

Further influence by federal legislation on the definition of the practice of school counselors has been present through the passing of the School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994 and the Elementary School Counseling Demonstration Act of 1995. Also contributing to the definition of the school counselor's role has been the development of professional associations specifically for school counselors (Paisley & Borders, 1995).

The American School Counselors Association(ASCA) became the fifth division of the American Personnel and Guidance Association in 1953 (Minkoff & Terres, 1985). A role statement adopted by ASCA in 1990 defines a school counselor as a professional educator who is certified to assist students, teachers, parents, and administrators through counseling, consulting, and coordination (ASCA, 1990). These role elements are further defined as:

- 1) Counseling is a complex helping process in which the counselor establishes a trusting and confidential working relationship. The focus is on problem-solving, decision-making, and discovering personal meaning related to learning and development;
- 2) Consultation is a cooperative process in which the counselor-consultant assists others to think through problems and to develop skills that make them more effective in working with students;
- 3) Coordination is a leadership process in which the counselor helps organize and manage a school's counseling program and related services. (p. 1).

In Virginia, the State Board of Education (1996) outlines the standards and regulations for guidance and counseling programs in the schools. All public schools in Virginia are required to make available to students the services described below:

- 1) Academic guidance, which assists students and their parents to acquire knowledge of the curricula choices available to students, to plan a program of studies, to arrange and interpret academic testing, and to seek post-secondary academic opportunities;
- 2) Career guidance, which helps student to acquire information and plan action about work, jobs, apprenticeships, and post-secondary educational and career opportunities;

- 3) Personal/social counseling, which assists students to develop an understanding of themselves, the rights and needs of others, how to resolve conflict and to define individual goals reflecting their interests, abilities, and aptitudes. (p.1)

The Virginia State Board of Education (1997) requires that local school boards provide either a guidance counselor or a reading specialist in elementary schools for one hour per day for every one hundred students and a full-time counselor or reading specialist in schools of five hundred students or greater. This regulation may often force school systems to choose between personnel aimed at focusing on mental health issues versus academic ones. This potentially further limits the resources available to meet the social-emotional needs of school children.

Issues Facing School Counselors

In the daily functioning of school counselors, influences not only come from legislation, Board of Education regulations, and professional organizations, but also potentially from several other factors. Among the various influences are state certification standards; counselor education training programs; school system priorities and policies; and principals and other administrators' priorities (Sears & Coy, 1991). These many influences often add to the confusion about the role of the school counselor which has been well documented (e.g., Ballard & Murgatroyd, 1999; Hayes, Dagley, & Horne, 1996; O'Dell, Rak, Chermonte, Hamlin, & Waina, 1996; Paisley & Borders, 1995; Studer & Allton, 1996; Wilgus & Shelley, 1988).

Often school principals have assigned school counselors tasks which are administrative or clerical such as tracking attendance, counting credits, or dispensing discipline. These tasks have little to do with the actual role of the school counselor or the mental health needs of the students (Sears & Coy, 1991). Partin (1993) reports that many are concerned with the significant amounts of time that school counselors are required to devote to functions which are not considered direct student services. Because of the many challenges

which face students in today's world, school counselors are finding themselves addressing three categories of student issues: social/personal, educational, and career (Paisley & Hubbard, 1994).

Much is written about the need for school counselors to develop programs to meet the changing needs of today's children. They are coming to school from increasing numbers of single-parent homes and low-income family situations. Many live in homes where both parents are in the workforce and many come from minority or immigrant backgrounds. Today's children are faced with the greater use of technology in schools and the workplace and experience societal influences such as increased violence in schools, families, and communities (Paisley & Borders, 1995). The Children's Defense Fund Yearbook (1998) reports the following statistics about American children:

- *one in two preschoolers has a mother in the work force
- *one in two will live in a single parent family at some point during their youth
- *one in three has parents who are not wed
- *one in three will live in poverty at some point in childhood
- *one in three is a year or more behind in school
- *one in five are born to mothers who received no prenatal care in the first three months of pregnancy
- *one in seven has no health insurance
- *one in 12 has a disability.

Lockhart and Keys (1998) suggest that there is no indication that the need for mental health services in the schools will subside. With the growing stressors influencing families and the schools of today and with the traditional sources of mental health assistance for children being downsized, school counselors are in a critical position of being the most accessible mental health services available for children and their families.

Erdman and Lampe (1996) related the need for counselors to be aware of the developmental levels of children with regard to intelligence, emotionality,

physical growth, and psychological stage. They state that without higher level thinking skills which support abstract reasoning, children experience difficulty with the generation of alternative actions, prediction of outcomes, and comprehension of cause and effect relationships. Given the developmental issues involved when working with children and the already overburdened workload of school counselors, an effective, brief counseling approach which relies on the strengths and resources already available to the student appears warranted. While it is often necessary to refer students for long-term therapy, current literature suggests support for use of brief counseling approaches by school counselors (Paisley & Borders, 1995). Brief counseling approaches are supported by the research which suggests that the effective work in counseling is often accomplished in the first eight sessions (e.g. Beyebach, Morejon, Palenzuela, & Rodriguez-Arias, 1996; deShazer, 1985; deShazer, 1991; Lafountain, Garner, & Eliason, 1996; Schorr, 1997; Whiston & Sexton, 1993).

History and Description of Solution Focused Brief Therapy

Paisley and Borders (1995) state that training in brief counseling models and their techniques is one way for school counselors to provide more effective counseling to students. Because insight is not necessary with solution-focused brief counseling, it appears to be an appropriate approach for using with children where higher levels of conceptual development have not yet evolved (Kral, 1995). Within this approach a partnership between the client and the counselor is developed through which they together can identify therapy goals and foster solutions that are built on what the client is already doing that works (Kok & Leskela, 1996).

Solution-focused brief counseling has evolved in the past ten to fifteen years through the work of Steve deShazer, Insoo Kim Berg, and their colleagues at the Brief Family Therapy Center in Milwaukee, Wisconsin (Berg and DeJong, 1996 & Miller, 1997). It is described as an abbreviated, nonpathological approach which utilizes the clients' own strengths for effecting change. Its ultimate goal is to develop solutions through a collaborative process between the counselor and

the client (Kiser, Piercy, & Lipchik, 1993). Vaughn, Young, Webster, and Thomas (1996, p. 107) believe that focusing on "the pathology, deficits, and risk factors" alone, instead of including assessment and promotion of "strengths, resources, and mitigating factors" can be ineffective and possibly harmful to clients. They further suggest gathering information about the complaint but also balancing this with determination of the client's strengths, exceptions, and goals. While it is felt that a detailed description of the complaint is not necessary in solution focused brief therapy, it is believed that the solutions are achieved through altering the interactions within the context of the situation (deShazer, Berg, Lipchik, Nunnally, Molnar, Gingerich, & Weiner-Davis, 1986). They go on to suggest that by helping a client change their behaviors of interaction and/or their interpretation of the behavior or situation, a solution can be accomplished. They further believe that clients really do want to change and that only a small change is often necessary. This small change can lead to other improvement. In solution focused brief therapy, there is the assumption that change is always present in life. From this perspective, clients are not so focused on their complaints that they are unable to see that they already possess the resources to create solutions (Miller, 1997).

The counselor's task in the solution-focused brief counseling approach is to assist the client in investigating two areas: 1. What do they want to be different in their lives? and 2. What resources do they possess to make these changes occur? The counselor provides affirmation to the client and assists the client in the recognition of past success, strengths, and resources. Through this process goals are determined. The stages involved in creating solutions are the brief description of the issue in the client's own words, the development of appropriate goals, the investigation of exceptions (times when the problem is not occurring or is occurring to a lesser degree), assessment of the client's progress, and finally, feedback which is designed to support the client's goals, strengths, and successes (Berg & DeJong, 1996).

Well-formed goals are developed through the collaboration of the client with the counselor. Clients seldom begin the counseling process with well-

formed goals already determined and the solution-focused brief therapy process suggests that the helping professional does not have the right or power to determine which goals are appropriate for the client. Instead, the counselor and the client work together on goal development (DeJong & Miller, 1995). Well-formed goals, according to Berg and Miller (1992), have seven essential characteristics:

- 1) Goals are well-formed when they are a priority to the client and are in the client's words.
- 2) Goals are well-formed when they are small.
- 3) Goals are well-formed when they are specific and behavioral.
- 4) Goals are well-formed when they are stated with regard to promoting the presence of something as opposed to the elimination of something.
- 5) Goals are well-formed when they are conceptualized as first steps in an ongoing process.
- 6) Goals are well-formed when they are realistic in the context of the life.
- 7) Goals are well-formed when they are felt by the client to require a commitment to work.

DeShazer and Berg (1997) describe the characteristic features of solution-focused brief counseling as: the use of the Miracle Question; the opportunity for the client to scale some aspect of his or her situation; during the interview the counselor takes a break to confer with a colleague; and the counselor compliments the client and offers a homework task.

The miracle question and other solution-focused brief counseling questions are a major component of solution-focused interviewing. The miracle question is used to assist clients in the establishment of concrete and specific behaviors which will indicate to them that the problem is solved (Stilts, Rambo, & Hernandez, 1997). It can be stated, according to Tohn and Oshlag (1996), as "Suppose that tonight, after our session, you go home and fall asleep, and while you are sleeping a miracle happens. The miracle is that the problems that brought you here today are solved, but you don't know that the miracle has

happened because you are asleep. When you wake up in the morning what will be some of the first things you will notice that will be different that will tell you this miracle has happened?" (pp. 170-171).

Berg and DeJong (1996) describe relationship questions as a technique for clients to develop awareness of alternative perspectives. They also indicate that exception questions ask the client to consider a time when the problem is not as significant and further explore what they are doing differently at that point which makes the situation better. Finally, scaling questions are also used in solution-focused brief counseling to help the client measure success. Clients are asked to gauge the severity of the situation on a scale of one to ten. One indicates that the problem no longer exists and ten suggests that the problem is at its worst.

Gass and Gillis (1995) describe several basic assumptions of solution-focused brief counseling. They suggest that promoting the creation of solutions can diminish or eliminate the problem simply by utilizing the clients' own resources. Also, through a solution-focused brief approach, it is easier and more constructive to develop solutions than to eliminate problems. By encouraging clients to repeat behaviors that are already successful, it is not necessary to have them stop or change existing problematic behaviors. The beginning elements of solutions can be found in the clients' exceptions to their problems.

Counselors in many settings have begun using brief therapy approaches in an effort to provide both effective and efficient treatment. Brief therapy is being used in many therapeutic settings and situations, such as inpatient psychiatric treatment (Kok & Leskela, 1996; Vaughn, Young, Webster, & Thomas, 1996); college counseling centers (Turner, Valtierra, Talken, Miller, & DeAnda, 1996); couples and family therapy (Gale & Newfield, 1992; Lipchik & Kubricki, 1996); group therapy (Nickerson, 1995; Schorr, 1997); and individual counseling (Walter & Peller, 1994). It has been utilized to address client issues, such as; depression bereavement, insomnia, marital conflict (Freundlich, 1994); Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (Cocciarella, Wood, & Low, 1995); anger management (Schorr, 1997); and alcohol abuse (Berg & Miller, 1992).

Research Related to Solution Focused Brief Therapy

McKeel (1996) indicates that there is support in the literature regarding the effectiveness of brief therapy. Due to its relatively recent development, there is limited available research about solution-focused brief therapy specifically. Research conducted at the Brief Family Therapy Center in Milwaukee in the 1980s is reviewed by McKeel (1996) and suggests that 65.5 percent of a sample of clients receiving solution-focused brief therapy were able to reach their treatment goals, with another 14.7 percent making significant improvement during the therapy. He further relates the findings of a Swiss outcome study which reports 80 percent of the clients who were counseled using solution-focused brief therapy met their stated goals. A warning is offered to the reader to consider the findings tentative as the studies involved small sample sizes and simplistic methodology. McKeel (1996) also emphasizes the importance of solution-talk or change-talk. Solution-focused therapists often ask clients what has changed prior to the first session. This strategy highlights and reinforces client improvement between the time the appointment was made and the initial meeting. Shields, Sprenkle, and Constantine (1991) found that the more clients talked about solutions or goals during the initial session, the greater the likelihood that they would complete therapy and not drop out. McKeel (1996) concludes by noting that though there exist but a few studies on solution-focused brief therapy, results look favorable so far. Process studies have found that pre-session improvement often occurs and that solution-talk helps clients to generate new views of their situation. Also, clients usually cooperate with the formula first session task and report improvement during the second session. The formula first session task is essentially a homework assignment where the client attempts to recognize situations where the problem is not occurring. Finally, it is indicated that scaling questions are effective as a technique for monitoring progress and that a collaborative relationship between client and therapist is associated with treatment success.

DeJong and Hopwood (1996) report on another study conducted later at the Brief Family Therapy Center in which 275 clients received follow-up contacts regarding their experience. They report 77 percent of the clients who received solution-focused brief therapy either met their goals or made progress toward them. The therapeutic change was typically made over an average of three sessions and was equally effective with a variety of clients. The findings further suggest that client-therapist gender or racial mix did not contribute to level of effectiveness and that the solution-focused brief therapy procedures were effective across differing client issues. It is interesting that of the 275 clients who were involved in this study, one third of them were twelve years of age or younger and 15 percent of them were between the ages of thirteen and eighteen, suggesting that this approach is a viable method for working with children. Lee (1997) found that in a children's mental health setting, the use of solution-focused brief counseling can also be effective. With children ranging in age from four to seventeen and their families, 64.9 percent met or partially met their stated goals within an average of 5.5 sessions.

In a study comparing the effectiveness of brief counseling and traditional counseling models typically used by school counselors, Bruce and Hopper (1997) found that across a four-week treatment period, students demonstrated positive change in affective, cognitive, and behavioral domains regardless of the counseling approach. They further found that after one session, the students in the brief counseling group maintained their improvement for four weeks. The students exposed to the traditional counseling model required more and longer sessions to achieve equivalent results. They suggest that brief counseling can promote rapid but lasting change.

Research on the process of solution-focused therapy was conducted by Beyebach, Morejon, Palenzuela, and Rodriguez-Aria (1996). They state that at termination, seventy-one percent of their sample of ninety-seven clients reported either improvement in or disappearance of their complaint. Follow-up contacts from six months to thirty-seven months after termination revealed twelve percent of the successful clients had experienced some relapse while thirty-eight percent

of the successful clients stated that they had experienced additional positive change. This research team has also investigated the "cognitive reading" of particular elements of solution-focused therapy. For this study, a sample of thirty-nine subjects who had received brief therapy were selected and administered measures of control expectancy which tap self-efficacy, locus of control, and success expectancy. Overall, the investigators report that their research indicates support for the solution-focused brief therapy practices of amplifying pretreatment change, collaboratively developing well-formed goals, and empowering clients by acknowledging their influence on change. Specifically, they suggest that it may be productive to focus on pretreatment changes in the first session and that this may be more helpful in terms of outcome than working on goals in the initial session. A strong relationship between locus of control and therapy outcome may suggest the importance of promoting a sense of control in clients. Their findings also indicate the need for well-formed goals as they enhance commitment to the therapy process.

Solution-focused brief therapy has also been used in group counseling situations. Zimmerman, Prest, and Wetzel (1997) investigated its effectiveness with couples therapy. They compared the effects of solution-focused brief therapy and psycho-educational counseling with a comparable no treatment group. The researchers compared pre- and post-test scores on a measure of overall expression of affection and satisfaction and an instrument which predicts the likelihood of divorce. They found that the treatment group's scores on the measure of affection and satisfaction improved significantly while they were involved in therapy. The participants reported positive changes in their relationships which were congruent with the scores.

Solution-Focused Counseling in the School Setting

The developmental and psychological characteristics of children must be recognized by counselors in order to create optimal therapeutic opportunities for children. Without higher level thinking skills and the capability to make somewhat abstract associations, children may be unable to generate alternative

behaviors, predict the influence of their behavior, realize cause and effect relationships, and demonstrate moral reasoning. Due to these factors, counselors must provide specific developmentally appropriate examples with clear explanation of rules and consequences (Erdman & Lampe, 1996). Elementary school counselors are expected to adjust their services to the social and demographic needs of the children assigned to them. Lockhart and Keys (1998) suggest that the time is right for school counselors to redefine themselves as school mental health counselors who proactively attempt to move away from the traditional guidance role. They further outline the implications this adjustment will have on training programs, highlighting the need for awareness of and training in short-term counseling models. Brief counseling models are proving to be an appropriate addition to the school counselor's repertoire for individual (Bruce & Hopper, 1997) and group (LaFountain, Garner, & Eliason, 1996) counseling.

There are several aspects of solution-focused brief counseling which appear to lend themselves to the school setting. Murphy (1994) suggests the following aspects of solution-focused therapy could be positive and practical for school counselors:

- 1) The competency based belief that people are competent and resourceful promotes a collaborative interaction between school personnel and students and their parents.
- 2) The present/future orientation is particularly suited to the over-burdened school counselor. It limits the necessity of time consuming investigation into the students' history and previous experiences.
- 3) Specific and concrete goals which illustrate change in the problem situation are more realistic than vague goals which may be overly ambitious.
- 4) The assumption that people make an effort to change only when they believe there is a need to do so promotes effective choices regarding whom to work with in order to maximize change. This idea of working with the person most invested in creating change challenges the routine of always considering the student the primary client. If the student does not perceive a need for change, his

commitment to the process may be limited; therefore, it may be more efficient to work to change the behavior of others involved in the situation.

When working with students through a solution-focused brief counseling model, the school counselor expresses belief in the students' ability to make changes by utilizing their own resources. The students' strengths are highlighted and channeled toward their behavioral goals. Davis and Osborn (1999) describe other solution-focused brief counseling assumptions and their applicability in schools. They describe the technique where the counselor rephrases the presenting problem in a normalizing manner rather than a pathological one. This may foster a sense of the issue being more solvable. They also relate the need to identify times when the problem is not occurring (exceptions). From the identification of exceptions, efforts are made to find the behaviors that can make a change possible. Also, through the promotion of exceptions, the idea that solutions are always taking place is highlighted. Cooperation is also viewed as an essential element of solution-focused counseling. By aligning with the student, the counselor provides an opportunity for the student to feel heard and understood.

Metcalf (1995) provides some guidelines for using solution-focused approaches in schools. She relates that it is not necessary to promote insight or uncover the underlying issues related to the problem in order to be helpful. While insight is often interesting, it does not usually tell us how to change. She goes on to say that knowing all of the details about a situation does not necessarily offer more information for goal development. Metcalf further relates that students are more motivated when they define their own goals. She also suggests that it is important to allow students to relate the concerns through their own world-views to lessen resistance and enhance understanding. Murphy (1994) points out that allowing the student to speak frankly does not imply counselor agreement.

Bonnington (1993) states that the main objective of counseling is to assist the client in doing something differently and that with solution-focused brief therapy, the focus is shifted from the problem to the solutions which already

exist. He points out the solution-focused belief that only minimal change is necessary because even a small alteration creates a system for further change.

Beyond the school counselor's office, the solution-focused approach offers a perspective that has utility across the school environment. Administrators, teachers, students, and parents can address issues through a collaborative solution oriented communication (Davis & Osborn, 1999; Kral, 1995; Metcalf, 1995; Paull & McGrevin, 1996). The use of a present and future oriented, competency-based attitude in committee meetings, correspondence, and personal interactions sets the stage for solution gathering as opposed to problem preoccupation. This concept of developing an organization-wide approach is also suggested by Vaughn, Young, Webster, and Thomas (1996). They relate that the most vital element to the successful application of a solution-focused philosophy is for it to be endorsed at all levels of the organization.

There is very limited research available regarding the use of solution-focused brief counseling in the school setting. Mostert, Johnson, and Mostert (1997) investigated whether solution-focused brief counseling may be helpful in offering a more practical and effective approach for school counselors in working with their students. In their initial exploratory study, the authors interviewed five school counselors who had been through training in solution-focused techniques. The interviews took place one year after the completion of the training in order to examine long-term effects of using solution-focused brief counseling techniques. The findings of the interviews indicated that the counselors felt that they were able to use the model with minimum initial training and ongoing professional support. They also indicated that it was their belief that solution-focused brief counseling has application with parents as well as students and also with other professionals for collective problem solving.

In a statewide outcome study in Pennsylvania, researchers looked at solution-focused brief counseling in group situations. LaFountain, Garner, and Eliason (1996) found that solution-focused counseling groups seemed to offer a program for goal attainment. The students involved in the groups with the

solution-focused counselors reported significantly higher self-esteem, self-perception, and ability to cope.

Littrell and Malia (1995) investigated the use of more traditional problem focused therapy(with and without homework tasks) and solution-focused therapy with high school students. They found that solution-focused therapy was as effective as the problem-focused approaches while taking less time and they acknowledged that this would seem promising for today's busy school counselors.

Summary

As the role of the school counselor has evolved, often much of their time has been devoted to non-counseling tasks. This has been a result of many things: district policy, state standards, administrator's assignments, training trends, and other such factors. The mental health needs of children today are more complex than ever and school counselors are a valuable mental health resource to students and their families.

Brief counseling models offer techniques for providing efficient counseling to students. Solution-focused brief counseling promotes the use of individual strengths and resources in an effort to change behaviors. This competency-based approach highlights times when the behavior is not occurring in order to recognize that the desired skills may be within the client's repertoire.

Research on solution-focused brief counseling has been limited but favorable. Investigation into the use of solution-focused approaches in the school setting has been even more limited, especially at the elementary level. The view of school counselors regarding its use has not been broadly investigated. School counselors are given the responsibility of assisting students with various social/emotional concerns. It is important to investigate the perceptions of school counselors regarding the usefulness of solution-focused brief counseling in the school setting, which has been the focus of this study.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the research methodology of this study. It outlines the selection of subjects, details the instrumentation, describes the data collection method, and explains the form of analysis used with the collected information.

Population

The population for this study was elementary school counselors in Virginia who have received training in solution-focused brief counseling. The school counselors are all masters level, Department of Education endorsed public elementary school employees. To achieve full endorsement as a school counselor in the state of Virginia, candidates must: 1) earn a master's degree, which includes 200 hours of practical experience, from an approved counselor education program and 2) have completed two years of full time teaching or school guidance and counseling experience (Virginia Department of Education, 1998). There are seven school districts that have offered their school counselors training by the same trainer(s) in this approach. This one-day training was offered between 1994 and 1997 and was generally the same in all systems with some offering a follow-up session. Erin Johnson, M.Ed., the workshop leader, reports that the training included a review of the model's background and development along with a brief review of the theories which advanced it. Solution-focused brief counseling assumptions and techniques were reviewed and the trainer offered an opportunity for dialogue, role-plays, small group experiences, and questions (personal communication, March 16, 1999). In these school systems, there are approximately 112 school counselors working in the elementary schools.

Instrumentation

The instrument for this study was a survey (Appendix A) developed by the researcher. It contained a variety of questions with forced choice, open-ended,

rank order, and Likert-style responses. The sources for generation of the questions were the solution-focused brief therapy literature and the available information on the role and function of elementary school counselors. There was a section for determining demographic information of the respondents. A pilot study (Appendix B) was completed to assess content validity. Feedback was solicited from three practicing elementary school counselors not to be included in the actual research group and was also gained from the members of the investigator's doctoral committee. This committee was comprised of three counselor educators, one professor of educational research and statistics, and one supervisor of guidance and counseling services for a school system.

The questionnaire (Appendix A) was comprised of several sections, each addressing one of the proposed research questions. They were presented as follows:

Research Question 1. Do elementary school counselors believe that solution-focused brief counseling techniques are important in use with children?

Part 1 of the survey contained Likert-style questions to determine whether school counselors believe that specific techniques that are germane to solution-focused brief counseling are appropriate for use with children. Beliefs are defined as the person's current perception of reality (Dillman, 1978). An attitude is described as assessment of the value of and feeling toward persons, groups, or other objects which are learned through experience and are relative constant over time (Vogt, 1993). The respondents were asked to rate on two separate four-point Likert scales their view of the importance of specific solution-focused brief counseling strategies and their personal use of these techniques.

Research Question 2. Do elementary school counselors believe that solution-focused brief counseling strategies are useful with particular student issues in individual and/or group counseling situations in a school setting?

Part 2 of the questionnaire was comprised of a listing of potential student issues. Beside each of these items, the school counselor was asked to denote the situations where solution-focused brief counseling would likely be effective.

The respondents were also asked to indicate which issues they believe are most effectively addressed by solution-focused brief counseling strategies.

Research Question 3. What are elementary school counselors' attitudes about training in solution-focused brief counseling techniques?

Part 3 of the survey was made up of Likert-style, rank-order, and forced choice questions. The school counselors were asked to indicate their perceived level of familiarity with solution-focused brief counseling and their desire for ongoing edification in this area.

Research Question 4. In what instances or situations do elementary school counselors believe that solution-focused brief counseling philosophies are applicable within the overall school setting?

Part 4 of the questionnaire consisted of two open-ended questions. The school counselors were asked to indicate whether they believe that solution-focused brief counseling philosophies would be effective in situations within the school setting beyond counseling such as in enhancing group dynamics of committee meetings or in more effective interactions with colleagues. A space for comment and/or other situations where these approaches may be applicable was provided.

Demographic Information. Part 5 of the survey collected information about the respondents. The forced choice items served to provide information about the characteristics of the sample, such as years of employment in the field, highest degrees earned, estimated enrollment at the school they serve, and percent of time spent on particular activities.

Interviews. Within the Questionnaire, the school counselors had an opportunity to indicate their willingness to participate in a follow-up interview. Upon receipt of all returned surveys, several school counselors were selected for a brief follow-up interview (Appendix H). Originally the selection was to include three to five school counselors who were found to show a positive attitude toward the use of solution-focused brief counseling in the school setting as well as three to five who were less positive in their attitude toward this approach. No returned surveys showed particularly negative responses; therefore, follow-up interviews

were conducted with all eight respondents who expressed interest and consent for contact.

Pilot Study

The pilot questionnaire was distributed to three elementary school counselors who are presently employed in Virginia elementary schools, but who were not among the potential research sample, for review and feedback. In general, the three respondents indicated that the layout and the overall appearance of the survey were satisfactory and that no particular items were offensive or should be deleted or added. They also all suggested that the cover letter to accompany the survey was clear. All respondents indicated that Part 1 was too complex and therefore the wording was changed for clarity and reduction of length. This involved changing the phrase "the utility and the importance" to "the use and the importance". To shorten each item of this section, the phrase "is an effective technique for working with children" was omitted from individual item prompts and the phrase "working with children" in the directions was printed in bold letters. After two of the respondents suggested a dislike for lengthy rank ordering tasks, Part 2 of the survey was changed to marking yes/no responses beside each item. No alterations were made to Parts 3 and 4 at this point as all reviewers made positive comments about the brevity and clarity of these sections. The questionnaire was also given to the investigator's doctoral committee for examination and comment. Further changes were made to the questionnaire in Part 1 where a "don't know" column was added for each item to both scales. Two separate issue listings were created so that the respondents could rate the effectiveness of solution-focused brief counseling on these issues through both an individual and a group counseling context in Part 2. Also, an item was added to the end of both listings for the counselors to indicate if they "do not recall enough information to respond". It was also recommended that a yes/no item be added to Part 3 regarding the respondents' interest in a supervision opportunity in solution-focused brief counseling. Part 4 was split into two separate questions concerning how a solution-focused brief counseling approach

has changed the respondents' work with both children and adults beyond the counseling office. In the demographics section, it was suggested that items be included to ask the length of the respondents' training experience and when the training was conducted.

Data Collection

A letter to the superintendents (Appendix C) of the seven school systems to be targeted was sent, requesting permission to survey the school counselors in their district. The request was accompanied by a letter of support for the study from the solution-focused brief counseling trainer (Appendix D), a copy of the questionnaire (Appendix A), and a self-addressed and stamped response postcard (Appendix E). The questionnaire along with a cover letter (Appendix F) and the informed consent document (Appendix I) for each participating school counselor was sent to the contact persons indicated on the response cards after they were returned from the superintendents confirming permission.

The cover letter related the purpose of the study; stated the importance of responding; and reviewed the assurance of the confidentiality of the responses. A self-addressed stamped envelope was included for mailing purposes. Two weeks later a reminder postcard (Appendix G) was sent with a section thanking them if they had already mailed the questionnaire back to the researcher. Three weeks after the initial mailing, a second survey package was mailed to those who had yet made no response.

Interview Procedure

Interviews were conducted as a follow-up to the questionnaire to provide more comprehensive appreciation of the survey information and to offer the opportunity for the respondents to expand upon their answers. It has been stated that school counselors, despite excessive caseloads and extraneous duties, are the most consistent link that today's school children have to mental health services (Lockhart & Key, 1998). Elementary school counselors need a counseling approach that allows for the cognitive and psychological

developmental levels of children and that promotes the use of individual strengths and resources (Kral, 1995). The follow-up interview format was employed to provide an opportunity for school counselors who have received training in solution-focused brief counseling to voice their perceptions stemming from their knowledge of this approach.

Those elementary school counselors selected for interviews were contacted by telephone. With their permission, the interviews were audio-taped. The researcher posed the predetermined open-ended questions (Appendix H) and prompted the respondents for further explanation of topics.

The investigator compared interview responses of the school counselors according to the questionnaire results with consideration of similarity and difference in responses being highlighted.

Method of Analysis

As was indicated to the respondents, all results are reported in summary form without specific analysis linked to respondent, school system, or specific school. School systems are not identified by name in the summary text. The data analysis was descriptive in nature. Each section was analyzed as follows:

Part One. Means and standard deviation were calculated across all respondents' ratings on the Likert scale items. In this section, the Likert scale responses were assigned a number for each selection as follows: one for "Do not use" to four "Use very often" on one scale and one for "Not at all important" to four for "Very important" on the other scale. These were applied to each item. To make interpretation easier, the responses were recoded as follows:

Use

	Do not use at all			Use very often	Don't Know
Value	1	2	3	4	0
Recoded Value	-2	-1	1	2	0

Importance

	Not at all important		Very important		Don't Know
Value	1	2	3	4	0
Recoded Value	-2	-1	1	2	0

Part Two. The responses to the items of this section were tallied for yes and no responses for all questionnaires. More than half of the school counselors did not denote the issues that they believed were most effectively addressed by solution-focused brief counseling techniques, so no analysis of this information was conducted.

Part Three. The responses of this section were summed across all respondents. A listing of responses noted in part C of this section was generated.

Part Four. The responses to the open-ended questions were examined for common themes and their frequencies were tallied.

Part Five. The characteristic information of this section was tallied and summarized across the complete sample.

Chapter 4

RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter summarizes the analysis of the data collected through this study. It highlights the perceptions of Virginia elementary school counselors regarding the use of solution-focused brief counseling in the school setting. These perceptions were determined through the responses to the questionnaire and the follow-up interviews.

Response Rate

Seven Virginia school superintendents were contacted through a direct mailing to request permission to distribute the questionnaire regarding solution-focused brief counseling in the school setting to the elementary school counselors in their systems. These school systems have offered a training opportunity in solution-focused brief counseling to their school counselors within recent years. There are potentially 101 elementary schools that are served by school counselors who participated in this training. Of the seven superintendents contacted, four responded yes, one distributed the surveys directly to the elementary school principals for their consideration, and one declined involvement. One system did not respond to the request for participation in the research. In the system where the decision to participate was left to the ten elementary school principals, six responded yes, two declined involvement, and two made no response. The five participating school systems appear to have limited commonality. they are in general non-urban and yet none are totally rural. In total, 75 surveys were distributed to school counselors. Fifty-one questionnaires were returned which resulted in a response rate of 68.0 percent of the potential population.

Survey Results

Part 1

Responses to Part 1 of the survey provided information about the perceptions of elementary school counselors regarding the use of solution-focused brief counseling strategies with children and their perceptions of the importance of the particular strategies. Twelve solution focused brief counseling strategies were listed for the respondents to rate with regard to use and importance on separate Likert-style scales. Means and standard deviations for each item are presented for use and importance (see Table 1) .

Use. The highest mean ratings on the Likert-style scale for use of solution-focused brief counseling are: (g) using compliments to acknowledge strengths, solutions, and what is working (1.92) and (f) using the student's own language in rephrasing issues or stating possible goals (1.75) . Relatively high ratings were also noted for: (a) identifying what works and focusing on these strengths (1.65) and (b) reframing and normalizing events and behaviors.

Lower mean ratings were indicated on the following items: (k) using "scaling questions" to highlight progress toward a goal (0.65); (l) using "scaling questions" to illustrate willingness to make an effort to work for the accomplishment of a stated goal (0.61); and (i) using some form of the "miracle question" to maximize possibilities for change (0.57).

Importance. The highest mean ratings on the scale which considered the school counselor's perception of the importance of the particular solution-focused brief counseling techniques are the following: (g) using compliments to acknowledge strengths, solutions, and what is working (1.90); (a) identifying what works and focusing on these strengths (1.80); and (f) using the student's own language in rephrasing issues or stating possible goals (1.75). Also, relatively high ratings were earned on these scales: (d) mutual definition of goals (1.67); (b) reframing and normalizing events and behaviors (1.59); and (e) promoting the awareness of the "ripple effect" that one's behavior has on others (1.55).

The items earning lower mean ratings on the importance scale were (i) using some form of the "miracle question" to maximize possibilities for change and (l) using "scaling questions" to illustrate willingness to make an effort to work for the accomplishment of a stated goal. The mean rating for both these scales was 0.88.

Table 1 . Elementary School Counselor Rating for Use and Importance of Solution Focused Brief Counseling with Children

Item	Use		Importance	
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
a. identifying what works and focusing on these strengths.	1.65	0.48	1.80	0.40
b. reframing and normalizing events and behaviors	1.51	0.70	1.59	0.61
c. limiting labeling of behaviors.	1.08	1.07	1.24	0.81
d. mutual definition of goals.	1.43	0.78	1.67	0.48
e. promoting the awareness of the “ripple effect” that one’s behavior has on others.	1.45	0.78	1.55	0.70
f. using the student’s own language in rephrasing issues or stating possible goals.	1.75	0.56	1.75	0.70
g. using compliments to acknowledge strengths, solutions and what is working.	1.92	0.27	1.90	0.30
h. using “exception questions” to elicit acknowledgement that the problem is not always occurring.	0.82	0.99	1.06	0.88
i. using some form of the “miracle question” to maximize possibilities for change.	0.57	1.08	0.88	0.86
j. using “relationship questions” to assist in the awareness that there are possibly other perspectives.	0.96	0.85	1.16	0.64
k. using “scaling questions to highlight progress toward a goal	0.65	1.11	0.92	0.89
l. using “scaling questions” to illustrate willingness to make an effort to work for the accomplishment of a stated goal.	0.61	1.13	0.88	0.93

The frequency of response to particular items with regard to use of solution-focused brief counseling techniques by elementary school counselors can be seen in Table 2. The highest percentage of school counselors indicated (g) using compliments to acknowledge strengths, solutions, and what is working (92.2%) and (f) using the student's own language in rephrasing issues or stating possible goals (78.4%) very often in their counseling repertoire. The following techniques were indicated to be used to some degree: (a) identifying what works and focusing on these strategies (100%); (g) using compliments to acknowledge strengths, solutions, and what is working (100%); and (f) using the student's own language in rephrasing issues or stating possible goals (98.0%). Also used to some degree by the counselors were: (b) reframing and normalizing events or behaviors (96.1%); (e) promoting the awareness of the "ripple effect" that one's behavior has on others (95.2%); and (d) mutual definition of goals (94.1%). The highest percentage of "don't know" responses was indicated on item (i) using some form of the "miracle question" to maximize possibilities for change (11.8%). The school counselors tended to indicate little or no use of the techniques listed in items (i) using some form of the "miracle question" to maximize possibilities for change (25.5%), (k) using "scaling questions" to highlight progress toward a goal (27.5%), and (l) using "scaling questions" to illustrate willingness to make an effort to work for the accomplishment of a stated goal (27.5%).

Table 2. Percent of Elementary School Counselors Choosing Each Item Regarding Use of Solution Focused Brief Counseling Techniques When Working With Children.

Item	Do Not Use At All		Use Very Often		Don't Know
	1	2	3	4	DK
a. identifying what works and focusing on these strategies.	0	0	35.3	64.7	0
b. reframing and normalizing events or behaviors.	0	1.9	37.3	58.8	0
c. limiting labeling of behaviors.	2.0	11.8	37.3	43.1	5.9
d. mutual definition of goals.	0	5.9	39.2	54.9	0
e. promoting the awareness of the “ripple effect” that one’s behavior has on others.	0	5.9	37.3	56.9	0
f. using the student’s own language in rephrasing issues or stating possible goals.	0	2.0	19.6	78.4	0
g. using compliments to acknowledge strengths, solutions, and what is working.	0	0	7.8	92.2	0
h. using “exception questions” to elicit the acknowledgment that the problem is not always occurring.	0	17.6	52.9	23.5	5.9
i. using some form of the “miracle question” to maximize possibilities for change.	0	25.5	43.1	19.6	11.8
j. using “relationship questions” to assist in the awareness that there are possibly other perspectives.	0	9.8	58.8	23.5	7.8
k. using “scaling questions” to highlight progress toward a goal.	0	27.5	49.0	21.6	2.0
l. using “scaling questions” to illustrate willingness to make an effort to work for the accomplishment of a stated goal.	2.0	25.5	51.0	19.6	2.0

The perceptions of the school counselors with regard to the importance of particular solution-focused brief counseling techniques are presented in Table 3. Most of the elementary school counselors surveyed (90.2%) rated item (g) using compliments to acknowledge strengths, solutions, and what is working. Other items rated as very important were (a) identifying what works and focusing on these strategies as very important (80.4%) and item (f) using the student's own language in rephrasing issues or stating possible goals (78.4%). Three of the solution-focused brief counseling techniques were found to be either important or very important by all fifty-one of the school counselors surveyed. These techniques were represented by items (a) identifying what works and focusing on these strategies, (d) mutual definition of goals, and (g) using compliments to acknowledge strengths, solutions, and what is working. Eight of the twelve solution-focused brief counseling techniques that were listed as items were rated by at least ninety percent or more of the school counselors as important to some degree. The highest percentage of "don't know" responses was indicated on item (i) using some form of the "miracle question" to maximize possibilities for change (13.7%). Two percent of the school counselors indicated that item (c) limiting labeling of behaviors was not at all important. The techniques (l) using "scaling questions" to illustrate willingness to make an effort to work for the accomplishment of a stated goal and item (k) using scaling questions to highlight progress toward a goal were rated by 15.7 percent and 13.7 percent, respectively, as somewhat less important. Also, several counselors indicated that item (h) using "exception questions" to elicit the acknowledgment that the problem is not always occurring (9.8%) and item (i) using some form of the "miracle question" to maximize possibilities for change (9.8%) were, to some degree, not important.

Table 3. Percent of Elementary School Counselors Choosing Each Item Regarding Importance of Solution-Focused Brief Counseling Techniques When Working With Children

Item	Not At All Important				Very Important	Don't Know
	1	2	3	4	DK	
c. identifying what works and focusing on these strategies.	0	0	19.6	80.4	0	
d. reframing and normalizing events or behaviors.	0	2.0	35.3	62.7	0	
c. limiting labeling of behaviors.	2.0	2.0	51.0	39.2	5.9	
d. mutual definition of goals.	0	0	33.3	66.7	0	
m. promoting the awareness of the “ripple effect” that one’s behavior has on others.	0	3.9	33.3	62.7	0	
n. using the student’s own language in rephrasing issues or stating possible goals.	0	2.0	19.6	78.4	0	
o. using compliments to acknowledge strengths, solutions, and what is working.	0	0	9.8	90.2	0	
p. using “exception questions” to elicit the acknowledgment that the problem is not always occurring.	0	9.8	52.9	31.4	5.9	
q. using some form of the “miracle question” to maximize possibilities for change.	0	9.8	54.9	21.6	13.7	
r. using “relationship questions” to assist in the awareness that there are possibly other perspectives.	0	2.0	62.7	27.5	7.8	
s. using “scaling questions” to highlight progress toward a goal.	0	13.7	62.7	21.6	2.0	
t. using “scaling questions” to illustrate willingness to make an effort to work for the accomplishment of a stated goal.	0	15.7	60.8	21.6	2.0	

Part 2 - Checklists of Specific Student Issues

Part Two of the survey provided information about what particular student issues elementary school counselors believe can be effectively addressed using solution-focused brief counseling strategies. In this section, the responses of the school counselors were tallied for each student issue for both individual counseling and group counseling situations. The tallies were then converted into percentages of the total respondents (N = 51). See Table 4 for a summary of the school counselors' perception regarding the use of solution focused counseling strategies in individual counseling situations and consult Table 5 for the data on use of these strategies in group counseling situations.

Individual Counseling Situations. The elementary school counselors indicated their perceptions of the effectiveness of solution focused brief counseling strategies with regard to fourteen listed student issues. The highest frequency of response (90.1% or above) was noted in the counselors' responses to six particular student issues. Those issues are: (a) academic issues/homework/study skills (96.1%); (c) interactions with adults (92.1%); (d) peer interaction (92.1%); (e) discipline issues/temper tantrums/anger management (92.1%); (n) peer pressure (90.2%); and (b) behavior management (90.1%) . The lowest frequency of response was noted on the following student issues: (m) substance abuse (29.4%); (j) dealing with abuse (31.4%); and (i) grief (33.3%) .

The elementary school counselors were also requested to indicate any student issues that they felt solution-focused brief counseling strategies would not be effective in addressing. For individual counseling situations, the highest response frequency was noted for issues of (i) grief (39.2%) and (h) depression/suicide ideation (35.3%) .

Group Counseling Situation. The school counselors also were requested to indicate their perceptions of the effectiveness of solution-focused brief counseling strategies in a group counseling context for the fourteen student issues. The highest response frequencies were indicated for the following issues: (d) peer interactions (94.1%); (a) academic issues/homework/study skills

(92.2%); (b) behavior management (86.3%); and (c) interactions with adults (86.3%). The next highest frequency of responses for dealing with students in group situations were for items (n) peer pressure (80.4%); (e) discipline issues/temper tantrums/anger management (80.4%); and (l) dealing with transition(new school, changes in families (78.4%). The issues earning the lowest frequency of response regarding effectiveness were (h) depression/suicidal ideation (27.5%), (m) substance abuse (21.6%), and (j) dealing with abuse (17.6%).

When considering which of the fourteen student issues the school counselors perceived solution-focused brief counseling to be not effective through a group counseling context, several of the issues earned frequencies of 31.4 percent or more. These specific issues were: (g) separation or loss (31.4%); (m) substance abuse (31.4%); (i) grief (35.3%); (j) dealing with abuse (37.3%); and (h) depression/suicidal ideation (39.2%).

Table 4. Percent of Elementary School Counselors Who Indicated Solution-Focused Brief Counseling Strategies Were Perceived As Effective or Not Effective with Particular Issues in Individual Counseling Situations.

Student Issue	Effective	Not Effective	No Response
a. academic issues/homework/study skills	96.1	0	3.9
b. behavior management	90.1	7.8	2.1
c. interactions with adults	92.1	2.0	5.9
d. peer interactions	92.1	0	7.9
e. discipline issues/temper tantrums/anger management	92.1	0	7.9
f. family problems/divorce/step families	62.7	17.6	19.7
g. separation or loss	43.1	31.4	25.5
h. depression/suicidal ideation	45.1	35.3	19.6
i. grief	33.3	39.2	27.5
j. dealing with abuse	31.4	33.3	35.3
k. school refusal	64.7	13.7	21.6
l. dealing with transition(new school, changes in families)	86.3	2.0	11.7
m. substance abuse	29.4	33.3	37.3
n. peer pressure	90.2	0	9.8
o. other	0	0	0

Table 5. Percent of Elementary School Counselors Who Indicated Solution-Focused Brief Counseling Strategies Were Perceived As Effective or Not Effective With Particular Issues in Group Counseling Situations.

Student Issue	Effective	Not Effective	No Response
a. academic issues/homework/study skills	92.2	2.0	5.8
b. behavior management	86.3	5.9	7.8
c. interactions with adults	86.3	0	13.7
d. peer interactions	94.1	0	5.9
e. discipline issues/temper tantrums/anger management	80.4	9.8	9.8
f. family problems/divorce/step families	68.6	13.7	17.7
g. separation or loss	41.2	31.4	27.4
h. depression/suicidal ideation	27.5	39.2	33.3
i. grief	35.3	35.3	29.4
j. dealing with abuse	17.6	37.3	45.1
k. school refusal	51.0	17.6	31.4
m. dealing with transition(new school, changes in families)	78.4	5.9	15.7
m. substance abuse	21.6	31.4	47.0
n. peer pressure	80.4	2.0	17.6
o. other	0	0	0

Part 3 - Perception of Training in Solution-Focused Brief Counseling

The responses to this section provided information regarding the school counselor's perception of their training in solution-focused brief counseling. They rated their perceived proficiency in this approach (question a) and stated the probability that they would elect to pursue further training (question b). They also indicated if they had already pursued additional training in solution-focused brief counseling (question c) and what elements of the training provided by the school system were most useful to them (question d). Finally, they were asked if they believed that they would be likely to participate in a supervision opportunity in this approach (question e). The results of this section are found in Table 6.

Of the 50 school counselors who responded to question (a) "How proficient are you in solution-focused brief counseling?", no respondents indicated "very proficient" or "not proficient". The largest percentage (80.0%) of respondents indicated that they believed that they are "somewhat proficient" in this approach. "Limited proficiency" was indicated by 18.0 percent of the school counselors.

Question (b) "If more training in solution-focused brief counseling was available to you, would you pursue it?" resulted in the following information received from 51 respondents. Two (2.0) percent of the elementary school counselors responded that they would "definitely not" pursue additional training in solution-focused brief counseling if it was available to them. Two (2.0) percent of the counselors also indicated that they would "probably not" be likely to seek further training. However, the majority (96.1%) of the counselors indicated some probability of participating in additional training opportunities if available. The following shows the response rate for the favorable options: "definitely" (41.2%) and "probably" (54.9%) .

In response to question (c) "Have you sought more training in solution-focused brief counseling since the initial training offered by the school system?" a slight majority of the 48 respondents indicated "no" (54.2%). An affirmative response was supported by 45.8 percent of the school counselors.

Question (d) requested that the school counselors rank the presentation form used in the school system offered training on solution-focused brief counseling which they perceived as most useful (one) to them. According to the 51 responses, case scenarios (27.5%) and demonstrations (27.5%) were found to be the most useful form of presentation during the trainings. Role plays (15.7%) and videos of counseling sessions (15.7%) were indicated to be the next highest frequency of response as the first ranked option by the counselors. The presentation forms most often selected as second choice were demonstrations (25.4%) and case scenarios (21.6%). Although small group experience was seldom indicated to be the most useful (3.9%) presentation form, it was on several occasions chosen for second choice (11.8%) or third choice (27.5%) . Other forms which earned low ratings as first choice were group dialogue (3.9%) and question and answer segment (3.9%) .

The final question (e) of this section was included to determine the likelihood of the school counselors participating in a supervision opportunity in solution-focused brief counseling if it were available to them. Of the fifty school counselors responding, 40.0 percent indicated they would be interested in supervision in this approach to counseling. A larger percentage (54.0%) indicated no interest in this, while 6.0 percent of those responding noted that they were unsure at this time.

Table 6 . Percent of Elementary School Counselors Regarding their Perceptions of Training Needs in Solution-Focused Brief Counseling.

Item	Percentage of Response								
a. How proficient are you in solution focused brief counseling?(N=50)	Very Proficient	Somewhat Proficient	Limited Proficiency	Not Proficient					
	0	82.0	18.0	0					
	Definitely	Probably	Probably Not	Definitely Not					
b. If more training in solution focused brief counseling was available to you, would you pursue it?(N=51)	41.2	54.9	2.0	2.0					
c. Have you sought more training in Solution Focused Brief Counseling since the initial training offered by the school system? (N=48)	Yes		No						
	45.8		54.2						
d. During the school system offered training, which of these did you perceive as most useful?(rank 1 st most effective, etc.) (N=51)	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th		
Role Plays	15.7	13.7	7.8	5.9	2.0	0	0		
Case Scenarios	27.5	21.6	11.8	13.7	2.0	0	0		
Demonstrations	27.5	25.4	11.8	5.9	2.0	0	0		
Videos of Counseling Sessions	15.7	5.9	3.9	2.0	2.0	0	2.0		
Small Group Experiences	3.9	11.8	27.5	7.8	3.9	3.9	0		
Group Dialogue	3.9	3.9	15.7	17.6	5.9	9.8	2.0		
Question and Answer Segment	3.9	9.8	11.8	7.8	21.6	2.0	7.8		
				Yes		No		Unsure	
e. Would you participate in a supervision opportunity in solution focused brief counseling? (N = 50)				40.0		54.0		6.0	

Part 4 - Use of Solution-Focused Brief Counseling Philosophies Beyond Counseling Situations

Part four of the survey ascertained the perception of the elementary school counselors regarding the use of solution-focused brief counseling philosophies in school situations beyond counseling. In this section, the responses of the school counselors were noted and tallied for each situation where the counselor listed use of the solution-focused brief counseling philosophies. The tallies were then converted to percentages of the total fifty-one respondents (N = 51). Table 7 contains a summary of findings of these questions.

Question (a) of part 4 asked "In what ways has having an awareness of the solution-focused philosophy changed your interactions with students in situations other than formal counseling settings?". Twenty-two (43.1%) respondents indicated that their work in peer mediation had been altered by applying solution-focused counseling philosophies. Several other situations were indicated at lower frequencies: Discipline (5.9%), anger management (3.9%), conflict resolution (3.9%), development of behavior contracts (2.0%), behavior management (2.0%), equity groups (2.0%), and casual interactions (2.9%).

Question (b) of this section was "Since solution-focused philosophies are non-pathological and competency-based, in what general school situations(beyond counseling) do you believe that they can be utilized?". The most frequent response indicated the use of solution-focused counseling philosophies in parent conferences (78.4%). The next highest ratings were noted for the responses crisis intervention (25.5%) and faculty meeting (25.5%). Several other situations were indicated at lower response rates: teacher consultations/support meetings (9.8%); child study meetings (9.8%); site based meetings (3.9%); and problem solving/brain storming meetings (3.9%). Listed at the lowest ratings were consultations with administrators (2.0%), advisory committees (2.0%), faculty conflict (2.0%), parent/child conflict resolution (2.0%), teacher/child conflict resolution (2.0%), and new student orientation (2.0%).

**Table 7 . Frequencies and Percentages for Elementary School Counselor
Regarding the Use of Solution-Focused Brief Counseling
Philosophies Beyond the Counseling Setting.**

Perceptions	Frequency	Percent
a. Changes in Interactions with Students In Situations other than Through Formal Counseling (N=51)		
Peer Mediation	22	43.1
Anger Management	2	3.9
Discipline	3	5.9
Development of Behavior Contracts	1	2.0
Behavior Management	1	2.0
Conflict Resolution	2	3.9
Equity Groups	1	2.0
Casual Interactions	1	2.0
b. General School Situations(beyond Counseling)in Which Solution Focused Brief Counseling Philosophies Can Be Used. (N=51)		
Parent Conferences	40	78.4
Crisis Intervention	13	25.5
Faculty Meetings	13	25.5
Teacher Consultations/Support Mtgs	5	9.8
Child Study Meetings	5	9.8
Site Based Meetings	2	3.9
Consultations with Administrators	1	2.0
Problem Solving/Brain Storming Mtgs	2	3.9
Advisory Committees	1	2.0
Faculty Conflict	1	2.0
Parent/Child Conflict Resolution	1	2.0
Teacher/Child Conflict Resolution	1	2.0
New Student Orientation	1	2.0

Part 5 - Demographics

Part 5 of the survey provided information about the respondents and the schools they serve. Specific results can be reviewed in Table 8. Forty-seven (92.2%) of the fifty-one respondents were female while four (7.8%) were male. The majority (78.4) of the school counselors reported eleven or more years of experience in the field of education. Those with sixteen years or more made up 39.2 percent of those surveyed while there were 39.2 percent of the respondents who reported eleven to fifteen years of experience. There were 11.8 percent with six to ten years of experience in the field of education and 9.8 percent with fewer than six years to their credit. As far as their experience as school counselors, the highest frequency of response was noted for the six to ten years bracket where 49.0 percent of the respondents were noted. Those with eleven to fifteen years of counseling experience made up 19.6 percent of the respondents and 15.7 percent reported sixteen or more years on the job. Newer school counselors with fewer than six years of experience made up 15.7 percent of those surveyed. The majority of the school counselors earned their counseling degree between 1985 and 1994 (60.8%), while 25.5 percent of the respondents finished their counseling degree between 1975 and 1984. Four (7.8%) of the respondents indicated that they earned their counseling degree between 1995 and the present and three (5.9%) of the counselors finished their degrees prior to 1975. By far the majority of the respondents (94.1%) indicated that their highest degree earned was a Masters Degree while 3.9 percent were practicing with Doctorate Degrees. One respondent (2.0%) indicated the highest degree earned was an Educational Specialist Degree.

The estimated enrollment of the schools served by the respondents is reported in the next question of this section. The majority (52.0%) of the fifty respondents to this item indicated that they served schools with enrollment of more than 500 students. Thirty percent of the school counselors reported serving

schools with enrollment of 401 through 500. Eight percent of the respondents indicated serving 301 to 400 students in their schools and 10 percent were in the smaller schools serving 201 to 300 students. No respondent reported that their buildings had enrollment of less than 200 students. The next item on the survey asked the school counselors to indicate the number of school counselors assigned to their present school. The majority (62.7%) of the fifty-one respondents indicated that there was one full time counselor employed in their assigned school. One third (33.3%) of the school counselors surveyed reported that one full time counselor and one part time counselor were assigned to their building. One respondent (2.0%) indicated that there were two full time counselors in the school and one school counselor (2.0%) also reported that there were two part time counselors in the building.

The majority (91.8%) of the 49 school counselors indicated that they were assigned to only one school. Four (7.8%) reported that they were responsible for providing counseling services to two schools. None of the respondents were assigned to more than two schools. The majority (94.1%) of the schools served by the fifty-one school counselors responding to the survey were represented by kindergarten through fifth grades. Two (3.9%) of the school counselor served schools with kindergarten through second grades and one (2.0%) counselor was assigned to a school serving kindergarten through fourth grades.

The school counselors estimated the percent of their time typically spent in particular activities. Of the fifty school counselors who responded to this item, 30.0 percent indicated that they spend approximately 16 to 25 percent of their time in individual counseling activities, while 26.0% reported that they are involved in individual counseling 36 to 45 percent of the time. Additionally, 24.0 percent of the counselors reported 26 to 35 percent of their time sent in individual counseling activities. Only 4.0 percent reported spending between 6 and 15 percent of their time on this activity and no counselors reported spending less than 5 percent of their time in individual counseling with students. Group counseling activities comprised 6 to 15 percent of the counselors' time for 50.0 percent of the respondents. Thirty-two percent indicated spending 16 to 25

percent of their time in group counseling activities and 10.0 percent reported using 26 to 35 percent of their assigned time on group activities with students. Eight percent of the respondents indicated that they spend 5 percent or less in group counseling situations and no counselors reported spending more than 35 percent of their time in this activity. The majority (48.0%) of the school counselors spend less than 5 percent of their time on administrative duties, while 14.0 percent spend 6 to 15 percent of their time completing administrative activities. Two (4.0%) respondents indicated that they spend between 15 and 25 percent of their time on administrative activities, while none of the respondents reported spending more than 25 percent of their time on these types of activities. Guidance activities were reported to take between 6 and 15 percent of the counselors' time for 36.0 percent of the respondents. For thirty percent of the counselors' guidance activities were likely to take up 16 to 25 percent of their job time. The other school counselors indicated that guidance activities took 26 to 35 percent of the time for 24 percent of the respondents, 36 to 45 percent of the time for 6.0 percent, and over 45 percent of the time for 4.0 percent of the counselors. Paperwork and clerical concerns appeared to use less of most of the counselors' time. Fifty percent of the respondents indicated that they spent less than 5 percent of their time on paperwork and twenty-four percent reported spending 6 to 15 percent of their time with paperwork. Ninety percent of the counselors appear to spend less than 15 percent of their time in committee work. Forty-four percent indicated less than 5 percent of their time was spent in committee work while 28.0 percent noted 6 to 15 percent of their time in this activity. Parent conferences appear to take typically 15 percent of the counselors' time or less as suggested by 94 percent of the respondents. Fifty percent of them spend 6 to 15 percent of their time in parent conferences while forty-four percent spend less than 5 percent of their time in contact with the parents of students. Other activities that were indicated by the respondents as contributing to their work day were: testing/test coordinator - 6-15% of time (2.0%), 45% or more of time (2.0%); staff consultations - 6-15% of time (3.9%);

peer mediation coordinator - 6-15% of time (2.0%); correspondence - less than 5% of time (2.0%); and miscellaneous - 6-15% of time (2.0%).

The school counselors were next asked what was their exposure to solution-focused brief counseling during their counselor education training. Of the fifty-one counselors surveyed, forty-five responded to this question. The majority (51.1%) reported that they had no exposure to this approach during their training. Thirteen (28.9%) respondents indicated minimal exposure to solution-focused brief counseling while in training. The topic was reviewed to some degree in graduate level classes for 15.6 percent and 4.4 percent attended conference presentations while studying counselor education.

The school counselors were then asked through what format the majority of their information on solution-focused brief counseling has come. Of the fifty-one counselors responding to this item, 82.3 percent indicated that much of their knowledge about this topic has come from reading books on counseling. Another major source of information on the topic was the inservice provided by the school system as 80.4 percent of the counselors included this as one of the ways they acquired a majority of their information on solution-focused brief counseling. Other significant formats for accessing information on this topic were: conference presentation (43.1%), workshops (35.3%), and reading professional journals (27.5%). The school counselors seemed somewhat less likely to get their information on this topic through discussion with colleagues (17.4%), college courses (11.8) and listserve communications (5.9%).

The length of the training provided by the school systems was the next item. Only thirty-nine of the school counselors responded to this question; some indicated that they could not remember. Fifteen of the thirty-nine respondents indicated that their training lasted one day and 17.9 percent reported that theirs was a two-day training. Twelve of the school counselors reported that their training lasted several hours(2-4). Three (7.7%) respondents indicated that the training was one to one and a half hours, while two (5.1%) counselors reported three six-hour sessions. The last item on the survey also received a weak response rate. Thirty-six of the fifty-one respondents did not answer this item

regarding the year that their school system had provided the training opportunity in solution focused brief counseling. Again, several respondents noted that they could not recall. Of the thirty-six counselors responding, 38.9 percent reported that their training was offered in 1997. Twenty five percent indicated that they were trained in 1998 and 16.7 percent reported being trained in 1995. The remaining 11.1 and 8.3 percent were trained in 1999 and 1996, respectively.

Table 8 - Demographics

Characteristic	Frequency	Percent
Gender (N= 51)		
Female	47	92.2
Male	4	7.8
Years employed in the Education Field(N=51)		
0-5 years	5	9.8
6-10 years	6	11.8
11-15 years	20	39.2
16+ years	20	39.2
Years Employed as a School Counselor(N=51)		
0-5 years	8	15.7
6-10 years	25	49.0
11-15 years	10	19.6
16+ years	8	15.7
Year that Counseling Degree was Completed(N=51)		
1995 to present	4	7.8
1985-1994	31	60.8
1975-1984	13	25.5
Prior to 1975	3	5.9
Highest Degree Earned(N=51)		
Masters Degree	48	94.1
Educational Specialist	1	2.0
Doctorate	2	3.9
Estimated Enrollment of the School You Presently Serve(N=50)		
Less than 200	0	0
201-300	5	10.0
301-400	4	8.0
401-500	15	30.0
501+	26	52.0
Number of School Counselors Currently Assigned Your Present School(N=51)		
One Full Time	32	62.7
Two Full Time	1	2.0
One Full Time/ One Part Time	17	33.3
Two Part Time	1	2.0

Table 8 Demographics (Continued)

Characteristic		Frequency	Percent			
Number Of Schools to Which You Are Assigned(N=49)						
One		45	91.8			
Two		4	7.8			
More than Two		0	0			
Grade Levels Represented At Your School(N=51)						
Kindergarten through Fifth		48	94.1			
Kindergarten through Second		2	3.9			
Kindergarten through Fourth		1	2.0			
Percent of Time Spent in Particular Activities(N=50)						
	5% or Less	6-15%	16-25%	26-35%	36-45%	45% or More
Individual Counseling	0	4.0	30.0	24.0	26.0	16.0
Group Counseling	8.0	50.0	32.0	10.0	0	0
Administrative Duties	48.0	14.0	4.0	0	0	0
Guidance	0	36.0	30.0	24.0	6.0	4.0
Paperwork	50.0	24.0	0	0	0	0
Committee Work	44.0	28.0	8.0	0	0	0
Parent Conferences	44.0	50.0	0	0	0	0
Testing/Test Coordinator	0	2.0	0	0	0	2.0
Staff Consultations	0	3.9	0	0	0	0
Peer Mediation Coord.	0	2.0	0	0	0	0
Correspondence	2.0	0	0	0	0	0
Miscellaneous	0	2.0	0	0	0	0
During the Counselor's Counselor Education Training, What Was the Level of Exposure to Solution Focused Brief Counseling?(n=45)						
		Frequency		Percent		
None		23		51.1		
Minimal Amount("little, "not much")		13		28.9		
Conference Presentations		2		4.4		
Reviewed to Some Degree in Some Graduate Level Class		7		15.6		

Table 8 Demographics (Continued)

Characteristic	Frequency	Percent
Format of Information on Solution-Focused Brief Counseling(N=51)		
Inservice by School System	41	80.4
Reading Books on Counseling	44	82.3
Reading Professional Journals	14	27.5
Workshops	18	35.3
Conference Presentations	22	43.1
College Courses	6	11.8
Discussions with Colleagues	9	17.4
Listserv Communications	3	5.9
Length of School System Training(N=39)		
Two Days	7	17.9
One Day	15	38.5
Several Hours(2-4)	12	30.8
One to One and a Half Hours	3	7.7
3 Six Hour Sessions	2	5.1
Year School System Offered Training in Solution-Focused Brief Counseling (N = 36)		
1999	4	11.1
1998	9	25.0
1997	14	38.9
1996	3	8.3
1995	6	16.7

Follow-up Interviews

Follow-up interviews were conducted by telephone with eight of the respondents who agreed to be contacted. These interviews provided supplemental information about the topics covered in the questionnaire.

Question 1 - In what way(s) do you believe that solution-focused brief counseling is beneficial in working with elementary age children?

The most often offered response to this question indicated that school counselors perceive a solution-focused counseling approach to be beneficial due to the time constraints that they feel and the efficient use of time offered with this approach. Seven of the eight counselors interviewed suggested that this is one of the reasons why they find this approach beneficial. Examples of their comments are:

...if you can focus on, if they can identify and get to focus on a particular one little thing they can work on, they start kind of shaping their own behavior and developing a habit that's the most efficient use of time because in groups that I've found you know I mean sometimes just being reframed you just don't get it sometimes, you know.

In my setting cause I'm in a school setting, when I see kids on an individual basis it kind of needs to focus brief anyway. I think it's most beneficial in a setting like mine where if I was in like a treatment center setting or if I saw kids you know if I had my own practice that might be a little different, but I think it's more ideal in like a school setting.

For one thing, there's a time factor. We just don't have the time to bring in children as frequently as we want to to do regular counseling so trying to find a brief counseling solution or short focused solution is one that we really it has to work for us. I think everyone feels the same way too especially with SOLs testing and some activities that are going on for children.

Well, for one thing it's brief. I don't get a lot of time with kids, you know, especially with the SOLs. It's harder and harder to get them out of class at all.

Another response theme which was common among some of the respondents was the idea that solution-focused brief counseling strategies are effective with young children and highlight behavioral concerns in the "here and now". Some of their statements were:

Solution based, as I understand it and all, is focusing on particular behaviors, kind of the here and now and especially at that age I think uh you can't do any reflective stuff, pretty hard, and I think, you know, if you can focus on, if they can identify and you get the focus on one little thing they can work on, they start kind of shaping their own behavior and developing a habit and that's the most efficient use of time...

With elementary age and I want to decipher here that I feel it's very useful like with some of my second graders that are more advanced in their thinking and third grade, fourth grade, fifth grade. The other children it's a little too young, but what I like is like they will bring issues to me and I'll restate what they're saying...

Question 2 - In what way(s) do you believe that solution-focused brief counseling is not beneficial in working with elementary age children?

Several of the respondents indicated that they believed that children with certain issues may require a more extensive approach which offers more of an opportunity to delve more deeply into the dynamics of the concern. Samples of the comments made regarding this question are provided below:

I guess it depends on the issues that they are bringing, you know, if they're, although you know, I'm trying to think of kids who come in with deep chronic problems, you know, with alcoholic parents or some horrendous family thing that's going on. I think what I need to do then, in a lot of cases, is just listen, but then the time comes when they need some guidance on just how to cope through their day...

Well maybe, the one thing I think is we might assume something that might not be true too quickly without exploring issues a little bit more. It might be too that the child needs a lot longer to develop a relationship with the counselor.

I think a lot of time needs to be spent with a child who's very upset or in a very traumatized situation. Being able to just talk about their feelings and I'm not sure the standard format of solution focused allows for quite enough of that. So sometimes in those situations I choose not to use it.

Two of the school counselors did not view solution-focused brief counseling as beneficial with very young children. Their comments suggested concern that the children did not yet have the cognitive skills required for success.:

I feel that sometimes the cognitive level of understanding isn't there yet with very young children to understand the steps involved in the solution-focused process. I usually use a play therapy approach with younger kids.

With very young children it's got to be put on a very concrete level which is sometimes a challenge. So sometimes students don't respond very well to that.

Question 3 - In what specific counseling situations have you found solution-focused brief counseling most effective?

The most common response by the counselors to this question indicated that friendship and peer issues are often well addressed using solution-focused brief counseling strategies. The following are examples of their comments:

Well, I think sometimes it's developmental with the kids. I found that a lot of times there's peer/ interpersonal relations, you know, talking about how to be a friend. We kind of factor out and get them to understand, you know, what are friends to them and once you can identify again the behavior, then it becomes a practice issue.

Mainly dealing with friendship issues and dealing with academics. Putting a plan into effect that will help a child work through a particular subject that he is having trouble with or a particular skill area or study habits that's difficult for them. That's one way I think, too, they're dealing with friendship issues. We talk a lot about mediation and listening to one another and being able to use "I messages" and that sort of thing.

Solution-focused brief counseling was noted by one or more counselors during the interviews to be effective with several other issues. Some gave lists of issues for which they often use this approach.

When children come to me and when teachers send them to me. I do it with my divorced kids, I do it with a lot of, you know children trying to do better in the classroom grade-wise, that's very useful. But even just communication skills, you know, "I'm thinking this but I'm not saying it to my parents" .You know, we go through the whole thing about, "Well, if you did say it to your parents, how would it feel?" It's kind of goal setting in that way too.

In simple situations but the kids don't see it as so simple. Like mom and I had a fight. "We've been having fights in the morning." You know, "What's a better way? What are better choices you can make to avoid the fights?" "Well, I need to start getting out of bed on time," Things that are manageable like that.

Question 4 - In what specific counseling situations have you found solution- focused brief counseling least effective?

The counselors offered several issues which they indicated were less likely to be effectively addressed through a solution-focused brief counseling approach. One school counselor, however, indicated that she felt that a solution-focused brief counseling approach could be effective in any area if you were able to find the issue or behavior that the child wants to change instead of focusing on what the adults in the child's life are hoping to change. The following are examples of the comments made by counselors in response to question four.

I would say the impulsivity. The children that are ADHD...they can say I want to make changes in my behavior when their ADHD or ADD and I just think you know they don't have the focus, the carry through is just not there.

...like behavior modification. I think that takes a little more time, well, it takes a lot of time for like the reinforcement, but that's a little more long and drawn out.

I don't think it's as effective with children with more pathological issues. When you have, for example, you know kids with things like Asperger's Syndrome, you're not going to be able to use techniques like solution focused. The cognitive connection won't be there.

Well, again I would say with very young students if it's not put on a very concrete form or if the student doesn't understand why they're coming to see me, that they're coming to see me because they've had a traumatic situation or their behavior in the class indicates something is probably really wrong. With those students I don't think I'd use it.

I think dealing with anger/conflict issues. Learning new ways of handling anger, that takes a lot more practice, a lot more time to develop an individual plan for each child that's suitable for what they feel like they can do to handle those kinds of issues. Also, dealing with children that are from homes that have situations that are not easily changed or like divorce situations or grief situations, those kinds of things take a lot longer and you really want to see a student more because those issues don't go away quickly and there's not a quick solution for handling those types of situations.

Question 5 - Have you attempted to use solution-focused brief counseling concepts or strategies in school situations other than individual or group counseling (committee meetings, grade level meetings, parent conferences, etc.)?

In response to this question, the most common answer by the counselors indicated that they used solution-focused strategies during parent or teacher conferences in an attempt to reframe the statement away from a negative perspective. Situations other than counseling that were mentioned by the counselors as places where they had successfully integrated solution-focused concepts and techniques were Child Study Meetings, monitoring situations, team teaching, and discipline.

Well, I think it helps with communication skills and also with working with parents. A lot of parenting activities, things that you can give to someone, to a parent to help them deal with the situation with the child.

In parent/teacher conferences, I have done that a lot. I would say I've sometimes done it too on using those strategies with the Child Study Team. People have been stuck or everyone's sitting around complaining about the child and we're not really getting anywhere.

Actually, once in a while I have; it's come in handy with a parent or teacher who is kind of stuck on focusing on the negative behaviors of a child. To kind of help reframe things for them.

Oh, I always do it at conferencing with parents, always. Like I had a parent and a teacher going back and forth, well you failed here and you've done this, a lot of blame going on. It's like wait a minute, let's see where the problems are, where is the child, where do we want to take this child, you know, come up with a plan, you know, eventually they were on the same page together.

Question 6 - What do you see as the optimum training situation with regard to solution-focused brief counseling?

Several of the school counselors interviewed indicated that they felt the optimum training situation in solution-focused brief counseling would be an extended inservice opportunity or several workshops potentially where feedback was available. Also, two counselors reported that they would like to see solution-focused training available through graduate programs. One of the counselors indicated that she felt the trainings should be conducted separately for those serving elementary age students as opposed to older, secondary age students.

I would absolutely love to have inservice twice a year. One at the beginning of the year to kind of plan how we're gonna use it, then maybe somewhere in the middle of the year to say okay, how have we used it? how can we continue to use it? It's just a new, you know, people change, people's thinking gotta always kind of have it presented. I know I'd love to sit down and read any material that's out there but I don't have that time.

I would love to just have a one-way mirror in my room because Erin Johnson has done several workshops up here and we actually at one point had kind of looked into the idea of doing a sustained training with her, but she's just too far away...so we've invited her up for full day workshops...you just need more sustained practice like with anything you're trying to learn new.

I really believe that a series of workshops, rather than one workshop would be really good because you would be able to practice the types of counseling either in role play situation. You would be able to view videos, that sort of thing, maybe even be able to read some things during that time...I would like to see it extended for two or three evenings or maybe even a six-week course in solution centered counseling.

Well when my district had the initial training, we had counselors from every level in there. I think the optimal situation would be if we could have counselors working with the specific age groups. Like I'd like to see a training for just elementary counselors with things put down on the level of elementary; even though we still have a wide span, we have the very young kids.

Chapter 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This study was intended to investigate the perceptions of elementary school counselors in Virginia regarding the use of solution-focused brief counseling in the school setting. The following chapter provides a summary of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations for practice and future research.

Summary

Four research questions were addressed through this study:

1. Do elementary school counselors believe that solution-focused brief counseling techniques are important in use with children?
2. Do elementary school counselors believe that solution-focused brief counseling strategies are useful with particular student issues in individual and/or group counseling situations in a school setting?
3. What are elementary school counselor's attitudes about training in solution-focused brief counseling techniques?
4. In what instances/situations do elementary school counselors believe that solution-focused brief counseling philosophies are applicable within the overall school setting?

Question 1 – Do elementary school counselors believe that solution-focused brief counseling techniques are important in use with children?

The majority of the respondents indicated use of all of the listed solution-focused brief counseling techniques to at least some degree. Although still in use by the majority of the school counselors, some of the “questions” of solution focused brief counseling were indicated to be used less or not at all by some respondents. For example, “exception questions” were used less often by 17.6 percent of respondents, but no one indicated not using this technique at all.

Also, “miracle questions” were used less often by 25.5 percent of the school counselors and “scaling questions” were used less often (27.5%) to highlight progress toward a goal and less often (25.5%) or not at all (2.0%) to illustrate a student’s willingness to make an effort to work for a stated goal. School counselors were also more likely to indicate that they did not know how to respond on the questionnaire items involving the solution-focused brief counseling “questions”.

With regard to perceived importance of the specific solution-focused brief counseling techniques, the majority of the school counselors indicated that they viewed all of the techniques to be of some importance or very important. Again, the higher instance of perception of little importance for particular techniques was indicated on the “question” items. No school counselors indicated that they believed the “question” techniques were of no importance at all.

Question 2 – Do elementary school counselors believe that solution-focused brief counseling strategies are useful with particular student issues in individual or group counseling situations in the school setting?

With regard to individual counseling situations, the school counselors appear to find solution-focused brief counseling strategies effective with several student issues. The strongest agreement was indicated for the following student issues: academic issues/homework/ study skills, behavior management, interactions with adults, peer interactions, discipline issues/temper tantrums/anger management, dealing with transition(new school, changes in families), and peer pressure. Eighty-six percent or more of the respondents indicated that they believed that solution-focused brief counseling strategies effectively address these issues. More than half of the counselors surveyed also indicated that they believe these strategies are effective when addressing children with family problems/divorces/step families and school refusal.

Approximately one-third of the respondents indicated that they believe solution-focused brief counseling strategies are not effective in an individual counseling setting when attempting to address these issues: separation or loss(31.4%), depression/suicidal ideation(35.3%), grief(39.2%), dealing with

abuse(33.3%), and substance abuse(33.3%). Conversely, approximately one-third of the school counselors responded positively with regard to effectiveness of this approach in use with these same issues. The frequency of their responses are: separation or loss(43.1%), depression/suicidal ideation(45.1%), grief(33.3%), dealing with abuse(31.4%), and substance abuse(29.4%).

In a group counseling situation, a majority of the respondents indicated that solution-focused brief counseling strategies are effective with a number of student issues. Eighty percent or more of the school counselors responded that these strategies are effective in group counseling situations for the following student issues: Academic issues/homework/study skills(92.2%), behavior management(86.3%), interactions with adults(86.3%), peer interactions(94.1%), discipline issues/temper tantrums/anger management(80.4%), and peer pressure(80.4%). A third or more of the counselors indicated that these strategies are viewed as effective in group situations when addressing separation or loss(41.2%), grief(35.3%), school refusal(51.0%), family problems/divorce/step families(68.6%), and dealing with transition(new school, changes in families)(78.4%).

Some disagreement is indicated in response to the effectiveness of solution-focused brief counseling strategies in a group counseling situation with some student issues. Again, approximately a third of those responding indicated that they believe that these strategies are not effective with the following issues: separation or loss(31.4%), depression/suicidal ideation(39.2%), grief(35.3%), dealing with abuse(37.3%), and substance abuse(31.4%).

Question 3 – What are elementary school counselor's attitudes about training in solution-focused brief counseling techniques?

All of the surveyed school counselors indicated that they believe that they have some level of proficiency with solution-focused brief counseling. The majority (80.0%) indicated that they believed they were somewhat proficient; only 18.0 percent reported limited proficiency. Most of the school counselors reported that, if available, they would pursue further training in this approach. Only one respondent indicated that s/he would definitely not pursue more training and one

reported that s/he would probably not opt for further training if available. When asked if the school counselors had already pursued additional training in solution-focused brief counseling, 45.8 percent reported that they had, while 54.2 indicated that they had not sought more training since the school system offered training.

The counselors were asked to indicate what form of presentation was most useful to them during the initial training. Case scenarios (27.5%) and demonstrations (27.5%) were most frequently selected as the number one form of presentation. Finally, the school counselors were asked to respond regarding their likelihood of pursuing a supervision opportunity in solution focused brief counseling. There were somewhat mixed results on this item. A slight majority (54.0%) indicated that they would not participate in a supervision experience. Forty percent responded that they would partake of a supervision opportunity and six percent indicated that they were unsure of their interest in this type opportunity.

Question 4 – In what instances/situations do elementary school counselors believe that solution-focused brief counseling philosophies are applicable within the overall school setting?

The most frequent response regarding other situations where a solution-focused approach has changed interaction between the school counselors and the students was peer mediation. Twenty-two (43.1%) of the 51 respondents reported peer mediation situations being changed by their solution focused approach. The least frequent responses were noted for development of behavior contracts, behavior management, equity groups, and casual interactions. In general school situations, the school counselors related that parent conferences, crisis intervention, and faculty meetings were most often altered by using solution focused strategies. The least frequent responses for the general school setting were indicated for consultations with administrators, advisory committees, faculty conflict, parent/child conflict resolution, teacher/child conflict resolution, and new student orientation.

Summary of Interviews

Follow-up interviews were conducted with eight of the elementary school counselors who answered the survey. The interviews were intended to provide supplemental information to the results of the questionnaire. The interview questions were developed to provide input regarding the school counselor's perceptions: (1) of the benefit of using solution focused brief counseling specifically with children; (2) of the specific counseling situations where solution focused brief counseling is and is not effective; (3) of its potential use in other school situations; and (4) of the optimum training situation in this approach.

The aspect most often indicated as a reason for the effectiveness of solution-focused brief counseling in a school setting was the time efficiency of such an approach. Counselors also suggested that this approach highlights children's behaviors and keeps the focus in a present and future orientation. The school counselors indicated that solution-focused brief counseling may not be as effective when the children are struggling with issues which may require a more extensive approach. There was also concern about using solution-focused brief counseling with very young children due to their conceptual level.

Friendship and peer issues were the most common response regarding specific issues where school counselors found solution-focused brief counseling successful. Other areas of positive response regarding this approach were: communication skills, divorce issues, goal setting, and conflict with parents. The school counselors indicated that they found solution-focused brief counseling least effective when working with impulsive children and with behavior modification. One counselor reported that she did not find it effective with children who suffered from pathological issues such as Asperger's Syndrome because the "cognitive connection" would not be there. One counselor reported that it may be less effective in dealing with anger issues because they felt that learning new ways of managing anger takes practice over time.

A follow-up interview question regarding the use of solution-focused brief counseling strategies beyond the counseling situations revealed that they most commonly used the techniques to reframe the conversation away from a

negative perspective during parent and teacher conferences. It was also indicated that several of the counselors found the solution-focused approach useful in Child Study Meetings, monitoring situations, team teaching, and with discipline.

The final question was intended to provide supplemental information regarding the counselor's perception of the most beneficial training opportunity. Several of the interviewees indicated that the optimum situation would be an extended inservice or several workshops where feedback was available. Two of the counselors interviewed suggested graduate level instruction and one of the counselors reported feeling that the training should be broken down with strategies specifically for the elementary school counselor.

Conclusions

According to the responses to the research survey by the elementary school counselors who have received training in solution-focused brief counseling by their respective school systems, counselors have a relatively favorable perception of the solution-focused brief counseling approach for working with children. Again, it is important to encourage the reader to interpret these findings cautiously due to the limited number of respondents as well as the brevity of the training that they received through the school system offered inservice. The school counselors appear to use all of the solution- focused brief counseling techniques listed on the survey to some degree. They seem to most universally utilize the techniques which promote recognition and complementing of personal strengths, normalization of events and behaviors, mutual goal setting, and use of the child's own language to restate issues. The techniques which were likely to be used less often by the elementary school counselors appear to be the solution-focused brief counseling "questions". The miracle question, exception questions, and scaling questions require somewhat more abstract thinking skills which, according to the follow-up interviews, the school counselors sometimes felt were too advanced for elementary age students. Varying degrees of reported effectiveness may reflect the need for more extensive training in

some techniques. Relationship question techniques did tend to be used by a majority of the school counselors.

With regard to the perceived importance of the particular solution-focused brief counseling techniques, the school counselors again appear to find most of the techniques of value in the counseling process with children. One respondent reported that limiting labeling of behaviors was of no importance. The majority of the school counselors related through survey response that some degree of importance was perceived for all of the listed techniques. Again, the miracle, scaling, and exception “questions” were more likely to be judged of less importance when working with children.

The school counselors indicated through survey responses that several issues of children may be effectively addressed using solution-focused brief counseling strategies in the school setting. Through individual counseling sessions, academic issues and relationship issues were felt to be effectively addressed using this approach. Also, solution-focused strategies were noted to be effective with behavior management and discipline concerns. Less than half of the counselors indicated confidence in the effectiveness of solution-focused brief strategies for use with children experiencing separation and loss, grief, substance abuse, and/or depression or suicidal ideation.

A majority of the school counselors indicated that solution-focused brief counseling strategies are perceived as effective in a group counseling setting for academic issues, behavior management, relationship issues with peers and adults, and dealing with transition. Fewer than half of the counselors indicated that they felt that solution-focused strategies were effective when children were dealing with separation or loss, depression or suicidal ideation, grief, abuse, or substance abuse. Through the follow-up interviews the school counselors indicated that they perceived some of the more “traumatic” issues requiring a longer opportunity to build trust between the child and the counselor, as well as more time to process the issue at root for the child.

While none of the respondents indicated feeling very proficient with solution-focused brief counseling skills after the initial school system offered

training, the majority responded that they perceived themselves as somewhat proficient. There was an indication that the counselors would pursue further instruction in this approach were it made available to them. To date, 45.8 percent of the respondents have already sought further training in this approach. The counselors appeared to feel that opportunities for demonstration of techniques or discussion of case scenarios was most valuable in the presentation of the philosophies and techniques of solution focused brief counseling. Most of the respondents indicated no interest in a supervision opportunity in solution-focused counseling; however, forty percent related that they would participate in a supervision opportunity if available.

The school counselor's responses suggest that they are using the solution-focused philosophies in settings beyond the counseling office. They indicate its usefulness in peer mediation groups and with disciplining children. In the overall school setting, beyond their work with children, they are using these techniques during parent conferences and faculty meetings to keep the focus positive and goal oriented.

The time efficiency of this approach appears to be a significant factor in its appeal to today's elementary school counselors. With heavy caseloads and limited resources, school counselors must attempt to meet the needs of children facing significant stressors (Lockhart & Keys, 1998). Its use of identification of already established resources within the child limits the need for learning of new behaviors in order to effect a change.

Recommendations for Practice for School Counselors

1. The information from this research suggests that solution-focused brief counseling is viewed an effective approach when working with elementary age students. It offers a brief counseling approach that is solution oriented for assisting children with specific concerns so that they can return their attention to learning. For school counselors to become more skillful and perhaps more confident in the use of solution-focused brief

- counseling techniques, they should seek continuing educational opportunities. School counselors should request training in solution-focused brief counseling that is specific to their needs and areas of interest. They should ask for training techniques and strategies that are age and developmentally appropriate to their school population.
2. Through this survey and the follow-up interviews, it appears that there is an interest in an extended learning opportunity that would offer feedback and/or supervision to the participants. Given the positive reception indicated by the school counselors who received training in solution-focused counseling, school systems may want to provide inservice or further training to their counselors.
 3. There is a growing body of literature regarding solution-focused brief counseling with children and within the school setting. Professional journals, individual books, and workshop presentations are available on this topic. There is also considerable information available via the Internet through web pages run by leaders in the field and listservs where counselors can pose particular questions for response. School counselors should attempt to seek access to these resources.
 4. Elementary school counselors must often work cooperatively with colleagues, teachers, and parents in order to provide a best practice approach to assisting the children in their charge. The counselors may need to introduce their colleagues and the children's teachers and parents to the basic philosophies of a solution-focused approach. This may help to increase the carryover of a solution oriented and resource-promoting approach across settings to help the child work toward stated goals.
 5. School counselors should request that their supervisors include budget support to extend their training, as well as to provide for supplementary materials and possibly monies for teacher and parent training in this approach.

Recommendations for Practice for Counselor Educators

1. As school counselors have indicated the effectiveness of the solution-focused brief counseling approach in the elementary school setting, university counselor educator programs may want to incorporate instruction in this approach in their curriculum for counselors considering work in the school environment.
2. Counselor educators should encourage and promote continued research in various areas regarding the use of solution-focused brief counseling in school settings.
3. Through liaisons with state and national school counselor associations, counselor educators should encourage or request future workshops and presentation on this topic at conferences. They may seek to include well-known solution-focused brief counseling practitioners.
4. As none of the surveyed school counselors indicated feeling "very" proficient following the brief training experience, counselor educators should offer extended training opportunities which include a supervision aspect to those counseling students who are interested.

Recommendations for Future Research

1. Future research could include comparison of the effectiveness of solution-focused brief counseling to that of other counseling approaches with the inclusion of a control group. Investigation of the effectiveness of solution-focused brief counseling with specific school related issues using concrete, measurable goals would be of interest.
2. It may be of interest to investigate the preference of school counselors for use of solution-focused brief counseling in comparison to other specific counseling approaches when working with children of varying ages.
3. It is indicated by this research that school counselors use particular solution-focused brief counseling techniques in the school setting. It may be of interest to investigate to what extent school counselors are using an

- adapted form of solution-focused brief counseling as opposed to an approach that is true to the more precise parameters of the approach.
4. Specifically, it may be interesting to pursue investigation regarding the use of the "miracle question", "scaling questions", and/or "relationship questions" with varying age groups or student issues. Given the responses to the survey suggesting limited success or comfort with these techniques, further investigation may provide trainers with helpful information for tailoring instruction in these strategies.
 5. It may also be beneficial to look beyond the limited sample included in this study. The impressions of school counselors statewide or across the nation who have received some training in solution-focused brief counseling could offer more data. This study surveyed only elementary school counselors and does not reflect the perceptions of secondary or college level counselors. It may also not be reflective of the perceptions of counselors who work with children in private or agency settings. This information would be valuable.
 6. Further information about the perceptions of school counselors who have received more extensive training in this approach and who perceived themselves as proficient in its delivery would provide data of interest.
 7. The same workshop leader trained all of the elementary school counselors who responded to this questionnaire. The perceptions of individuals instructed by other trainers would provide supplemental information.
 8. It may also be important to access the perceptions of teachers or parents of the children who have been counseled using a solution-focused approach. This may offer insight into their beliefs regarding goal attainment, meaningful behavioral change, and/or the social/emotional functioning of the children.
 9. In light of responses to the survey that suggested utility of solution-focused brief counseling strategies in situations beyond counseling, such as, parent conferences, peer mediation, child study meetings, etc., further

research into the manner in which this approach is applied to these situations would be interesting.

Final Remarks

This research indicates that elementary school counselors who have received training in solution-focused brief counseling philosophies and techniques find the approach important and useful with children. As the world becomes more and more complicated for our youth, it is crucial that school counselors are trained in techniques that will address the issues that arise. This study indicates that the school counselors surveyed believe that solution-focused brief counseling strategies can be effective in addressing a variety of children's issues. The counselors also indicate that training in this approach with feedback when possible is essential

It is apparent that this competency-based approach where the students are viewed as capable and resourceful may be an effective way to reach students experiencing problems. School counselors need an approach which is positive in orientation and which highlights the strengths and resources that the children already possess. This allows the children to more quickly get beyond areas of difficulty and get on with learning.

REFERENCES

- Adams, J.F., Piercy, F.P., & Jurich, J.A. (1991). Effects of solution-focused therapy's "formula first session task" on compliance and outcome in family therapy. Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 17, 277-290.
- Amatea, E.S. (1989). Brief strategic intervention for school behavior problems. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- American School Counselor Association (1990). ASCA role statement. Alexandria, VA: Author.
- Ballard, M.B. & Murgatroyd, W. (1999). Defending a vital program: School counselors define their roles. National Association of Secondary School Counselors Bulletin, 83, 19-26.
- Berg, I.K. & DeJong P. (1996). Solution-building conversations: Co-constructing a sense of competence with clients. Families in Society The Journal of: Contemporary Human Services, 77, 376-391.
- Berg, I.K. & Miller, S.D. (1992). Working with the problem drinker: A solution focused approach. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Beyebach, M., Morejon, A.R., Palenzuela, D.L., & Rodrigues-Arias, J.L. (1996). Research on the process of solution-focused brief therapy. In S.D. Miller, M.A.Hubble, & B.L. Duncan, (Eds.). Handbook of Solution-Focused Brief Therapy(pp. 299-334) San Fransisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Bonnington, S.B. (1993). Solution-focused brief therapy: Helpful interventions for school counselors. The School Counselor, 41, 126-128.
- Bruce, M.A. (1995). Brief counseling: An effective model for change. The School Counselor, 42, 353-363.
- Bruce, M.A. & Hopper, G.C. (1997). Brief counseling versus traditional counseling: A comparison of effectiveness. The School Counselor, 44, 171-184.

- Children's Defense Fund (1998). The State of America's Children, Yearbook 1998. Washington, D.C.: CDF.
- Cocciarella, A., Wood, R., & Low, K.G. (1995). Brief behavioral treatment for ADHD. Perceptual and Motor Skills, 81, 225-226.
- Coy, D.R. (1999). The role and training of the school counselor: Background and purpose. National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin, 83, 2-8.
- Davis, T. E. & Osborn, C.J. (1999). The solution-focused school: An expectational model. National Association of Secondary School Principals' Bulletin, 83, 40-46.
- DeJong, P. & Hopwood, L.E. (1996). Outcome research on treatment conducted at the Brief Family Therapy Center, 1992-1993. In S.D. Miller, M.A. Hubble, & B.L. Duncan(Eds.), Handbook of solution-focused brief therapy (pp. 272-298). San Fransisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- DeJong, P. & Miller, S.D. (1995). How to interview for client strengths. Social Work, 40, 729-736.
- DeShazer, S. (1985). Keys to solution in brief therapy. New York: Norton.
- DeShazer, S. (1987). Cues, investigating solutions in brief therapy. New York: Norton.
- DeShazer, S. (1991). Putting Differences to Work. New York: Norton.
- DeShazer, S., Berg, I.K., Lipchik, E., Nunnally, E., Milnar, A., Gingerich, W., & Weiner-Davis, M. (1986). Brief therapy:Focused solution development. Family Process, 25, 207-221.
- DeShazer, S. & Berg, I.K. (1997). What works? Remarks on research aspects of solution focused brief therapy. Journal of Family Therapy, 19, 121-124.
- Dillman, D. A. (1978). Mail and telephone surveys: The total design method. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Downing, J. & Harrison, T. (1992). Solutions and school counselors. The School Counselor, 39. 327-332.
- Erdman, P. & Lampe, R. (1996). Adapting basic skills to counsel children. Journal of Counseling and Development, 74, 374-377.

- Fairchild, T.N. (1993). Accountability practices of school counselors: 1990 national survey. The School Counselor, 40, 363-374.
- Freundlich, N. (1994). Trading in the couch: Brief therapy. Harvard Health Letter, 19, 1-3.
- Gale, J. & Newfield, N. (1992). A conversation analysis of a solution-focused marital therapy session. Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 18, 153-165.
- Gass, M. & Gillis, H. L. (1995). Focusing on the "solution" rather than the "problem": Empowering client change in adventure experiences. Journal of Experiential Education, 18, 63-69.
- Gerler, E.R. (1991). The changing world of the elementary school counselor. Ann Arbor, MI: ERIC Clearinghouse on Counseling and Personnel Services.
- Gerler, E.R., Ciechalski, J.C., & Parker, L.D. (1990). Elementary school counseling in a changing world. Ann Arbor, MI: ERIC/CAPS and The American School Counselor Association.
- Gysbers, N.C. (1990). Comprehensive guidance programs that work. Ann Arbor, MI: ERIC Counseling and Personnel Services Clearinghouse.
- Hayes, R.L., Dagley, J.C., & Horne, A.M. (1996). Restructuring school counselor education: Work in progress. Journal of Counseling and Development, 74, 378-384.
- Hutchins, D. & Vaught, C.C. (1996). Helping relationships and strategies. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.
- Kiser, D.J., Piercy, F.P., & Lipchik, E. (1993). The integration of emotion in solution focused therapy. Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 19, 233-242.
- Kok, C.J. & Leskela, J. (1996). Solution-focused therapy in a psychiatric hospital. Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 22, 397-406.
- Kral, R. (1995). Strategies that work: Techniques for solutions in schools. Milwaukee, WI: Brief Family Therapy Center.

- LaFountain, R.M., Garner, N.E., & Eliason, G.T. (1996). Solution-focused counseling groups: A keys for school counselors. The School Counselor, 43, 256-267.
- Lee, M.Y. (1997). A study of solution focused brief family therapy: Outcomes and issues. The American Journal of Family Therapy, 25, 3-17.
- Lipchik, E. & Kubricki, A.D. (1996). Solution-focused domestic violence views: Bridges toward a new reality in couples therapy. In Miller, S.D., Hubble, M.A., & Duncan, B.L. (Eds.). Handbook of Solution Focused Brief Therapy (pp. 65-98). San Fransisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Littrell, J.M. & Malia, J.A. (1995). Single session brief counseling in a high school. Journal of Counseling and Development, 73, 451-458.
- Lockhart, E.J. & Keys, S.G. (1998). The mental health counseling role of school counselors. Professional School Counseling, 1, 3-6.
- McKeel, A.J. (1996). A clinician's guide to research on solution-focused brief therapy. In S.D. Miller, M.A. Hubble, & B.L. Duncan (Eds.), Handbook of solution-focused brief therapy(pp. 251-271). San Fransisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Metcalf, L. (1995). Counseling toward solutions: A practical solution-focused program for working with students, teachers, and parents. West Nyack, NY: The Center of Applied Research in Education.
- Miller, G. (1997). Systems and solutions: The discourses of brief therapy. Contemporary Family Therapy, 19, 5-22.
- Minkoff, H.B. & Terres, C.K. (1985). ASCA perspectives: Past, present, and future. Journal of Counseling and Development, 63, 424-427.
- Mostert, D.L., Johnson, E., & Mostert, M.P. (1997). The utility of solution-focused brief counseling in schools: Potential from an initial study. Professional School Counselor, 1, 21-24.
- Murphy, J.J. (1994). Working with what works: A solution-focused approach to school behavior problems. The School Counselor, 42, 59-65.

- Myrick, R. (1993). Developmental guidance and counseling. Minneapolis: Educational Media.
- Nickerson, N. (1995). Solution-focused group therapy. Social Work, 40, 132-133.
- O'Dell, F.L., Rak, C.F., Chermonte, J.P., Hamlin, A., & Waina, N. (1996). Guidance for the 1990s: Revitalizing the counselor's role. The Clearinghouse, 69, 303-307.
- O'Hanlon, W.H. & Weiner-Davis, M. (1989). In search of solutions: A new direction in psychotherapy. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Paisley, P.O. & Borders, D.B. (1995). School counseling: An evolving specialty. Journal of Counseling and Development, 74, 150-153.
- Paisley, P.O. & Hubbard, G. (1994). Developmental school counselling programs: From theory to practice. Alexandria, VA.: American Counseling Association.
- Partin, R.L. (1993). School counselor's time: Where does it go? The School Counselor, 40, 274-281.
- Paull, R.C. & McGrevin, C.Z. (1996). Seven assumptions of a solution-focused conversational leader. National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin, 80, 79-85.
- Schorr, M. (1997). Finding solutions in a roomful of angry people. Journal of Systemic Therapies, 16, 201-210.
- Sears, S.J. & Coy, D.R. (1991). The scope of practice of the secondary school counselor. Ann Arbor, MI: ERIC Counseling and Personnel Services Clearinghouse.
- Shields, C.G., Sprenkle, D.H., & Constantine, J.A. (1991). Anatomy of an initial interview: The importance of joining and structuring skill. The American Journal of Family Therapy, 19, 3-18.
- Shilts, L., Rambo, A., & Hernandez, L. (1997). Clients helping therapist find solution to their therapy. Contemporary Family Therapy, 19, 117-132.
- Sklare, G.B. (1997). Brief counseling that works: A solution-focused approach for school counselors. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.
- Studer, J.R. & Allton, J.A. (1996). The professional school counselor: Supporting

- and understanding the role of the guidance program. National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin, 80, 53-60.
- Tohn, S.L. & Pshlag, J.A. (1996). Solution-focused therapy with mandated clients: Cooperating with the uncooperative. In S.D. Miller, M.A. Hubble, & B.L. Duncan (Eds.). Handbook of Solution Focused Brief Therapy, (pp. 152-183) San Fransisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Turner, P.R., Valtierra, M., Talken, T.R., Miller, V.I., & DeAnda, J.R. (1996). Effect of session length on treatment outcome for college studenets in brief therapy. Journal of Counseling Psychology, 43, 228-232.
- Vaughn, K., Young, B.C., Webster. D.C., & Thomas, M.R. (1996). Solution-focused work in the hospital: A continuum-of-care model for inpatient psychiatric treatment. In S.D. Miller, M.A. Hubble, & B.L. Duncan (Eds.). Handbook of Solution Focused Brief Therapy. (pp. 99-127). San Fransisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Virginia State Board of Education (1996). Regulations regarding school guidance and counseling programs in the state of Virginia. Richmond, VA: Author.
- Virginia State Board of Education (1997). Regulations establishing standards for accrediting public schools in Virginia. Richmond, VA: Author.
- Virginia State Board of Education (1998). Licensure regulations for school personnel. Richmond, VA: Author.
- Vogt, W.P. (1993). Dictionary of statistics and methodology. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Walter, J.L. & Peller, J.E. (1994). "On track" in solution-focused brief therapy. In M.F. Hoyt (Ed.), Constructive Therapies. (pp. 111-125). New York: Guilford.
- Whiston, S.C. & Sexton, T.L. (1993). An overview of psychotherapy outcome research:Implications for practice. Professional Psychology, 24, 43-51.
- Wilgus, E. & Shelley, V. (1988). The role of the elementary school counselor: Teacher perceptions, expectations, and actual functions. The School Counselor, 35, 259-266.

Zimmerman, T.S., Prest, L.A., & Wetzel, B.E. (1997). Solution-focused couples therapy groups: an empirical study. Journal of Family Therapy, 19, 125-144.

Appendix A-Questionnaire

Part 1

Please rate the phrases listed below on both scales presented. These items are presented to determine your perception of the use and the importance of particular solution focused brief counseling techniques as effective when **working with children**. Please indicate your response by circling the corresponding rating in each column

	Don't Know DK	Do Not Use at all 1	Use 2	Use very often 3	4	Don't Know DK	Not at all Important 1	2	Very Important 3	4
a. Identifying what works and focusing on these strengths.	DK	1	2	3	4	DK	1	2	3	4
b. Reframing and normalizing events or behaviors.	DK	1	2	3	4	DK	1	2	3	4
c. Limiting labeling of behaviors.	DK	1	2	3	4	DK	1	2	3	4
d. Mutual definition of goals.	DK	1	2	3	4	DK	1	2	3	4
e. Promoting the awareness of the "ripple effect" that one's behavior has on others.	DK	1	2	3	4	DK	1	2	3	4
f. Using the student's own language in rephrasing issues or stating possible goals.	DK	1	2	3	4	DK	1	2	3	4
g. Using compliments to acknowledge strengths, solutions and what is working.	DK	1	2	3	4	DK	1	2	3	4
h. Using "exception questions" to elicit the acknowledgment that the problem is not always occurring.	DK	1	2	3	4	DK	1	2	3	4
i. Using some form of the "miracle question" to maximize possibilities for change.	DK	1	2	3	4	DK	1	2	3	4
j. Using "relationship questions" to assist in the awareness that there are possibly other perspectives.	DK	1	2	3	4	DK	1	2	3	4
k. Using "scaling questions" to highlight progress toward a goal	DK	1	2	3	4	DK	1	2	3	4
l. Using "scaling questions" to illustrate willingness to make an effort to work for the accomplishment of a stated goal.	DK	1	2	3	4	DK	1	2	3	4

Part 2.

Please indicate if you believe that solution focused brief counseling strategies would be effective in addressing the following student issues in an individual or group counseling setting. Please do so by writing yes or no in the space provided. Also, denote the issues which you feel would be most efficiently addressed by solution focused brief counseling techniques by putting a star next to the item.

Individual Counseling Situations

- _____ a. academic issues/
homework/study skills
- _____ b. behavior management
- _____ c. interactions with adults
- _____ d. peer relationships
- _____ e. discipline issues/temper
tantrums/anger management
- _____ f. family problems/
divorce/step families
- _____ g. separation or loss
- _____ h. depression/suicidal ideation
- _____ i. grief
- _____ j. dealing with abuse
- _____ k. school refusal
- _____ l. dealing with transition(new
school, changing families)
- _____ m. substance abuse
- _____ n. peer pressure
- _____ o. other _____
- _____ p. Do not recall enough
information to respond

Group Counseling situations

- _____ a. academic issues/homework/
study skills
- _____ b. behavior management
- _____ c. interactions with adults
- _____ d. peer relationships
- _____ e. discipline issues/temper
tantrums/anger management
- _____ f. family problems/
divorce/step families
- _____ g. separation or loss
- _____ h. depression/suicidal ideation
- _____ i. grief
- _____ j. dealing with abuse
- _____ k. school refusal
- _____ l. dealing with transition(new
school, changing families)
- _____ m. substance abuse
- _____ n. peer pressure
- _____ o. other _____
- _____ p. Do not recall enough
information to respond

Part 3.

Please respond to the following questions regarding your perceptions about training needs in solution focused brief counseling.

- a. How proficient are you in solution focused brief counseling?(circle one)

Very	Somewhat	Limited	Not
Proficient	Proficient	Proficiency	Proficient
- b. If more training in solution focused brief counseling was available to you, would you pursue it?
(circle one)

Definitely	Probably	Probably	Definitely
		Not	Not
- c. Have you sought more training or information regarding solution focused brief counseling since the initial training offered by your school system was conducted?

If yes, in what form, where, etc.

d. During the training you received in solution focused brief counseling, which of the following were utilized and which did you find most useful? Please rank those included in the training you attended from most useful (one) to least useful. If some of these elements were not included, simply leave them blank.

- _____ role plays
- _____ case scenarios
- _____ demonstrations
- _____ videos of counseling sessions
- _____ small group exercises
- _____ group dialogue
- _____ question and answer segment
- _____ other _____

e. Would you elect to participate in a supervision opportunity in solution focused brief counseling if it was offered? (circle one) yes no

Part 4.

In this section, please indicate your perceptions of the ability to utilize of solution focused brief counseling philosophies in school situations beyond counseling of individual students or groups of students:

a. In what ways has having an awareness of the solution focused philosophy changed your interactions with students in situations other than formal counseling settings(i.e. peer mediation, disciplining, etc.)?

b. Since solution focused philosophies are non-pathological and competency-based, in what general school situations(beyond counseling) do you believe that they can be utilized(i.e. faculty meetings, parent conferences, crisis intervention, etc.)?

Part 5

Please complete this last section to provide some demographic information. The information from this section, like the others, will be summarized without reference to individual respondent, school, or school system.

- a. Gender of respondent _____
- b. Years employed in the education field _____
- c. Years as a school counselor _____
- d. Year that your counseling degree was completed _____
- e. Highest degree earned _____
- f. Estimated enrollment of the school you presently serve _____
- g. Number of school counselors currently assigned to your present school(including yourself)
_____(Full time)_____(Part time)
- h. Number of schools to which you are assigned _____
- i. Grade levels represented at school _____
- j. At school, what is the percent of your time spent in:
 - individual counseling activities _____
 - group counseling activities _____
 - completing administrative duties _____
 - classroom guidance activities _____
 - clerical/paperwork _____
 - committee work _____
 - parent conferences _____
 - Other _____(please explain) _____
- k. During your counselor education program, what exposure to solution focused brief counseling did you have? _____
- l. Through what format has the majority of your information on solution focused brief counseling come?
 - inservice provided by a school system _____
 - reading books on counseling _____
 - reading professional journals _____
 - workshops(at least a half day in length) _____
 - conference presentations _____
 - college courses _____
 - discussions with colleagues _____
 - internet listserv communications _____
 - other _____(please explain) _____
- m. Describe the length of the training that you attended _____
- n. When did your school system provide training in solution focused brief counseling to its school counselors? _____(year)

* Please indicate here if you are willing to be contacted by the researcher for a brief follow-up interview regarding the issues covered in this survey.

_____ Yes, contact me at _____(phone number).

_____ No, I do not wish to be contacted.

Appendix B - Pilot Study Questions

- 1) Is the layout and general appearance of the questionnaire satisfactory?
- 2) Are the instructions clear?
- 3) Are there any questions that are difficult to understand or that are not stated clearly?
- 4) Are any questions redundant?
- 5) Are any questions offensive?
- 6) Are there any questions that you believe should be added or deleted?
- 7) Is the cover letter clear?
- 8) Please make any general comments regarding this survey that you feel necessary.

Thank you for your input!

Appendix C - Letter to Superintendents

Date

Dear

I am currently a doctoral candidate at Virginia Tech in the Counselor Education program. My dissertation is designed to investigate the perceptions of elementary school counselors who have been trained in solution focused brief counseling regarding its use in the school setting.

This research will investigate the school counselors' perceptions regarding the use of solution focused brief counseling approaches in both group and individual situations. Also their perceptions of the training available in solution-focused brief counseling will be queried. This topic was chosen in light of the significant role that school counselors play in providing mental health services to children and the need for an effective and efficient counseling approach which promotes a student's competencies. The findings will have implications for school counselors, administrators, and counselor educators.

Throughout this process confidentiality will be maintained. The data will be summarized without reference to specific counselors, schools, or school systems. They will be presented in summary form in a dissertation, will be published in Dissertation Abstracts International, and will be available online.

We request permission to conduct this survey(enclosed) with counselors in your system, since they are among the few in Virginia who have received training in brief counseling approaches. If you are willing for your counselors to be a part of the data collection, please indicate through the enclosed self-addressed stamped postcard how you prefer the surveys to be distributed in your school system. Also, please indicate if you wish to receive a summary of the results of the study.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (540) 772-2235 or by email at jarrup@roanoke.infi.net . My doctoral committee chairperson is Dr. Claire Cole Vaught. She can be reached at (540) 231-5949 or by email at vaughtc@vt.edu.

Thank you for your consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

Janet B. Kegley
Doctoral Candidate

Claire Cole Vaught
Dissertation Committee Chairperson

Appendix D - Endorsement Letter from Trainer

- available upon request from the researcher

Appendix E - Postcard to Superintendents

Please distribute the surveys in this school system through

_____ The Principal of each elementary school

_____ A division contact person _____

_____ Other _____

_____ I am unable to approve the distribution of this survey at this time.

Signature _____

School System _____

- ☐ Please place a check in the box if you would like to receive a summary of the survey results.

Appendix F - Cover Letter to Accompany Questionnaire

Dear School Counselor,

School counselors are often faced with heavy caseloads and with extraneous duties. They are typically the only mental health professional to which elementary age children have access. Brief therapies have been prominently featured lately in professional journals as a potentially effective way for elementary school counselors to make the most of the time they have for counseling activities.

Your school system, in recent years, offered a training opportunity to school counselors in solution focused brief counseling. For this reason, your input about the utility of solution focused brief counseling in the school setting is being sought. Your perception of solution focused brief counseling and its use with children will help other counselors and administrators understand this approach and how it is used with elementary age students.

Please complete the enclosed questionnaire at your earliest convenience and return it in the supplied self-addressed stamped envelope. Confidentiality will be maintained and the results will be offered in a summarized manner with no direct reference to individual, school, or school system. If you wish to receive a summary of the results of this study, please include an index card with your name and address in your response envelope.

If you wish to possibly be contacted for a follow-up interview please read and sign the enclosed informed consent form and return it along with your completed survey.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (540) 772-2235 or by email at jarrup@roanoke.infi.net. Dr. Claire Cole Vaught, my doctoral dissertation advisor, may be reached at (540) 231-5949 or by email at vaughtc@vt.edu.

Sincerely,

Janet B. Kegley
Doctoral Candidate

Appendix G - Prompting Postcard to Respondents

Date

A questionnaire was mailed to you recently regarding the perceptions of school counselors with reference to the use of solution focused brief counseling in the school setting. You were selected to participate in this survey because of the training in solution focused brief counseling that was offered in your school system.

I would like to **THANK YOU** for your time and input. If you have not yet completed and returned the survey, **PLEASE** do so at your first convenience. If for some reason you have not received a questionnaire, please complete this replacement survey and return it in the enclosed self-addressed, stamped envelope.

Thank you

Janet B. Kegley
Doctoral Candidate
(540) 772-2235
jarrup@roanoke.infi.net

Appendix H - Interview Protocol

The following is a list of topics to be covered in follow-up interviews with some questionnaire respondents. It is felt that there is relevant information to be tapped beyond the initial questionnaire. The responses to this interview will be summarized without reference to particular respondent, school, or school system.

Areas to be addressed:

- 1) In what way(s) do you believe that solution-focused brief counseling is beneficial in working with children?
- 2) In what way(s) do you believe that solution-focused brief counseling is not beneficial in working with children?
- 3) In what specific counseling situations have you found solution-focused brief counseling most effective?
- 4) In what specific counseling situations have you found solution-focused brief counseling least effective?
- 5) Have you attempted to use solution-focused brief counseling concepts or strategies in school situations other than individual or group counseling (committee meetings, grade level meetings, parent conferences, etc.)?
- 6) What do you see as the optimum training situation with regard to solution-focused brief counseling?

Appendix I - Informed Consent for School Counselors Agreeing to a Follow-up Interview

Purpose:

School Counselors are working to meet the mental health needs of today's school children. They are faced with complex student issues, heavy caseloads, extraneous duties and assignments and limited resources. This project examines the perspective of elementary school counselors who have had previous training in solution-focused brief counseling regarding its utility in the school setting.

Procedures:

If you elect to participate, I would like to interview you either by phone or in person at a time that is convenient to you. The interview would last approximately 30 minutes and would address issues pertaining to the use of solution-focused brief counseling in the elementary school setting. The questions will be open-ended and you would be encouraged to give as much detail as you would feel comfortable providing. You would also have the option to select not to respond to any questions you choose or to ask for clarification. The interviews will be audio-taped and transcribed by the researcher.

Risks and Benefits:

Your control as to which questions you answer insures that there will be no more than minimal risk to you as a participant in the interview. The benefit to you for participating in this study will not be direct but your contribution may provide information which could assist in determining the perceived advantages of solution-focused brief counseling with children and the potential training needs.

Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality:

Interview tapes will be transcribed under a code number only and record of the corresponding name will be maintained at the residence of the researcher. Anyone reading the transcript would not likely be able to identify the respondent. The audio-tapes will be destroyed once they have been transcribed and any written summary of the interview will not make reference to the individual respondent. Every effort will be made to maintain your anonymity, but you should be aware that your anonymity could potentially be compromised.

Freedom to Withdraw:

You are at liberty to discontinue your participation in this study at any time. Simply inform the researcher, Janet Kegley at (540) 772-2235.

Your signature below indicates that you have read this information and that you agree to the conditions of this project.

Signature(date)

VITA

Janet B. Kegley

Professional Experience:

School Psychologist, Roanoke City Public Schools, August 1988-present.
Provided Full-time contracted school psychological services to Roanoke
City Public Schools, January 1987-June 1988.

School Psychologist Intern, Roanoke City Public Schools, January 1986-
December 1986

Education:

Ed.S. (1987) in School Psychology, James Madison University
M.Ed. (1985) in School Psychology, James Madison University
BA (1982) in Psychology, University of South Carolina

Endorsements:

School Psychologist/Pupil Personnel Services in Virginia
Nationally Certified School Psychologist (NASP)