

**A Qualitative Study of the Proactive Use of Traditional Counselling Methods: The
perceptions of teachers in education**

By

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my father, Dr. Rick Freeze and my mother, Jieka Freeze. Thank you for instilling the importance of education, perseverance, and determination within me. Thank you for all the support, wisdom, guidance, and love you have provided me with throughout the years. I am grateful to have such strong role models who always encouraged me to be independent and gave me everything I needed to grow into the person I am today.

Abstract***Key Words: Proactive Counselling, Positive Psychology, Adolescence***

Adolescents and young adults face several developmental, social, and personal challenges as they grow towards adulthood. Common challenges such as: (a) conflicts within their families, (b) problems in their friendships and intimate relationships, (c) threats to their health, fitness, and body image, and (d) difficulties arising from their peer group social stratification, are generally addressed after damage or stress has already occurred. These challenges can introduce varying degrees of difficulty and stress into the lives of adolescents and young adults. While traditional reactive counselling methods are helpful in responding to challenges that emerge in the lives of young adolescents, it may be valuable to employ counselling methods proactively and non-therapeutically in order to equip students in junior high schools with the tools they will need to navigate common challenges before they occur. This study aimed to explore the thoughts and perceptions of teachers towards such a proactive approach to counselling with junior high school students. The findings indicated that there is a place for the proactive non-therapeutic use of traditional strategies in schools. While teachers may feel more comfortable with the content of “typical” adolescent challenges, they are less comfortable coaching students through the emotional and behavioural outcomes that occur as a result of these challenges. Educators may feel a need for more process related strategies to support students (e.g., managing unpleasant emotions, problem-solving, goal setting, etc.) in meeting goals and challenges however, one must also ensure that the context (e.g., peer relationships, family, health, etc.) is taken into consideration as well. In addition, proactive strategies and opportunities for social-emotional learning need to take place

within a larger context rather than behind closed doors. In addition, the challenges experienced by today's youth may be complicated by the technological world and the overall cultural climate of contemporary Western Canada (Ahn, 2011; Lai & Gwung, 2013; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008). Furthermore, with dual earner families being the majority in Canada, the home environment is impacted and the quantity and quality of time is diminished, which in turn affects the academic and social-emotional development and health of today's youth (Wada et al., 2014; Dilworth, 2004). It may be that this phenomenon puts educators in a position where they are required to fill multiple roles and balance social-emotional education of children with their academic growth and development.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Background

Adolescents and young adults face myriad developmental, social, and personal challenges as they grow towards adulthood. As examples, common challenges may be related to: (a) conflicts within their families (Baer, Garmenzy, McLaughlin, Pokorony, & Wernick, 1987; Kandel, Kessler, & Margulies, 1978; Maggs & Galambos, 1993 Galambos & Ehrenberg, 1997), (b) problems in their friendships and intimate relationships (Brooks-Gunn & Paikoff, 1997; Brown, 1999; Arnette, 2007), (c) threats to their health, fitness, and body image (Jones & Bradley, 2000), and (d) difficulties arising from their peer group social stratification (Broudy, Brondolo, Coakley, Brady, Cassells, Tobin, & Sweeney, 2007; Brondolo, Brady ver Halen, Pencille, Beatty, & Contrada, 2009; Harrell, 2000).

These challenges can introduce varying degrees of difficulty and stress into the lives of adolescents and young adults. Traditional counselling methods tend to be reactive, typically initiating interventions only after crises already have occurred (Seligman & Csikzentmihalyi, 2000). Since most adolescents face similar developmental, social, and personal challenges, it may be beneficial to employ proactive methods of counselling that will equip them, in junior high school, with the tools they will need to navigate common challenges before they occur. This study aimed to explore the thoughts and perceptions of teachers towards such a proactive approach to counselling with junior high school students.

Statement of Problem

Teenagers experience several problems and stressors that can cause feelings such as fear and hopelessness (Strom, Oguinick & Singer, 1995). Consequently, many teenagers sometimes may feel ill equipped to deal with life events and may feel trepidation about entering adulthood. The fear and stress that are caused by the above-mentioned difficulties may be causing more unhappiness than necessary. Traditional methods of counselling tend to be reactive in the sense that they respond once a crisis or challenge already has occurred. While reactive methods are valuable, they may not be the most effective or efficient way of supporting young adults as they navigate through or negotiate the challenges of maturation. Given that these challenges are, to some degree, inevitable and likely to affect virtually all members of the adolescent population, it seems counterproductive to respond only when they have been defeated by a challenge.

An alternative approach is to prepare adolescents to meet common challenges, before they occur, by arming them with the attitudes, skills, tools, and knowledge of resources needed to enhance their personal strengths, resiliency, and coping ability. Such an approach may decrease human suffering, increase human happiness, reduce the demand for adult counselling services, and support greater wellness in the general population for years to come.

If all youth face these challenges, to varying degrees, then a method that will help them to prepare for these inevitable challenges is needed. Such a pro-active method must be grounded in a solid theoretical foundation derived from contemporary research and scholarship. It is not surprising then, that efforts to isolate and describe proactive ways of approaching the challenges faced by today's youth have intensified in positive

psychology literature. Much existing positive psychology research supports the use of proactive interventions to promote youth mental health and well-being (Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich & Linkins, 2009). However, empirical research that integrates theory with the perspectives of teachers and students, in the development of positive psychology interventions, remain rare.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to discover how counselling strategies can be used in a proactive rather than a reactive approach to address the struggles of young adolescent students at the junior high level. Central to the rationale for this study was the idea that it may be wiser to equip all young adolescents with the tools they will need to negotiate the problems they may experience in the future, than to react to crises in individual lives with one-on-one or small group counseling after the fact.

A second insight that motivated this study was the desire to develop non-therapeutic educational uses for some of the tools used in counselling. The idea was to use counselling methods that traditionally have been used therapeutically in new ways. Specifically, to equip students with the tools and empower them with the attitudes they will need to navigate the inevitable challenges of adolescence and adulthood. While it is understandable that not all young adults will experience the same challenges, many of the tools used in therapeutic counselling may be transferable to the general population to be employed in non-therapeutic ways that may enhance personal strengths, resilience, coping ability, and happiness.

This study drew on Forster's (2005) ideas about self-identity construction to explore the perceptions of educators regarding the use of future oriented counseling

approaches with young adults to help them to build capacity, resilience, and develop skills that are intended to lead to healthy self-determination and independence. Forster's (2005, 2006) self-identity construction is a positive psychology approach, which posits that personal constructs and perspectives are used to interpret life experiences. According to Forster (2008), focusing on personal strengths is integral to having a positive perspective. Consequently, counselling could be used not only reactively (i.e., in response to mental health "dis-ease") but proactively as well (i.e., as a wellness resource to enhance positive emotions and experiences). Forster's studies targeted the wellness approach to self-construction and self-identity and suggested that personal strengths and positive perspectives play important roles in helping young adults to negotiate the challenges they will face.

The primary purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of teachers regarding the usefulness and potential effectiveness of methods derived from positive psychology, solution-focused therapy, and cognitive-behavioural therapy with junior high students. The secondary purpose of this study was to discover if any changes occurred in the participants' perceptions of their own problem-solving behaviours and attitudes, after having learned about a variety of strategies used in counselling. To do this, teachers were provided with scenarios (Appendix A) describing various challenges that youth may face. Then they were asked to discuss, analyze, and provide insight into the viability, usefulness, and effectiveness of these methods with junior high students. The participants also were asked questions that aimed to gather information about their own attitudes, beliefs, and feelings towards their own problem-solving abilities.

Research Questions

1. How do teachers perceive the usefulness, effectiveness, and viability of methods derived from positive psychology, solution-focused therapy, and cognitive-behavioural therapy, in a proactive intervention designed to equip junior high school students with the skills they need to navigate life challenges before they arise?
2. How do teachers feel about their own decision-making and problem-solving abilities before and after having learned about these methods?

In the first phase of this study, a focus group was used to collect data on how participants viewed traditional counseling methods being used in proactive ways (duration 30 minutes). The participants also were asked open-ended questions adapted from the Problem Solving Inventory (Heppner, 1988) (Appendix C) that aimed to understand how teachers felt about their own abilities to manage and solve problems (duration 30 minutes). The first round of questioning provided the participants with context, which allowed them to more accurately describe their own personal feelings regarding their own problem solving abilities during the second round of questioning. The purpose of the first part of this study was to establish the construct validity of these ideas.

Next, the participants participated in a professional development opportunity (Appendix B) that presented specific counselling techniques and how they can be used proactively. The workshop also included several scenarios that described a student at the beginning of a decision-making process and suggested ways that counselling techniques may be used by the student, or someone who is supporting the student (duration 40 minutes).

In the second phase of this study, a focus group was used to collect data on how participants view traditional counseling methods being used in a proactive way after having been exposed to the professional development workshop (duration 30 minutes). The participants were again asked open-ended questions adapted from the Problem Solving Inventory (Heppner, 1988) that aimed to understand how they felt about their own abilities to manage and solve problems after having been exposed to the professional development workshop (duration 30 minutes).

Limitations of Study

There are at least four limitations to the qualitative research design that was employed in this study. Although, this study was carefully prepared, the sample size of this study was too small to make the results generalizable. Consequently, the findings may not reflect the majority of teacher opinions regarding the effectiveness of the techniques presented in the professional development workshop. Second, the participants were not chosen randomly. However, since the nature of human experience is relatively similar in this group, the sample was selected purposefully (i.e., participants were average teachers in an average, typical public school). Third, since the professional development workshop was implemented within a time-limited period, the results and the effectiveness of the intervention are only determined over a time period and do not reflect longitudinal outcomes. The fourth limitation is researcher bias in a qualitative design. However, triangulation (i.e., data was collected from different participants in multiple instances of data collection) as well as member checking, were used to ensure the trustworthiness of the results. Selection bias, researcher bias and theoretical sensitivity of the researcher are internal threats to validity that should be noted. The placebo effect (i.e., participants may

have come to believe that the method is effective just by participating in it), the novelty effect (i.e., this is a new and unusual approach), the Rosenthal effect (i.e., the expectation inherent in the approach may have caused a higher evaluation of the methods in the first part of the study and in the experiences of the participants in the second part of the study), and the Hawthorne effect (e.g., the participants were aware that they were participating in this research, which may have affected how they participate) are threats to the external validity of this research.

Delimitations of Study

There are at least three delimitations to this study. First, the values represented in positive psychology emerge in a western, English speaking worldview, while the participants of this study were be teachers from various multi-cultural backgrounds. The tenets of positive psychology are rooted in cognitive-behavioural psychology, which has predominately influenced the direction of counselling in North America. Some of the ideas in positive psychology are unique in this cultural context and may not be transferrable to other cultural or social contexts. Nevertheless, there are increasing similarities across cultures in the practice of school counselling as the world becomes a more interconnected and interdependent global village.

Second, the range of challenges faced by adolescents is so large that the literature review could not exhaust the literature and cover the field fully. For example, while the two main areas of family conflict (i.e., marital discord and dual-earner families), there are other areas of conflict that affect families that are less common (e.g., struggles faced by single parent families or the stressors unique to same sex couples). In this case, there is no assumption of universal generalization of the issues under study. Finally, the results

are not generalizable to other age groups or sub-divisions of the teacher population. The small sample remains a limitation and results should be interpreted with caution.

Nevertheless, to the extent that most children share similar developmental paths and similar experiences in the Canadian cultural context, it may be possible to gain insight into a wider range of youth than those that participated in this study. It is hoped that the results of this study will give significant guidance to counsellors and teachers working with students of this population to help them meet challenges with confidence.

The concept of applicability in qualitative research poses that many important tenets must be considered when generalizing results. According to Lewis and Richie (2003), the following principals are important to consider when generalizing from qualitative data: (a) use of the original data, (b) encompassing diversity, (c) nature not number, (d) level of classification, (e) assigning meaning and interpretation, (f) checks on research design and conduct, (g) display of research methods, (h) noted limitations, and (i) validation of the inference. Based primarily on the work of Lewis and Richie (2003), each of these different elements of applicability will be discussed in the following section.

Use of the original data. According to Lewis and Richie (2003), using original data helps to strengthen the generalizability and applicability of a study. In this study, the original words of the participants in the focus group were used to elucidate the emergent themes of this study in a way that is both authentic and likely to assist the reader in applying the results of the study to his or her own situation with greater confidence.

Encompassing diversity. With respect to diversity, Lewis and Richie (2003) note that, “there is virtually no social or psychological phenomena that exists about which

there will be only a single perspective to account”. In this study, both genders were purposely sampled to ensure gender diversity. Teachers in more than one grade level were invited to participate, ensuring grade level diversity. There also was diversity in the subject areas the teachers represent (i.e., English, French, Social Studies, Science, Art, Physical Education, etc.).

Nature not number. In this study, a qualitative data set was collected to understand the perspectives of the individuals participating in this study; rather than a quantitative data set intended to establish prevalence, statistical distribution, or estimate a parameter in a larger population.

Level of classification. In a nutshell, the importance of level of classification in qualitative research is that aggregate phenomena, that are complex and that involve many interdependent variables as is the case in this study, are best approached in ways that have the potential to tease apart and throw light on their complexity; rather than by using presumed classifications, that may or may not be valid, as might be the case in a quantitative approach.

Assigning meaning and interpretation. There are two important factors in assigning meaning and making interpretations. The first is preserving the data in its original form as a means of substantiating emergent themes. The second factor is being transparent about your stance as a researcher and your method analysis and interpretation. In this study, the voices of the focus group participants were preserved in their original form in the process of assigning meaning and the interpretive process was explained as fully as possible.

Checks on research design and conduct. A variety of strategies were employed to support fidelity to the research design and the trustworthiness of the data collected.

These include triangulation, member checking, and a detailed outlining of the procedures.

Display of research methods. In Chapter 3 of this thesis proposal, a detailed explanation of the qualitative research design is provided.

Noted limitations. The most important point Lewis and Richie (2003) make about limitations is that they may arise unexpectedly during the course of the study. It is important to document such unanticipated limitations as they may affect the applicability of the study to other groups.

Validation of the inference. According to Lincon and Guba (1985), "...the central condition for inferential generalization is similarity between the 'sending' and 'receiving' contexts". This means that the research context, processes, methods, and circumstances must be described in such a way that the findings can be understood not only as a particular study but as they contribute to existing theoretical discussions and professional practice in the field of adolescent school counselling. Consequently, relating the findings of this study to constructs in the literature review (Chapter 2) was important to this process.

Significance of Study

This research is a significant step forward towards learning more about how educators can better prepare young adults by enhancing their personal strengths, resiliencies, coping abilities, and potential for greater happiness as they move towards adulthood. This research also may help us to better understand how to develop interventions that will accomplish this initiative. In addition, we also learned more about

teachers' perceptions on the effectiveness of traditional counselling tools when used proactively.

The students that the participants in this study taught were in the transition years between elementary and secondary schooling. As a consequence, they inevitably experienced new peer groups, new educational environments, and new curricular expectations while going through puberty and being seen by their parents as increasingly autonomous. This study has helped us to better understand the unique needs of this group.

Definitions of Terms

Positive Psychology – A branch of psychology that is concerned with what makes individuals thrive beyond a normal level of functioning. Research in this area is concerned with the factors that allow individuals, communities, and societies to flourish (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Solution-Focused Therapy - A form of therapy that focuses on goal setting and forward movement rather than past experiences. This is usually done in a brief time frame (Bannick, 2007; Bannink, 2008; Prochaska & Norcross, 2010).

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy – A form of therapy that addresses unhelpful thinking styles and maladaptive behaviors through goal oriented activities and adaptive coping strategies (Ellis, 1996, 1999; Corey, 2005).

Universal Design – A flexible framework that takes into consideration various learning styles and abilities and ensures that users are engaged in the process (Council for Exceptional Children, 2005)

Miracle Question – A technique used in Solution-Focused Therapy to engage the client in imagining life without a particular problem (O'Connell, 2001).

Scaling – A technique used in Solution-Focused Therapy to assess where the client sees himself or herself in relation to a particular goal. The scale is also used to measure and track progress and the client moves towards his or her goal (O’Connell, 2001).

Goal Setting – The identification and establishment of specific and measurable objectives within a determined time frame (O’Connell, 2001; Prochaska & Norcross, 2010).

Future/Strategy Talk – A technique used in Solution-Focused where the client is engaged conversation that identifies specific small tasks that will move him or her closer to his or her goal (Metcalf, 2008; Parsons, 2009).

Cognitive Reframing – A process used in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy to assist the client in replacing maladaptive thoughts with more adaptive thoughts (Corey, 2005).

Students – Students in this work are defined as secondary school students between the ages of twelve and fifteen.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

The primary purpose of this study was to understand the thoughts and perceptions of teachers regarding the proactive use of methods, derived from positive psychology, solution-focused therapy and cognitive-behavioral therapy, to equip young adults to better navigate the challenges of adolescence. In order to do this, it is important to understand what the challenges faced by today's youth are and how they might be better prepared in a positive proactive way. Young adults experience many developmental, social, and emotional challenges to varying degrees. In the first part of this section, challenges in the following areas are explored: (a) family, (b) relationships and sexuality, (c) health and fitness, and (d) racism and social stratification. In the second part, positive proactive approaches to psychological well-being are explored.

Challenges of Youth

Adolescents and young adults face a myriad of developmental, social, and personal challenges as they grow towards adulthood. These challenges may stem from family issues, relationships and sexuality, health and fitness, racism or social stratification, or other areas (Strom, Oguinick, & Singer, 1995). Bronfenbrenner (1979) describes a microsystem as "a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics" (p.22). Microsystems represent the structures through which individuals have direct contact with others and which involve their closest relationships. The family structure is one of the most important microsystems in an adolescent's life. According to Galambos and Ehrenberg (1997), the family unit is central to socialization

and psychosocial maturity. In addition, according to Bronfenbrenner (1986), the family unit can be examined in many ways including size, relationships within the family, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, employment status, divorced or two-parent household, same sex marriage, and wealth or impoverishment.

Family Conflict

When issues related to one or more of these areas arise, family conflict can occur. While conflict can generally be expected in most families, it can range from mild to severe. According to Galambos and Ehrenberg (1997), severe conflict within families puts adolescents at risk developmentally. In addition, problem behaviour, drug and alcohol use, as well as deterioration in academic performance are connected to high levels of conflict within family units (Baer, Garmenzy, McLaughlin, Pokorony, & Wernick, 1987; Kandel, Kessler, & Margulies, 1978; Maggs & Galambos, 1993, Galambos and Ehrenberg, 1997). Baer et al. (1987) found that family conflicts, as well as the occurrence of other stressful events, were positively correlated with alcohol usage. In addition, they stated that, “substantial alcohol use can be seen as a component of maladaptive behaviour that is produced by discontinuities and destabilization in terms of family conflict and life events” (p.463). There are many ways in which family conflict can occur including a marital discord and conflicts related to dual-earner families.

Marital Conflict. Azam and Hanif (2011) found that marital conflicts negatively affect parental attachment and social competence. This means that children and adolescents who witness higher levels of marital discord between their parents may have a higher likelihood of adjustment problems. Furthermore, a study conducted by Doyle and Markiewicz (2005) found that “marital conflict affects internalizing and externalizing

problems and self-esteem indirectly, through parenting... marital conflict affects parenting negatively, and how parents directly interact with their children relates causally to changes in these indices of adjustment” (p.107). The authors also found that adolescent maladjustment was linked to attachment insecurities and anxiety, which significantly contributed to decreased self-esteem and decreased levels of school achievement (Doyle & Markiewicz, 2005). Marital disaccord is one of many issues that can cause challenges for youth. Dual-income families are becoming more prominent and are another area that can affect adolescent development.

Dual-Income Families. Another emerging reality is that dual-income families are becoming far more frequent. In fact, according to Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (2011), dual income couples are the majority in Canada. This may be a significant factor in the health of families. Galambos, Sears, Almeida, and Kolaric (1995) posit a three-stage spill-over process in which parental stress, caused by work overload, affects parent-adolescent relationships that, in turn, leads to problem adolescent behaviours. Galambos et al. (1995) found that “...among mothers, work overload may precipitate feelings of stress, which in turn, may result in less accepting behaviors towards the adolescent. These less accepting behaviors are associated with increases in adolescents’ problematic behaviours” (p.218). In addition, Galambos et al. (1995) also stated that the same pattern was present among fathers, but was not related to lower acceptance. In a study which aimed to understand the cumulative effects of dual-income parents work schedules on adolescent risky behaviours, Han, Miller, and Waldfogel (2010) found that “maternal night shifts... lead to significantly less time spent together and [a] poorer home environment ... lead[ing] to increased adolescent risky behaviours.”

(p.1257). Han et al. (2010) also found a causal link in which years of maternal night shift work, in addition to a father who is present less than one third of the time, was significantly linked to risky adolescent behaviours such as smoking and drinking.

A second consideration regarding dual-income families is parental monitoring. According to Galambos and Ehrenberg (1997), “monitoring refers to the parent’s knowledge of what the adolescent is doing, where the adolescent is, and with whom he or she is doing it (Steinberg, 1986, as cited in Galambos and Ehrenberg, 1997). It may be more difficult for some dual-income working families to effectively monitor their children. According to Galambos and Ehrenberg (1997), the adolescents of parents who are less effective monitors are more likely to engage in acts of delinquency and do less well in school (Baber, Olsen, & Shagle, 1994; Brown, Mounts, Lamborn, & Steinberg, 1993; Crouter, MacDermid, McHale, & Perry-Jenkins, 1990; Kurdek & Fine, 1994; Paterson & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1984, as cited in Galambos & Ehrenberg, 1997). In a longitudinal quantitative study on parental monitoring and adolescent depressive symptoms, Hamza and Willoughby (2011) reported that:

When we examined reciprocal associations between adolescent depressive symptoms and perceived parental monitoring behaviors (i.e., parental solicitation and control) we found that, consistent with our expectations, higher levels of adolescent depressive symptoms predicted decreased parental solicitation over time. We had predicted that depressive symptoms would be associated with lower levels of solicitation because there has been research showing that parents tend to withdraw monitoring efforts when adolescents are involved in problem behaviors.... (p. 911)

Family issues are one among many factors that can have a direct impact on a young adolescent and can interact with other systems either positively or negatively. For example, peer microsystems also may pose challenges for adolescents, especially when romantic relationships and issues related to sexuality are involved.

Romantic relationships and sexuality

According to Arnette (2007), adolescence, for many, is a time when dating, love, and certain expressions of sexuality begin. New experiences also can be accompanied by new emotions including pleasure, delight, wonder, fear, anxiety, and confusion (Arnette, 2007). In a national study of adolescent romantic relationships, Carver, Joyner, and Udry (2003) found that most North American teenagers have experienced at least one romantic relationship. According to Brooks-Gunn and Paikoff (1997), “youth are expected to take on increasing responsibility for their own behavior and decisions due to physical and cognitive maturity as well as social-relational changes...” (p. 198). Social-relational changes include a decrease in parental monitoring and the increase in the time that adolescents spend with their peers (Brooks-Gunn & Paikoff, 1997). In a developmental model developed by Brown (1999), the impact of peers on love and relationships is acknowledged. There are four phases of adolescent love described in Brown’s (1999) model: the initiation phase, the status phase, the affection phase, and the bonding phase. According to Arnette (2007), the initiation phase occurs in early adolescence and is a period in which anxiety, fear, and excitement are prominent. Arnette (2007) explained that, “anxiety and fear result in part from the novelty of romantic feelings and behaviors, but also from adolescents’ awareness that these new feelings and behaviors are subject to scrutiny and potential ridicule from their friends...” (p. 282). Peers and friends continue

to exert a significant amount of influence as adolescents enter the status phase. Arnette (2007) explained that, while this phase is often marked by an increase in confidence in relation to interacting with eligible romantic partners, adolescences are very much aware of their friends' evaluations. Arnette (2007) stated that:

“[When] considering a potential romantic partner, they assess not just how much they like and are attracted to the person but how there status would be influenced. Peer crowds represent a clear status hierarchy, and adolescents usually date others who have similar crowd status, but lower-status adolescents often fantasize about and may attempt a relationship with someone of higher status...”
(p. 282).

The third phase is the affection phase. According to Arnette (2007), this stage is marked by greater levels of intimacy, emotion and sexuality. Adolescents are forced to manage deeper and stronger emotions. While peers become less important during this phase, they often step-in when conflicts between partners emerge. Jealousy issues also may emerge if the time spent with friends and partners is not balanced. The final phase is bonding, in which partners begin to consider the possibility of a long-term commitment. At this stage, friends may offer guidance and advice.

Each of these phases is likely to create many emotional reactions within adolescents. According to Larson, Clore, and Wood (1999), adolescents have difficulty understanding the differences between their emotional reactions and the situations that gave rise to them. For example, adolescents may mistake sexual arousal for compatibility when entering into or sustaining a relationship. In addition, Larson et al. (1999) explained that young adolescents might place more value on their peers' reactions and opinions

than on their own feelings. According to Larson et al. (1999), "...their lack of experience in recognizing simultaneous conflicting emotions may lead them to suppress information and feelings that are not in line with a dominant emotion, whether anger or love" (p. 29). Considering the latter, adolescents may have a difficult time differentiating between love and sex and may place more emphasis on their peers feelings than their own (Miller & Benson, 1999). For example, a young woman may yield to the sexual advances of a young man because of a yearning for greater intimacy (Miller & Benson, 1999) or for social acceptance from her peers, rather than real affinity and self-attribution. Intimate relationships take place in larger peer contexts, in which new experiences arise. To some extent, especially among young people, this peer context is affected by health and wellness. In particular, leisure, sport, fitness, diet, and recreational activities may have an impact on peer relationships.

Health and fitness

Adolescence, for the most part, is considered to be a relatively healthy time in life. However, according to Jones and Bradley (2007), adolescence is a time in which both healthy and unhealthy behaviours can develop. These behaviours can have a profound impact on long-term health and well being, as the adolescent likely will carry them into adulthood. Jones and Bradley (2000), list the following health related behaviours that may affect health and well-being later in life: (a) exercise, (b) diet, (c) smoking, (d) drug usage, (e) alcohol usage, and (f) sexuality. Adolescence is a time when a good exercise routine, good sleep habits, moderation in alcohol use, and safe habits at work and play are likely to be established. For example, safety precautions such as buckling your seat belt when in a vehicle or putting on a life jacket when in a

watercraft are proactive and protective behaviours that adolescents should adopt. During adolescence, the circumstances in which risky behaviours are possible increase because of many factors. First, adolescence is a period when adult supervision is declining and self-management, independence and autonomy are increasing, which is why the development of health promoting behaviours is important. Second, more situations in which risky behaviours either become legal (e.g., getting a drivers license, being able to purchase cigarettes, etc.) or possible (e.g., after puberty adolescents start seeing themselves as sexual beings, etc.) arise. In addition, adolescents may enter into a wider spectrum of environments such as traveling independently, or leaving home to go to university, college, or work. In a greater diversity of environments, the number of possible risks increase. Consequently, new experiences during adolescence lead young adults to modify their belief systems and develop their identity, as well as solidifying certain habits. However, adolescent development takes place in a larger social milieu where many variables have an impact. For example, adolescent development may take place in a climate of racism or social stratification.

Racism and social stratification

Racism and discrimination can pose several challenges for young adolescents. As evidence, Fisher, Wallace, and Fenton (2000) used the *Adolescent Discrimination Distress Index (ADDI)* to measure distress levels in one hundred and seventy-seven adolescents of various ethnic backgrounds between ninth and twelfth grade. Fisher et al. (2000) explained that the ADDI measures "...adolescent distress in response to perceived instances of racially motivated discrimination in institutional, educational, and peer contexts" (p. 682). They found that, "racial discrimination may be a pervasive stressor in

the daily lives of many adolescents...” (p. 690). Researchers also have established a relationship between racism and mental health difficulties such as negative mood, depressive symptoms, and stress (Broudy, Brondolo, Coakley, Brady, Cassells, Tobin, & Sweeney, 2007; Brondolo, Brady ver Halen, Pencille, Beatty, & Contrada, 2009; Harrell, 2000).

In addition to racism, peer group social stratification can present challenges. Conflicts can emerge between groups and within groups. While cliques and crowds help adolescents to differentiate between each other and have a better understanding of their identities (Arnett, 2007), relational aggression tactics such as sarcasm, ridicule, gossiping, spreading rumors, excluding, snubbing, and physical violence often are used to strengthen clique identity and establish boundaries between groups (Arnette, 2007). Research shows that the repercussions of relational aggression are prevalent for both the aggressor and the victim (Arnette, 2007). Prinstein, Boerger, and Vernberg (2001) found that “adolescents who were the targets of peers’ aggression, particularly through relational victimization, also reported higher levels of internalizing symptoms compared with other teens and “was true for both boys and girls...” (p. 488). Prinstein et al. (2001) reported that relational victimization is associated with depression, loneliness, and lower feelings of self-worth. In addition, the authors also suggest the notion that adjustment difficulties from victimization may be reciprocal phenomena.

There are many other challenges or crises that may occur for adolescents. The foregoing background discussion is illustrative, but not exhaustive. When adolescents face significant and largely avoidable challenges that may (a) undermine their sense of well-being, (b) compromise their success at school, and even (c) lead to psychiatric

problems; it is reasonable to provide them with tools to meet those challenges in a proactive and positive way before they occur. Consequently, in the next section, positive approaches to psychological well-being are explored.

Psychological Approaches to Adolescent Issues

Positive Psychology was chosen as the theoretical framework for this study. Solution-Focused Therapy and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, as well as strategies used in Positive Psychology, were selected as the traditional forms of counselling. These approaches were chosen for their positive techniques and orientation.

Positive psychology

Seligman and other individuals in the field of psychology are responsible for the development of Positive Psychology (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Positive Psychology can be defined as the study of ordinary human strengths and virtues (Sheldon & King, 2001). According to Sheldon and King (2001), positive psychologists are interested in finding out what works, what is right, and what leads to self-improvement. Seligman and Csikzentmihalyi (2000) state that, “the aim of Positive Psychology is to begin to catalyze a change in the focus of psychology from preoccupation with repairing the worst things in life to also building positive qualities.” (p.5). According to Linely, Joseph, Harrington, and Wood (2006), positive psychology attempts to restore balance to research attention and practice objectives in psychology. This means that much of the focus in psychology has been on disease, disorder, disability, dysfunction, distress, and disaffection and little has focused on health, ability, well-being, happiness, optimal functioning, and achieving the good life. While research in support of positive psychology is far from complete, researchers have begun to explore positive psychological variables. For example,

Seligman, Steen, Park, and Peterson (2005) tested five purported happiness interventions and three were found to increase happiness and decrease depressive symptoms.

Peterson and Seligman (2004) developed the *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification* that was intended to do for psychological well-being, what the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* did for psychological disorders (Seligman, Steen, Park, Peterson, 2005). According to Seligman et al. (2005), there are six overarching virtues that are acknowledged by almost every culture in the world (see Figure 1.0).

In this study, teachers and students participated in a professional development workshop. One component of this workshop presented strategies that assist adolescents in the identification of their personal strengths and virtues. These strategies are either derived from, or consistent with, the classification of virtues and character strengths proposed by Peterson and Seligman (2004). A discussion of these strategies follows.

Solution-Focused Therapy (SFT)

Berg and de Shazer and a few of their colleagues developed SFT in the 1980's (Bannick, 2007). SFT practitioners believe in the importance of the individual strengths that people possess and how they can be used, functionally, in the personal change process. Solution-focused therapy begins with a few assumptions. First, SFT therapists believe that people are healthy, competent, and capable of constructing solutions that will improve their lives (Prochaska & Norcross, 2010). Second, SFT therapists believe that potential solutions to life problems lie within their clients, but just have not surfaced yet (Bannink, 2008). Third, they believe there may be strengths in other domains or subplots of experience in people's lives that can be brought into service when constructing

Figure 1.0

Classification of 6 virtues and 24 character strengths

Virtue and strength	Definition
1. Wisdom and knowledge	Cognitive strengths that entail the acquisition and use of knowledge
a) Creativity	Thinking of novel and productive ways to do things
b) Curiosity	Taking an interest in all of ongoing experience
c) Open-mindedness	Thinking things through and examining them from all sides
d) Love of learning	Mastering new skills, topics, and bodies of knowledge
e) Perspective	Being able to provide wise counsel to others
2. Courage	Emotional strengths that involve the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, external or internal
a) Authenticity	Speaking the truth and presenting oneself in a genuine way
b) Bravery	Not shrinking from threat, challenge, difficulty or pain
c) Persistence	Finishing what one starts
d) Zest	Approaching life with excitement and energy
3. Humanity	Interpersonal strengths that involve "tending and befriending" others
a) Kindness	Doing favors and good deeds for others
b) Love	Valuing close relations with others
c) Social intelligence	Being aware of the motives and feelings of self and others
4. Justice	Civic strengths that underlie healthy community life
a) Fairness	Treating all people the same according to notions of fairness and justice
b) Leadership	Organizing group activities and seeing that they happen
c) Teamwork	Working well as member of a group or team
5. Temperance	Strengths that protect against excess
a) Forgiveness	Forgiving those who have done wrong
b) Modesty	Letting one's accomplishments speak for themselves
c) Prudence	Being careful about one's choices; not saying or doing things that may later be regretted
d) Self-regulation	Regulating what one feels and does
6. Transcendence	Strengths that forge connections to the larger universe and provide meaning
a) Appreciation of beauty and excellence	Noticing and appreciating beauty, excellence, and/or skilled performance in all domains of life
b) Gratitude	Being aware of and thankful for the good things that happen
c) Hope	Expecting the best and working to achieve it
d) Humor	Liking to laugh and tease; bringing smiles to other people
e) Religiousness	Having coherent beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of life

Note: From Peterson and Seligman (2004)

solutions to problems (Hoyt, 1994,1996). Forth, they hold that knowledge is created through conversations. This means that the client's view and understanding of something can be reframed through language and dialogue. More importantly, once problems have been reframed, they form a new starting of point for the exploration of solutions (Hansen, 2004). Finally, in SFT, it is acknowledged that memories, prior experiences, and life contexts contribute to ongoing change (Bannink, 2008). In SFT, there are four guides to making choices in life (Walter & Peller, 1992). First, if it works, don't fix it; find ways to do more of it. This means, taking something in your life that is working in one context, such as a skill or ability, and finding ways to either use it more often or to transfer it to other areas of life. Second, if what you are doing works a little, build on it and find a way to make it work a lot. Third, if nothing seems to be working, choose to experiment with new approaches. Finally, choose to begin planning today, since change starts now, not next week.

While there are several techniques used in SFT, four of are particularly useful in the methodology of this study. The first of these strategies is the miracle question.

Miracle question. The miracle question was developed by de Shazer (1988) and generally follows a standard procedure:

“Imagine when you go to sleep one night a miracle happens and the problems which we've been talking about disappear. As you were asleep, you did not know that a miracle had happened. When you woke up what would be the first signs for you that a miracle had happened?”

The miracle question is a technique used in SFT designed to help clients (in this study, students) describe and visualize their goals (O'Connell, 2001). In SFT, the miracle question is generally asked during the first session as it enables the counsellor to begin to explore a client's preferred future (O'Connell, 2001). According to Parsons (2009), the miracle questions sets the stage for goal articulation and allows the counsellor and client to get on track immediately.

In this study, the miracle question was adapted to focus on preferred futures, rather than life without a particular problem. This adapted version of the miracle question was presented in the professional development workshop as strategy to assist adolescents, and the adults who work with them, describe and visualize their goals. The adapted version of the miracle question that was presented in the workshop was:

“Here are some of the areas in which people might imagine a better future: personal relationships, health and fitness, education, career, personal growth, spiritual growth, etc. You are welcome to explore one or more of these aspects of your personal future and others that you might think of yourself. To help you do that I am now going to ask you the miracle question. Imagine when you go to sleep one night a miracle happens and overnight your world has been transformed and you have become a person who feels whole and all of your hopes, dreams, and aspirations have been achieved. Now imagine yourself to be that person and imagine yourself to be in that future. Imagine yourself to be that new person waking up in your new world? When you awoke, what would be the signs that your world had changed. What would your miracle world look like?”
(Adapted from de Shazer, 1988).

Goal setting. The second SFT strategy that was presented in the workshop was goal setting. According to Prochaska and Norcross (2010), the goals we choose determine the future we live. In SFT, the counsellor assists the client to define realistic and concrete goals (O'Connell, 2001). According to Egan (1994), a goal can be considered realistic if: (a) accessible resources can be identified, (b) external circumstances do not inhibit the goal from being accomplished, (c) the goal is sustainable, and (d) the benefits of goal achievement outweigh the costs. In addition to being realistic, goals should be empowering. According to O'Connell (2001), empowering goals meet the following four criteria: (a) the goals are grounded and concrete, (b) the goals are simple and clear, (c) the goals are measurable, and (d) the goals respect the values of the individual.

Scaling. The third SFT strategy that was adapted, for use in this study, is scaling. According to O'Connell (2001), this technique is used to help individuals express their thoughts and feelings about a problem they are facing. The individual is asked to rate how challenging a problem is on a scale of one to ten. One represents the worst that the problem has ever been and ten represents the problem's solution. The counsellor then asks the individual what it would take to move up one number on the scale. This is when small, attainable steps are set and the client begins to plan how to move towards each of his or her goals. According to O'Connell (2001), scaling is a valuable strategy for at least seven reasons. First, the client is engaged as an active participant. Second, the client is responsible for evaluating his or her situation. Third, scaling allows the client to become aware of the control and choice he or she has over his or her problem. Fourth, it helps the client to describe goals and identify small steps that can be taken towards each goal. Fifth, it enables the client to track his or her own progress and to identify and evaluate

signs of progress. Sixth, the client is able to use this tool anywhere and it may help him or her to see how solutions in one area of life can lead to solutions in other areas. Finally, scaling builds confidence, hope and motivation.

In this approach, scaling was adapted and presented in the workshop as a strategy that assists adolescents' to obtain their desired futures, rather than lives without particular problems.

There are four changes that were made to the original version of scaling as it has been presented in SFT. The first change was that rather than a scale that rated progress from the presence of a problem to the absence of a problem, the redesigned scale rated progress from existing circumstances to an ideal future. The second change was that it now allowed the individual to identify where they were on that scale and allowed them to describe what that place meant. The individual also was encouraged to name anchors to describe his or her present circumstances and his or her ideal end result and give anchors to the numbers that fall in between. To better illustrate this notion, please consider the following example. A thirteen-year-old girl imagines her preferred future of being one of the most "popular girls" in her class. On a scale of one to ten, she gives anchors to both one and ten. She describes one as having zero friends, never being invited anywhere, and people ignoring her in class, at lunch and in the hallways. She describes ten as having many friends, always being invited to weekend festivities, and having people saying hello and recognizing her in class, at lunch and in the hallways. The thirteen year old girl then places herself on the scale, presently, at a five; which she describes as having a few friends who she hangs out with on the weekends and who sit with her at lunch and with whom she walks to class. The thirteen year old then is asked what a six on the scale

would look like. She then describes what that would look like for her and strategies are the outlined for how she might move up the scale. The third change was to ask the individual how he or she can move up the scale, rather than what would it take to move up one number on the scale. The individual was then asked to think of strategies that would move and him or her forward and what number that strategy might get him or her to. The fourth change was to ask the client to explore specific ways that the forward movement might be accomplished. In a nutshell, the individual was asked to specifically explain and map out how he or she intended to implement the strategies that he or she had listed.

Future and strategy talk. The fourth approach that was adapted and used in this study is future and strategy talk. In SFT, the counsellor uses future talk to present the assumption that change is imminent (Metcalf, 2008). The goal of future talk is to acknowledge where the individual is at this present moment and to help him or her articulate a desired future (Parsons, 2009). Future talk also is intended to communicate that where the individuals is now, does not have to be where the individual will be in the future (Parsons, 2009).

Strategy talk also is used in SFT. Parsons (2009) has defined strategy talk as engaging the individual in the identification and application of small tasks that will move him or her closer to his or her goal. Strategy talk also aims to transition the individual from thinking to acting. Parsons (2009) identified four elements of strategy talk: (a) using “change” language (i.e., having a positive orientation), (b) identifying and employing individual strengths, (c) externalizing (i.e., seeing things objectively), and (d) developing specific tasks. Both these forms of “talk” help the individual to: (a) feel hopeful, (b)

recognize that he or she can improve his or her current situation, (c) develop strategies based on his or her individual strengths, and (d) discover resources that will help him or her achieve his or her goal strategies.

Solution-focused therapy differs from other counselling approaches in that it does not place a great deal of emphasis on past experiences. Instead, the approach attempts to help individuals build solutions to their problems (de Shazer, 1991). According to Prochaska and Norcross (2010), constructing complex explanations serving to analyze and understand the events of the past may help clients and therapists feel better, but not necessarily live better.

The miracle question, goal setting, scaling, and the future and strategy talk strategies were used in this study because they are forward looking, flexible, and help individuals to anticipate their goals. Other SFT strategies such as “exception questions” and “the formula first session task” were left out of this approach as they are traditionally used to move the client away from problem oriented talk to a focus on what is going well in their lives.

In SFT, clients’ are encouraged to set small goals that move them towards their preferred futures. However, in some cases, roadblocks in the form of internal conflicts may occur due to unhelpful thinking styles previously developed by the individual. The Cognitive behavioural approach to well-being aims to replace unhelpful thinking styles with ones that are more adaptive.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

Cognitive behavioral therapy is the result of a conceptual merging of cognitive therapy and behavioral therapy. While cognitive behavioural approaches can differ, at

least four characteristics are typical (Corey, 2005). First, it is expected that the therapist and the client will enjoy a collaborative working relationship. Second, internal conflicts are thought to be the result of maladaptive thought processes. Third, change occurs when maladaptive thought processes are replaced with ones that are more adaptive. Finally, therapy is generally short-term and structured in the sense that it aims to focus on clearly identified problems (Corey, 2005). According to Corey (2005), the premise underlying cognitive behavioural therapy is that the reorganization of one's self-statements will result in the reorganization of one's behaviour.

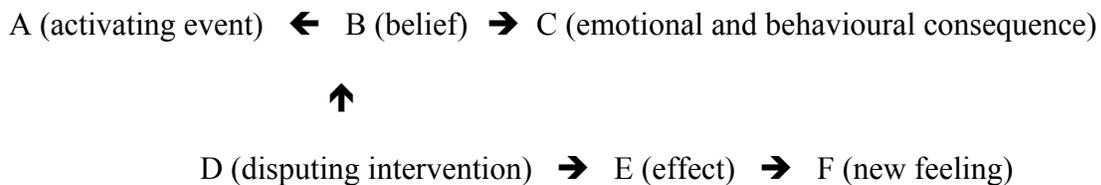
Cognitive reframing. The A-B-C theory of personality (see Figure 2.0) is central to CBT theory and practice (Corey, 2005). A is described as the activating event but also can include a fact, an event, or the attitude or behaviour of an individual. B is the belief that is held by the individual about the activating event. C represents the emotional and behavioural consequences that can be either adaptive and healthy or maladaptive and unhealthy. D is the process of helping individuals to detect, debate, and discriminate their irrational beliefs. E refers to the results of disputing their previous beliefs to create a more realistic and adaptive belief system that is then adopted, and results in F, a new set of feelings, thoughts and behaviours that are more adaptive (Corey, 2004; Ellis, 1996, 1999).

Implementation and fidelity of behavioral interventions

While using traditional counselling methods in a proactive and preventative way is a fairly new concept, there is some research on preventive interventions. Building on the work of others (Mrazek & Haggerty, 1994), Miller, Laye-Gindu, Bennett, Liu,

Figure 2.0

A-B-C theory of personality



Note: From Corey (2005)

Gold, March, Olson, and Waechtler (2011) report that there are two emergent themes discussed in the literature concerning preventative interventions. The first theme is universal implementation. This refers to prevention programs that are offered to the entire population rather than just to those who are at-risk. The second theme that Miller et. al (2011) identify is the targeted approach in which intervention is offered “in an effort to keep problematic behaviour from developing into a disorder and reducing symptom expression.” Miller et al. (2011) also state:

“Currently, there is support to move health promotion and psychological treatment models out of office settings and into contexts where children function (Durlack, Weissburg, Quintana, & Perez, 2004). Schools offer an ideal and natural setting for anxiety prevention and intervention. Schools provide access to large numbers of children in an environment that plays a critical role in shaping development. Educators and counselling staff have the opportunity to observe and interact with students on a sustained basis across a variety of anxiety-provoking situations, and therefore are in the unique position to help in the identification, referral, and treatment of anxiety problems....(p.620)

In a study conducted by Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, and Linkins (2009) on positive psychology and classroom interventions, the effects of the Penn Resiliency Program (PRP) are discussed. In particular, the PRP was found to be effective at increasing “students ability to handle day-to-day stressors and problems that are common for most students during adolescence...” (p.297). According to Seligman et al. (2009), the PRP has been evaluated in seventeen studies that compared the program against a control group. The basic findings for PRP are that it “reduces and prevents symptoms of depression”, “reduces hopelessness”, “prevents clinical levels of depression and anxiety”, “reduces and prevents anxiety”, “may reduce behavioural problems”, and it “works equally well for children of different racial/ethnic backgrounds” (p.298).

Preventative and pro-active interventions are vital to the health and well being of youth. Today’s adolescents encounter many daily stressors that wear at their psyches and ongoing challenges related to the aforementioned areas. Positive approaches that build resilience and provide adolescents with the tools they need to meet these challenges with greater success are needed. By integrating strategies and counselling techniques from traditional counselling approaches and orientations such as positive psychology, solution-focused therapy, and cognitive behavioural therapy, which are designed to decrease human suffering and increase well being, a set of theoretical constructs was also developed to guide the design of a proactive workshop that presented these strategies and techniques to adolescents as well as the teachers who work with them. The theoretical foundations that inform this method must ensure that it is constructed to have several pertinent characteristics.

Proactive approach. The first characteristic is that it must be a proactive approach. In order for individuals to successfully handle the challenges that occur in their lives, they need to be equipped with the proper skills do to so beforehand. For example, many students in their senior years of high school or in university or college, experience stress due to deadlines and exams. Teaching them strategies such as stress reduction, time management, and study skills will equip them with the tools they need to handle the challenges of academic life. In order to provide further insight, consider as a thought experiment the case of a student in his first year of university who has suffered greatly from exam stress. This individual did very well on assignments and during class discussions but felt extreme physiological symptoms resulting from stress when taking his university exams. As a result of this stress, the individual was unable to concentrate on his exams and spent so much time trying to “talk himself down” that he would run out of time on the exam. His poor performance led to below average marks in his courses and a blemished transcript. He was forced to seek assistance from student advocacy to change his marks, to authorize withdrawals and, in order to do so, needed documentation from a counsellor or doctor confirming that he suffers from exam anxiety. In order to receive such documentation, the student must join a workshop that teaches skills and strategies for managing exam stress. Of course, this case study thought experiment does not even cover all of the implications (time, money, stress, etc.) that emerge from this situation. Now consider that the student had been taught these strategies prior to his exam or prior to even entering university. The outcomes might have been quite different.

As a second example, teens and young adults are likely to be troubled by disagreements and arguments in their relationships with their partners, friends, and

parents. Skills such as empathic listening, collaborative problem solving, and respectful communication in the acceptance of diverse opinions and lifestyles, might assist them in building positive relationships and help to strengthen the development of their own identities.

Easy and intuitive use. The second characteristic has to do with the ease of acquisition and use of the method. In other words, the strategies within the method must be easy to learn, intuitive, and available to all. Furthermore, the strategies must be perceived to utilize common sense approaches for navigation and decision-making in life. For example, in career counselling assessing or discussing personal strengths and interests with clients and setting sequential personal goals may seem like a more straight - forward process than aptitude testing.

Enjoyable and empowering. It is also important that individuals find the method and the strategies enjoyable and fulfilling. For example, the miracle question used in solution focused therapy is a much more enjoyable process than analyzing the problems of the past because it allows the client to imagine a positive problem free future rather than to recall a painful past full of setbacks.

Accessibility. The fourth characteristic is the accessibility of the method. This means that the method should accommodate all youth and young adults and communicate the necessary information easily and effectively to them. In order for this to be done, the method must use current and progressive mediums of communication. For example, traditional forms of counselling generally appear as a client-therapist or group therapy dynamic. This may not be the most effective way to transmit information to today's youth. The proposed method may benefit from having multiple sources for youth to

access information (i.e., face-to-face encounters, internet sites, wikis, live internet chat groups, focus group meetings, workshops, computer applications, etc.). The method also should be accessible enough to engage all end users regardless gender sexual orientations, ethnicity, culture, language, socio-economic status, and (dis)ability. For example, the method should use gender and orientation neutral language, culturally sensitive procedures, language translation apps, be accessible, free or inexpensive, and include supports for individuals with disabilities such as sign language interpreters, text to speech, and differentiated learning strategies.

Anticipatory. The method also must be constructed to be anticipatory. This means that in order for the program to be proactive, the needs of this population must be anticipated beforehand so that relevant strategies and skills can be identified. This also ties in with accessibility, as the information must be necessary and applicable to those receiving it. This means that continuous intake and feedback must be performed to ensure that the needs of the population are being met. For example, counselling in relation to the challenges and benefits of relationships must anticipate needs based partly on the ways that people meet and relate.

Flexible. In addition to being anticipatory, the method also should be flexible. Flexibility can have several different implications and meanings in this case. The most important implication in this context is the provision of several different responses or behaviours that can be made in reaction to a situation. For example, young adults should be taught several ways to deal with grief and loss (before it occurs) so that they may choose one that is appropriate for their personality and type of loss. For instance, they may wish to use a different strategy when dealing with different types of losses such as

the loss of a loved one, job, pet, self-esteem, etc. This way, if a loss does occur, the individual already will be equipped with a set of behaviors and sets of skills that he or she can access to process, cope and recover. As examples, consider two different young adolescents. One, who has encountered a lot of challenges in life, may need a wider spectrum of strategies that are more supportive and personalized. Yet, at the end of the day, he or she may develop more resiliencies. Another, who has faced fewer challenges, may not need as much support, but may enter adulthood with fewer resources to face the challenges that may lie ahead.

Inexpensive. It also is important that the method is inexpensive. Once again, inexpensive can have several different meanings. In this case, it can mean the consumption of time, funds spent on assessment and professional training, and the costs of implementation, materials, and technology.

These characteristics were adapted from the principles of Universal Design for Learning (Council for Exceptional Children, 2005).

Chapter 3

Methodology

Introduction

The primary purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of teachers regarding the usefulness and potential effectiveness of methods derived from positive psychology, solution-focused therapy, and cognitive-behavioural therapy with junior high students. The secondary purpose of this study was to gain insight and understanding into the participants' perceptions of their own problem-solving behaviours and attitudes, before and after having learned about a variety of strategies used in counselling.

The proactive approaches that were used in this study were designed to help young adolescents build capacity and resilience and develop skills that are intended to enhance their emotional well-being and positive self-affect.

Conceptual Design

Empirical studies that integrate theory and the perspectives of teachers in the development of positive psychology interventions for adolescents are rare. This may be because most schools have adopted counselling programs that are reactive and deal with students' problems after they have occurred. Research in this area may be beneficial in preparing adolescents to meet common challenges before they occur by arming them with the attitudes, skills, tools, and knowledge of resources needed to enhance their personal strengths, resiliency, and coping ability. Young people who are better able to meet the challenges of adolescence may reduce the demand on high school and adult counselling services and support greater wellness in the general population for years to come while at the same time decreasing human suffering and increasing human happiness.

Scholars and professionals who write about comprehensive school counselling advocate the use of developmentally appropriate proactive approaches (Collins & Dozois, 2008, Conyne, 2000), while recognizing the salience of post-crisis intervention approaches. This focus is informed by positive psychology theories, which propose that psychological well-being, and positive outcomes among youth will be enhanced by approaches that build capacity and resilience. The proponents of positive psychology also argue that it is important that young people are helped early on to develop skills that lead to healthy self-determination and independence as part of the normal school experience (Forster 2005, 2006, Seligman et al., 2009). This is because youth develop their self-identities through the meanings they make of their life experiences (Russell, 1982). These experiences often inform their developmental outcomes (Merriam & Yang, 1996). Positive psychology posits that schools, and systems that are significant to youth, could provide resources that target psychological well being for all students by supporting positive self-construction, self-identity and role identities. This might best be achieved if counselling is not only used reactively (i.e., in response to personal crises, chronic problems, addiction, mental health disease, etc.) but also proactively (i.e., as a wellness resource to enhance positive emotions and experiences) (Seligman, 2009). Since personal strengths and positive perspectives play an important role helping young adolescents navigate the challenges they face, positive psychologists target the wellness approach to self-construction and self-identity.

Teachers were introduced to some of the main methods that might be employed in a proactive counselling program grounded in the theoretical framework of positive psychology through an experiential professional development (PD) workshop. This

professional development opportunity is delineated fully in Appendix B. The strategies that were introduced during the PD opportunity reflected the four core areas of positive psychology (see Figure 3.0) and were derived from solution-focused therapy, cognitive-behavioural therapy and positive psychology.

Characteristics of Qualitative Research

In this study, a qualitative research methodology was used to gain a more complete understanding of the perspectives held by the participants. The design was selected because the research questions that guide this study were developed to understand and relay meaning from the perspectives of its' participants through their experiences and their words (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). According to Bryman (1988), qualitative research is “the way in which people being studied understand and interpret their social reality...”. Ritchie (2003), describes the main proponents of qualitative research as:

“...the overall research perspective and the importance of the participants' frames of reference ; the flexible nature of research design; the volume and richness of qualitative; the distinctive approaches to analysis and interpretation; and the kind of outputs that derive from qualitative research.” (p.3).

While there are many characteristics of qualitative research, two are particularly relevant for this study.

Contextual. According to Ritchie (2003), contextual research is interested in finding out what exists in the social world and how emerges. Richie (2003) describes that an important component of qualitative research, is describing and displaying phenomena as experienced by the participants with great detail and in their own words. This is

particularly relevant for this study as the purpose was to “map the range of elements, dimensions, and positions within a social phenomenon.” (p.27). Bogden and Biklen (2007), refer to this as descriptive data and state that the written word is just as essential in data collection as it is in the presentation of emergent themes.

Generative. Qualitative research also is concerned with the development of new ideas as a contribution to social theory (Ritchie, 2003). Ritchie also states that,

“ because qualitative research seeks to capture emergent concepts and is not overly predetermined in coverage, the potential for original or creative thoughts or suggestions is high. It also allows ideas to be generated through, and then placed in, the ‘real’ contexts from which they arise [and] therefore has the potential to develop new conceptions or understandings of social phenomena... develop hypotheses about the nature of the social world and how it operates... generate new solutions to persistent social problems... [and] determine actions that are needed to make programs, policies, or services more effective.” (p.30-31).

Fostering positive experiences, relationships, enduring psychological traits in the context of positive environments

In this section, positive counselling strategies are explored as well as how they may contribute to the four core areas of positive psychology thus providing a conceptual framework for this study. Figure 3.0 was developed to illustrate which strategies contribute to each of the four core areas.

Miracle question. The miracle question is a technique used in SFT designed to help clients (in this case students) describe and visualize their goals (O’Connell, 2001). In this study, the miracle question was presented to the teachers in an adapted form designed

to focus on students' preferred futures, rather than life without a particular problem. This adapted version of the miracle question still will be used to help individuals describe and visualize their goals. The miracle question is the first technique designed to increase positive experiences. The adapted version of the miracle question that was used in this study is:

“Here are some of the areas in which people might imagine a better future: personal relationships, health and fitness, education, career, personal growth, spiritual growth, etc. You are welcome to explore one or more of these aspects of your personal future and others that you might think of yourself. To help you do that I am now going to ask you the miracle question. Imagine when you go to sleep one night a miracle happens and overnight your world has been transformed and you have become a person who feels whole and all of your hopes, dreams, and aspirations have been achieved. Now imagine yourself to be that person and imagine yourself to be in that future. Imagine yourself to be that new person waking up in your new world? When you awoke, what would be the signs that your world had changed. What would your miracle world look like?”

By visualizing the details of a dream future the individual is actually imagining a series of positive experiences and relationships and begins to consider realizing this ideal future. Consider the following hypothetical “thought experiment,” a young man might envision a future in which he weighs his ideal weight. In this dream, he might describe himself as being athletic and playing football for the junior varsity team. He might discuss feeling confident and popular. In this example, the young man is actually

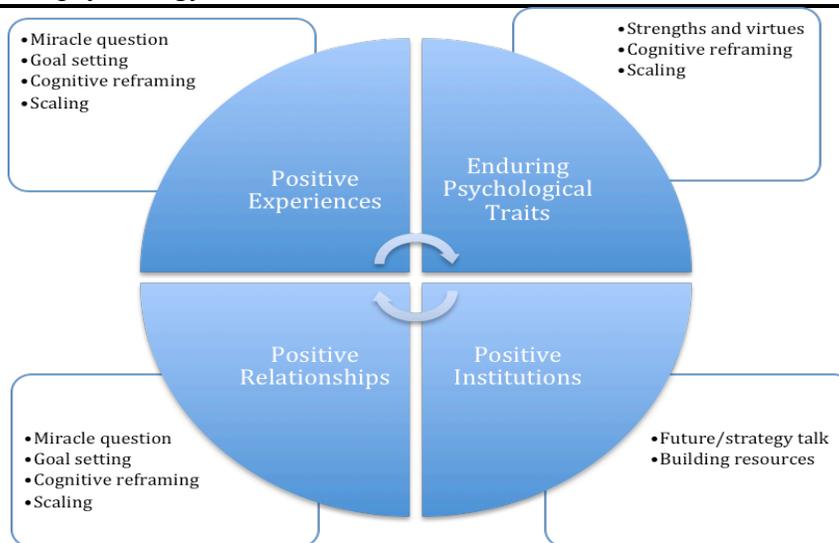
imagining a set of positive experiences (i.e., being at his ideal weight, being athletic, playing football, feeling confident, and having many friends). He is envisioning positive experiences and positive relationships through this technique. In fact, each of these areas is actually a potential goal.

Goal setting. The second SFT strategy that was used in this approach is goal setting. According to Prochaska and Norcross (2010), the goals we choose determine the future we live. In SFT, the counsellor assists the client to define realistic and concrete goals (O'Connell, 2001). According to Russel (1982), youth develop their self-identities through the meanings they make of their life experiences. Through goal setting, students are actually identifying, prioritizing, and choosing the positive life experiences and relationships they want to work towards. The students referenced in this study will no doubt have a wide spectrum of different goals, both small and large. Returning to the example of the young man, after considering his ideal future, he might have prioritized his goals as – increasing his athletic skills, playing football, and making more friends, as the positive experiences and relationships he would like to work towards.

Scaling and identifying strengths. In this study, scaling was presented to the participants in an adapted form designed to help their students obtain their desired futures, rather than lives without particular problems. On a scale of one to ten, each individual will be asked to identify ten as optimally happy and whole and one as being the furthest the he or she could possibly be from that goal. The individual will then be asked to situate himself or herself on the scale and to describes ways of moving up the scale and to identify where that would place them. Where he or she locates himself or herself on the scale will indicate how challenging he or she thinks achieving the goal

Figure 3.0

Positive counselling techniques and how they may contribute to the four core areas of positive psychology



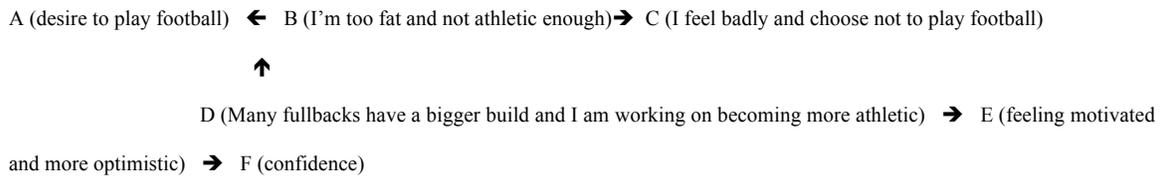
will be. In a nutshell, the individual is asked to specifically explain and map out how he or she intends to implement the strategies that he or she has listed. Through scaling, the participants create mini positive experiences that contribute towards their goals. Positive relationships also may factor in to their experiences. Scaling also plays an important role when considering one's strengths and virtues. Youth will become more aware of their resiliency strengths and utilize them as they move closer towards their ideal futures and, in turn, solidify these strengths and maybe even develop new ones. Revisiting the example of the young man and considering his goal to play football, he may rate himself at a "three" because he has played a little football in the past and felt he had some potential talent for it because he wasn't afraid to get hurt. When asked what a "four" for him would look like, he might say that he would be actively training to play fullback and learning more about the rules and regulations of the game. When asked what would it

take for him to get to a “four” he responds that he will need to play on a community team for a year to gain experience in the fullback position and to learn more about the rules and regulations. As a result, he decides to take the initiative to sign-up for a community football team. In this example, the young man has designed the positive experience he would like to have (play football as a fullback), decided what steps he would need to take to move towards his goal (sign up for a community team), and identified a personal strength (i.e., bravery) through the process of scaling.

Cognitive reframing. The A-B-C theory of personality (see Figure 4.0) is central to CBT theory and practice (Corey, 2005). A is described as the activating event but also can include a fact, an event, or the attitude or behaviour of an individual. B is the belief that is held by the individual about the activating event. C represents the emotional and behavioural consequence that can be either adaptive and healthy or maladaptive and unhealthy. D is the process of helping individuals to detect, debate, and discriminate their irrational beliefs. E is the result of disputing their previous beliefs so that a more realistic and adaptive belief system is adopted. It leads to F, a new set of feelings, thoughts and behaviours that are more adaptive (Corey, 2004; Ellis, 1996, 1999). Through cognitive reframing, youth will become more mentally equipped as they reframe unhelpful thinking styles that may have been holding them back. In addition, they will learn helpful thinking styles through this process that will contribute to positive experiences and relationships. In addition, adopting more adaptive thinking patterns will contribute to the development and the duration of positive psychological traits. Continuing with the above example of the young man who aspires to play fullback, he may have had some unhelpful thinking

Figure 4.0

A-B-C theory of personality (with example)



Note: Adapted from Corey (2005)

patterns that have gotten in the way in the past and may continue to get in the way as he works towards his goals. For example, he may say things to himself like, “I’m too fat to play football, and I am not in good enough shape”. Helping him to identify limiting thoughts and replace them with more adaptive ones can help him as he works towards his goal. Figure four demonstrates how an unhelpful thought can be replaced with more adaptive thoughts.

In this example, the young man has replaced his maladaptive thoughts with thoughts that are more forgiving and helpful in the pursuit of his goal.

Future and strategy talk and building resources. The fourth approach drawn from SFT that was adapted and used in this study is future and strategy talk. In SFT, the counsellor uses future talk to present the assumption that change is imminent (Metcalf, 2008).

The goal of future talk is to acknowledge where the individual is at this present moment and to help him or her articulate a desired future (Parsons, 2009). Future talk also is intended to communicate that where the individuals is now, does not have to be where the individual is in the future (Parsons, 2009). All those involved use future and strategy talk throughout the process. The idea is to help the individual build positive resources by using “change” language (i.e., having a positive orientation). In addition, the student identifies and employs individual strengths that may be helpful towards goal

achievement. Furthermore, the above techniques help each student to externalize (i.e., see things objectively), and develop specific tasks that he or she can do that contribute to his or her overall goal.

Participants

In this section, I describe the criteria used to select the participants. The sample for this study comprised of 5 teachers (N=5). The sample was used to collect qualitative data. Teachers were selected purposefully, to meet the following criteria:

- (a) represent both genders,
- (b) involved with middle years education, and
- (c) teachers must be certified teachers teaching in a Manitoba public school with a minimum of five years experience

Participant Theta. Participant Theta has taught grades 3, 6, 7, and 8 and worked in Student Services. Theta has taught in three different schools over the last 20 years. Theta did not specify all areas of teaching but did mention having taught Physical Education.

Participant Kappa. Participant Kappa has been teaching for 11 years and has always worked at the same school. Kappa began teaching grade 1 and then moved to grades 7 and 8 for the last 10 years. Kappa currently teaches Math and Science.

Participant Zeta. Participant Zeta has been teaching for 26 years. Zeta began teaching in a rural town in three different communities. Zeta then moved back into a city in Western Canada and started working at Foxtrot School Division. Zeta has been with this school division for the last 16 years and has taught French, Language Arts, and has been involved with Student Services. Zeta has been at the same school for the last 7 years.

Participant Gamma. Gamma has been teaching for the last 7 years. Gamma began teaching grades 7 and 8 at Zulu School. Gamma then moved to Charlie School to teach grade 8 followed by Sierra School to teach grade 7 and 8. Gamma currently works at Oscar school in student services for the last 4 years.

Participant Epsilon. Participant Epsilon began teaching Physical Education at Oscar School for 3 years. Epsilon then taught grades 5, 6 and 7 in the classroom. Epsilon taught these grades for 5 years then moved to Kilo School for 14 years and taught grade 7 and 8. This year, Epsilon moved to Romeo School and now teaches grades 5 and 6.

Recruitment Procedure

The following procedure was followed during the participant recruitment process. After I received approval from the Education and Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB) for my study to be carried out in Foxtrot School Division, the superintendent of the school division was approached by email and provided with detailed information about the study (Appendix D). In the attached information, the superintendent was also asked to approach the principals of each school within the division on behalf of the researcher. Once permission was received from the superintendent and the principals had been informed and no participants were generated, I sought out an amendment from ENREB (Appendix E). As per the amendment, I emailed the principals (Appendix F) of all schools in Foxtrot School Division hosting grades 7 and 8 and went to a few meetings at the schools I heard back from. This effort resulted in five participants from Foxtrot School Division. After the participants contacted me by email and expressed their interest, they were asked to sign the consent forms and once again, given detailed information about the study and their participation (Appendix G). The participants were

also asked to sign a promise of confidentiality (Appendix G) prior to the onset of the first focus group. Once all of the participants had consented, the study was held during a divisional in-service/professional development day at one of the schools in Foxtrot School Division. The study took place in a staff meeting room with the participants and myself sitting around two small round tables pushed together. In the next section, the procedure followed during the data collection is described in detail.

Procedure

In the first phase of this study, a focus group was used to collect data on how participants view traditional counseling methods being used in a proactive way (duration 30 minutes). The participants also were asked open-ended questions adapted from the Problem Solving Inventory (Heppner, 1988) aimed to understand how teachers felt about their own ability to manage and solve problems (duration 30 minutes). The first round of questioning provided the participants with context, which allowed them to more accurately, describe their own personal feelings regarding their own problem solving abilities during the second round of questioning. The purpose of the first part of this study was to establish the construct validity of these ideas.

Next, the participants participated in a professional development opportunity that presented specific counselling techniques and how they can be used proactively. The workshop also included several scenarios that described a student at the beginning of a decision-making process and suggested ways that counselling techniques may be used by the student, or someone who is supporting the student (duration 40 minutes).

In the second phase of this study, a focus group was used to collect data on how participants viewed traditional counseling methods being used in a proactive way after

having been exposed to the professional development workshop (duration 30 minutes).

The participants again were asked open-ended questions adapted from the Problem Solving Inventory (Heppner, 1988) that aimed to understand how teachers felt about their own ability to manage and solve problems after having been exposed to the professional development workshop (duration 30 minutes).

Data Collection

The qualitative data was collected through focus groups. During qualitative data collection, teachers were asked open-ended questions that address how effective, useful, and viable they think a proactive form of counselling that uses adapted versions of traditional counselling methods. The questions that guided the focus group interviews can be found in Appendix H. A paragraph that introduces the topic was read before the onset of the discussion.

During the first focus group, which took place in the first phase of this study, the group comprising of teachers received five levels of questioning. The first level of questions was designed to collect demographic information (e.g., How long have you been a teacher? What grade levels have you taught?). The second level of questions explored the challenges that they felt were the most relevant for young adolescents today (e.g., What do you feel are some of the biggest challenges experienced by young adolescents today? Which challenges do you feel are the most difficult ones experienced by adolescents today?). The third level of questions explored their perceptions of their own abilities to equip students with the skills they need to navigate common adolescent challenges (e.g., How do you feel about your own ability to equip adolescents with the skills they need to manage common challenges?). The fourth level of questions was

aimed at understanding the teachers' perceptions about the effectiveness, usefulness, and viability of traditional counselling methods being used in a proactive way (e.g., do you think that a program that taught strategies designed to better equip teachers and students to manage common challenges would be beneficial and if so, why/why not?). The fifth level of questioning explored how the teachers felt about their own problem solving abilities.

During the second focus group, which took place during the second phase of the study, the participants were asked only the questions from the third, fourth, and fifth levels of questioning.

Data Management and Analysis

Data from focus groups was collected and analyzed to support the identification of emerging themes. Transcribed data was shared and checked with participants to ensure that the information accurately reflects their intentions (i.e., member checking). Contact information was gathered from each participant prior to the onset of the first focus group. Participants were informed that their contact information was being collected so that a transcript of the focus group they participated in could be sent to them to be checked for accuracy. The participants then received a transcript record of everything that was said during the focus group, but that did not identify who said what. In this study, it is the ideas, perspectives and insights expressed during the focus groups that are important; not the assignment of them to specific individuals. Transcripts were emailed out after the data collection was complete. Participants received one week to review the transcript. They were notified that if they fail to respond with their changes after the one-week period it would be assumed they are satisfied with the transcript as sent.

The information collected from the participants in this study was used to inform the data analysis and interpretation in this research. Qualitative data was collected both before and after the participants had been exposed to the professional development workshop (i.e., intervention). Thick descriptions and exact quotes were used during analysis to ensure transferability. In addition to descriptive accounts, explanatory accounts, including the methods of analysis and interpretation used to account for patterns in the data also are provided.

Triangulation was also used. For example, member checking (as described above) of the emergent themes was used to ensure accuracy and credibility.

The raw data was coded into areas to identify emergent themes. Only the actual transcript was analyzed in this study. The first level of coding that was used in this study was 'topical' situational coding, described by Bogdan and Biklen (2007) as "...data that tells you how the subjects define the... particular topics". A more detailed analysis of each topic, and the relationships between them, involved a second level of coding designed to reveal the perspectives held by the focus group participants. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) describe "perspectives held by subjects" coding as "...orientations toward particular aspects of a [topic]". Strategy coding was used at this level. Strategy codes refer to "...the tactics, methods, techniques, maneuvers, ploys, and other conscious ways people accomplish various things". Colors and symbols were used to group and cross reference the raw data in the coding process. The final level of coding was highly analytical and interpretive. It was used to relate the emergent themes to the theoretical constructs and professional practices discussed in the literature review and to suggest topics for future research and or changes in professional practice.

In summary, this study assessed the perceptions of teachers regarding the usefulness and potential effectiveness of the proactive use of traditional counselling methods within the framework of Positive Psychology. The secondary purpose of this study was to assess if any changes occur in the participants' perceptions of their own problem-solving behaviors and attitudes, after having learned about a variety of strategies used in counselling. This study used a qualitative methodology, involving teacher focus groups. It is hoped the findings will give direction to future research and professional practices in preparing teachers and students to proactively confront the challenges that occur in junior high school.

Chapter Four

Emergent Themes and Analysis and Interpretation

The purpose of this study was to gain a greater understanding about teachers' perceptions regarding the usefulness, effectiveness, and viability of methods derived from positive psychology, solution-focused therapy, and cognitive-behavioural therapy in a proactive intervention designed to equip junior high school students with the skills they need to navigate life challenges before they arise. The second purpose of this study was to gain greater insight into how do teachers felt about their own decision-making and problem-solving abilities before and after having learned about these methods.

In this chapter, I present the results of my study in two sections. Section one lists and describes the emergent themes drawn from the data collected from the two focus groups. The emergent themes are supported by description and quotes derived directly from the transcripts. I provide my interpretation and analysis of the data and emergent themes in Part Two. In addition, I incorporate the findings and analysis with the information from the literature review in Chapter Two.

Part One: Emergent Themes

In this section, each of the eight themes (as well as the sub-themes) that emerged from the data are described and supported through exact quotes and details from the data. Figure 5.0 provides an outline of the themes and sub-themes. The themes that emerged were: (a) perceptions, beliefs and attitudes about parental involvement, (b) cultural climate, (c) challenges facing today's youth, (d) the dual role of educators, (e) attitudes about managing students' challenges, (f) benefits of process strategies for adolescents, (g)

participants' suggestions and considerations for implementation, and (h) personal attitudes towards problem solving.

Theme one – Perceptions, Beliefs and Attitudes about Parental Involvement

The data revealed that the participants felt that parental involvement was a contributing factor in terms of the challenges that youth face. In particular, the participants expressed that family support was often not adequate in terms of what they felt children needed in order to successfully mature socially, academically and emotionally. This was first brought up very early in the focus group when participants were asked about what challenges they felt were the greatest for adolescents today. Two of the participants mentioned that “family support” and “adult influence and involvement” were challenges in terms of academic and social support. It was later re-stated as a “root problem” by one participant.. There were several sub-themes that emerged in the area of parental involvement: (a) social skills, (b) extra-curricular activities and free time, (c) parenting and setting boundaries, and (d) educational support at home.

Social Skills. Some participants felt that parents struggled to teach or model social skills for their children, which may be why children themselves are having difficulty in this area. The teachers identified and gave examples of different areas of student interaction and communication that they felt students were struggling with. For example, one teacher said, “. . .I see that there's a lot of kids who don't have great social skills, but I think it's just because they don't know, parents don't have the skills to teach

Figure 5.0

List of themes and sub-themes

Theme 1.0 – Perceptions, Beliefs, and Attitudes about Parental Involvement

1.1 – Social Skills

- Beliefs that parents are unable (due to time or lack of resources) or unequipped (do not have proper social skills themselves or lack the ability to transfer social skills) to model and teach social skill to their children.

1.2 – Extra-curricular Activities and Free Time

- Youth today are participating in less activities outside of school and there is less parental monitoring during free time.
- Some students are over scheduled and have little time with no scheduled activities.

1.3 – Parenting and Setting Boundaries

- Many parents lack the time, energy, skills, or abilities to set boundaries or establish rules and standards for their children.
- Parents are reluctant to accept responsibility for their child when a problem occurs.

1.4 – Educational Support at Home

- Parents do not spend enough time engaged in educational oriented learning activities with their children.

Theme 2.0 – Cultural Climate

2.1 – Technology

- A large part of peer social connections occur online.

2.2 – Community Involvement

- Today's parents are more isolated with their children as the result of a fragmented community.

Theme 3.0 – The Challenges Facing Today's Youth

3.0 – Academic Challenges

- Many students today are lacking in terms of resiliency, effort, time on task, and problem solving when it comes to their academic studies.

3.1 – Social Emotional Challenges

- Students are struggling with managing unpleasant emotions such as anxiety, anger, etc. and lacking "self-coping strategies".
- Students have difficulty accepting responsibility.
- Students are having difficulty managing conflict at home.

3.2 – Current Programming and Resources

- Programs and resources are available however they may only be used by middle class families.

Theme 4.0 – The Dual Role of Educators and Meeting the Needs of Today's Youth

4.1 – Balancing Social-Emotional Learning and Academic Learning

- In addition to academic learning, social-emotional development is now an important part of education.
- Balancing both areas is a difficult feat for educators.
- Having to act as an educator as well as a counselor and a parent impacts the student-teacher relationship.

4.2 – The Parent-Teacher

- Teachers are not comfortable being in a primary parenting role.
- Having to "act" like a parent impacts the relationship teachers have with their students.

Theme 5.0 – Attitudes About Managing Students' Challenges

- Teachers feel more equipped managing "common" or "typical" challenges faced by youth.
- Teachers feel less equipped managing family conflict/problems (e.g., abuse) or challenges that emerge as a result of problems at home.
- Teachers feel less equipped managing severe mental health issues.

Theme 6.0 – Benefits of Process Strategies for Adolescents

- Traditional counselling methods being used in a proactive way would be beneficial to today's youth.
- The strategies in the PD workshop would be useful to students because it provides them with a structure and process for problem solving and setting goals in a more manageable way (by breaking large goals down into more manageable steps).
- These strategies can be employed to help students achieve their goals both academic and social-emotional areas.
- These strategies may help students to see their progress.
- Cognitive reframing may be helpful for students who need to adopt a more positive inner dialogue.

Theme 7.0 – Participants' Suggestions and Considerations for Implementation

- Parental support is needed in connection with strategies.
- A program/plan designed to teach proactive strategies to students should be simple to employ, use common language across the board, and be taught/used with all students (rather than students in crisis).
- Meeting multiple curricular outcomes would be beneficial.
- Scenarios need to be authentic to students.
- The goals have to be attainable and within the student's control.
- A feedback loop and reflection opportunities are important and need to be built in.

Theme 8.0 – Personal Attitudes Towards Problem Solving

- Time and collaboration with others are common ways of approaching problem solving.
 - It may be easier to manage emotions when problem solving at work than at home.
 - Strategies may take time to learn and be internalized by participants and students.
-

their kids.” Another participant commented on an assumption that may be held by parents, that children will learn social skills without having to be taught or supported through the process. Kappa stated that, “... I think there are just a lot of assumptions made by parents that these things will just happen, they will learn how to be nice, they will learn how to be friends, they will know how to share... you’re not born knowing how to share, you have to learn it...” Gamma extended this belief to areas outside of education by stating that, “... I was thinking about the provincial hockey organization and how we had to do an online course before parents could attend hockey games. So we’re not the only organization or group that is noticing challenges where people don’t have the social skills that we need.”

Extra-curricular activities and free time. During the focus groups, the participants discussed student involvement regarding activities that take place outside the context of the school. The discussion mostly took place in the context of the participants’ own personal situations regarding age (i.e., comparing the way things are now to the way things were when they were teenagers), rural vs. urban living (i.e., participants who had lived in the country growing up and those who grew up in the city), and also the context/climate of the schools they have taught in or are currently teaching in. When the participants reflected back on their own experiences as youth, many commented on being involved in activities and spending time in groups with peers during their free time. For example, Kappa states that:

“...when I was younger, as a child, I was really busy. I had a lot of activities outside and my mom was very involved and my friends’ parents were very involved and we did things together in groups outside of school. And now when I

teach grade 7 and 8 and I ask them, who participates in activities outside, it's a really small group of kids that are doing out of school activities... in this school I've noticed."

Zeta commented on the fact that her free time as a child also was spent with friends however, she stated that she had, "parent supervision and it was everywhere because the community was my parent. With these kids, the parents may not be even home until 6 or 7." Epsilon also acknowledged that children today seem to have, "... a lot of unsupervised free time." Theta also acknowledged that it was different for him when he was younger and growing up, he stated that:

"...[he and his friends] goofed around or whatever we were doing and it was face to face and we invented a lot of stuff but like, I grew up on a farm too so we had different options there too but I think that many kids are squirreled away in their basements and they play games and that's their social reality."

Epsilon, who also grew up in a small rural community, discussed that as being a factor in terms of the options that are available to youth and their parents. For example, she stated that, "...when I was on a farm, I wasn't able to go and just do things. Where as here, the transportation is easier and there are more decisions to make and for kids to make too right? If you don't have to make the choice, it's not an option. Now there are options, which is good, but how good?"

The participants continued to discuss their perceptions on the current state of today's youth regarding extra-curricular activities and free time. One participant questioned if income was a factor. Kappa responded saying that,

“It’s not just the money, I think it’s the ability to take kids, parents try but they can’t find the time or they don’t have the time and they just... a lot of them have two jobs and they don’t have time to take kids, when there are multiple kid, to activities. So the kids don’t really do activities so there ends up being a lot more free time, more than I ever new as a kid.”

Two participants discussed their schools and the fact that many of their students were over scheduled and struggled to balance school and other extra-curricular activities. They discussed these schools as having a different climate or “different community”. Gamma stated that “...at Oscar School, we talk a lot about kids being overscheduled outside of school... and so they were talking about like, Thursday is my only day where I have nothing, and they work to try and get through that they try and balance their school and their commitments and fit it all in.” Theta agreed that he had experienced that when he worked at Tango School and “everything was very planned for them and they didn’t have time to kind of good around with their buddies...” Gamma continued on to say that in some instances when children, “do get free time they get so ridiculous because they don’t know how to spend it”.

There was a general attitude that today’s youth are not as engaged in social activities in the same way that the participants had experienced while they were in their early teenage years. The participants also felt there was a difference depending on the school. For example, Gamma, who works at Oscar School, spoke about the partnership that Oscar has with a ballet company in Western Canada and also discussed the “cross section of demographics where you have some students who come from pretty affluent backgrounds and others who are living on assistance” which was also extended to

parental involvement. Epsilon indicated that he/she had gone from working in a school that was more “affluent to less affluent within a year...and seeing a lot of kids who don’t have great social skills.” In addition to social skills, parenting and setting boundaries also was of concern among the participants.

Parenting and setting boundaries. Each of the participants expressed and shared examples of instances in which they have been asked to establish boundaries or intervene in a disciplinary way for an issue that they felt it was the parent’s responsibility to address. Specifically, the issues were boundaries in terms of friendships or peer relationships as well as disciplining and setting rules and standards for personal conduct. The participants said they felt that parents were not always comfortable “parenting” or “setting boundaries” for their children; perhaps, in some instances, due to a lack of time or energy. The dual role of educators will be revisited later on.

Many of the participants shared concerns about their beliefs that today’s parents lacked skills or lacked confidence in regards to setting boundaries for their children and with parenting in general. One participant stated that:

“...we are quite often asked to mediate when there has been some kind of online conversation that’s been inappropriate and part of that is because it bleeds over here, and the kids are distracted and can’t concentrate. But part of it is the parents not being able to parent and say, you know what you don’t know how to use this tool appropriately so I am taking it away. They don’t do that, they don’t want to be the person who is out of line with their kids.”

Gamma indicated that she has a “parent who doesn’t have a lot of parenting skills” and that her daughter is “challenging her on a lot of stuff.” In this context, Gamma

also indicated that there are instances when, “parents just don’t have the skills or they get to a point where they are just tapped out.” In addition, Gamma commented on having experiences in which “parents have shown up to school and said I’m done, take them, I don’t know what to do” and the school responded by seeking out resources for the family. Kappa gave some examples of parents being reluctant to set boundaries as well. Kappa stated that:

“...I have had a lot of parents who don’t want to be the bad guy and want me to instruct the child and be the bad guy so that they can just support it at home but it’s like they expect me to lay down the rules even if it has nothing to do with school and it’s like... if my child is going out and I don’t know where she’s going what am I suppose to do about that, can you tell her she can’t go out at night. So they think it’s my job to do it and the parent will just support me and back me up but they want me to be the face that’s telling their child what to do. I seem to have a lot of that this year.”

Theta commented on how the issue could be extended to even “basic healthy boundaries” around common issues such as use of the television or bedtime. Theta also stated that “a lot of these kids have T.V.’s in their room and they can watch as long as they want and as late as they want... and then when we get them in the morning they’re shot.” The participant continued to state that, “I feel like a lot of parents just don’t know or they’re afraid of having those boundaries for their kids and just setting ground rules and expecting, having them follow through with it.” Zeta also expressed concern for today’s youth and the impact a lack of parental modeling has had. She stated that:

“...I think that’s my concern for these kids growing up because every generation kind of struggles with this, a lot of other kids that I see don’t have the roll models for good parenting, and so they are going to become parents and what’s that going to look like for them and we’ve had this conversation many years ago with the residential schools we have had generations of kids who didn’t see parents parenting and so struggling to learn how to parent properly themselves and well it’s not just the aboriginal kids, I see it all over this community where you’ve got parents who want to be friends, parents who are scared of there kid freaking out about the boundaries.”

Kappa agreed with Zeta and stated that, “we have a generation of parents who believe it’s somebody else’s job to do the parenting”. A few of the participants also felt that parents were sometimes reluctant to accept responsibility for their child when a problem occurs. For example, Kappa stated that “it’s never their child’s fault, if their child didn’t take their stuff home to study, it’s my fault because I didn’t put it in their backpack.” Kappa also states that, “...there is never any ownership put on the actual student”, which Gamma agreed with. This issue also was related to what the participants felt was a lack of emotional support at home.

Educational Support at home. Most of the participants felt that in addition to a lack of social skills support at home, many students were also not receiving an adequate amount of academic support at home. Educational support was defined as time that parents spent with their children that was directly related to educational learning activities. Many participants indicated that some students struggle with what they learn at

school because they “don’t have the family support” at home. Kappa framed this in terms of “a lack of problem solving abilities.” Kappa stated that:

“Ya, I agree and it’s also educational support at home too. For example, I didn’t really think about it until I had a child who is five and she problem solves more than some of my [grade] 7 and 8’s, but I make her, like if she can’t figure something out, I say well what are you going to do to solve your problem? I think that some parents have this assumption that kids can just figure out how to do it. They just figure out how to add, and they just figure out how to be good people, and it’s not something that needs to be taught or guided and that that’s what schools is for”.

Kappa later stated, during the second focus group, that many parents “assume that we don’t actually have to teach kids, like they just turn 6 and know how to read... no, if you don’t work with your child, they won’t learn to read.” Kappa also discussed the importance of the parental role in early education and explained that as educators, “we know five year olds and six year olds should be able to do certain things, but... the general public doesn’t really know that they have to work on these things.” Kappa continued to stress the importance of parents teaching and exposing their children to new learning opportunities. Kappa elaborated by using examples of different possible everyday teaching opportunities available to parents (i.e., at the grocery store, “what does carrot start with”). Zeta posits that families today, “don’t spend the time with their kids”. Zeta also stated that when parents spend time with their children and are involved in activities like reading, parents are also modeling. In addition, there is less time being spent with children from an early age.

Epsilon brought up the argument that today there are more blended and split families and while parents desire to be the best parents they can be, in many instances, they have to manage and address other areas of their lives first. The participants also felt as though society has changed in terms of the way children are raised. In the following section, the possible impacts of that insight are discussed.

Theme Two – Cultural Climate

The data revealed that the participants, to some degree, had felt that our society and culture has changed a great deal over the last few decades and this has heavily influenced children's community involvement and education. As a result, there are additional challenges for today's youth. In addition, the participants' felt that technology had impacted on the way that today's youth engage socially. There were two sub-themes that emerged from the data: (a) technology and (b) community involvement.

Technology. This topic was brought up very early on in Focus group #1 and emerged every so often throughout both focus groups. Technology, in this context, can be defined more specifically as electronic forms of communication, Internet usage, online gaming and social media.

Gamma was the first participant to bring up technology. Gamma stated that she felt that a lot of students "struggle with their relationships with other students" and this can be complicated by their "lives on the internet". The other participants agreed with this notion. For Zeta, the "influence of media and the internet" was considerable. Zeta stated that many students socialize online and participate in "online chatting" and the impact of this was noticeable at school. Zeta also said that, "a huge amount of education time is spent with the peer social connections..." Later on, when the participants were

asked to consider how they felt challenges for today's youth differed from when they were in their teenage years, social media was again brought up. Kappa indicated that when the participants were younger they "didn't have the social media issues". Gamma then noted that things weren't that different however, "now you just have everything being captured on camera and in pictures". Gamma also indicated that while these moments existed during their teenage years, "there wasn't an image that got uploaded to YouTube or Instagram." Theta asked participants to consider the "huge shift... from when we [i.e., Theta and the other participants] were growing up to this age...". Theta then stated:

"...kids are gamming and that's their social connection. Even my own sons, which was a learning curve for me to realize that they are actually interacting through their gamming system, even if they are sitting alone in the basement sometimes. And I know that we have a whole whack of kids here where that's their entire reality...".

Zeta agreed with Theta and reported having a conversation with his or her own son about this topic "several times". Theta said that some of his/her son's friends are people whom he's never actually met but talks to all of the time similar to a "pen pal". Kappa also agreed that "technology has changed so much" in the sense that when they (i.e., the participants) were younger they would write friends that lived far away; and now "kids just text". The participants felt that community responsibility towards children had also changed.

Community Involvement. Community involvement was discussed throughout the focus groups and one participant in particular spoke more to this topic than the others.

Community involvement in this context refers to an equal commitment between the school and the parents of students in the school, working together as a community, to successfully educate and raise the children of their community. The other participants agreed to most of what was said by Zeta.

Zeta first posited the notion of community involvement after the participants were asked about how challenges for today's youth differ from when they were adolescents. Zeta stated that she felt that people are more "separate" from each other than ever before and that "parents are isolated with their child". Zeta told the group participants about how he/she came from a small community but was also still living here in a city in Western Canada "where each peer group became a community for me [in a Western Canadian city]". Zeta also stated:

"I do think the sense of social or community responsibility has changed. I think that Theta and I shared a similar experience. I mean, if I was being a brat in my community, every adult in my community would have told me, you cut it out, that is not appropriate", and they would have made sure my parents knew. Now, my kids, unless they are right in front of me, nobody has a clue what they are doing and a parent cannot be monitoring their child 24 hours a day. It takes a community to raise a child and we don't have that community anymore I don't think. To me that's huge in raising children..."

Theta also commented on society being more "fragmented" and considered, during the second focus group that to increase or change parental involvement we almost need a "societal shift".

Theme Three – The Challenges Facing Today’s Youth

The participants discussed many challenges that they believed today’s youth are experiencing. The data in support of this theme was peppered throughout both focus groups as the questions were asked and as the conversations continued and developed. The data has been organized into three sub-themes: (a) academic challenges, (b) social-emotional challenges, and (c) current programming and resources.

Academic Challenges. While the participants alluded to some students struggling and having difficulties with core areas like reading and math, many of the academically related challenges that emerged from the data were attitude, process, or policy related. The participants’ concern for the challenges that students encounter academically was brought up Gamma when he or she shared a personal story:

“ Well my [partner] owns a business and hires a lot of young people to work... [my partner] is in the business of building houses and is constantly talking about how employees are not prepared for the reality of work and so things like being on time. Things like basic math skills or being able to figure out a measurement. You know reading levels, you know those types of pieces so I kind of see it on that end. And I think that there has been some sort of talk in [a Western Canadian province] too where you couldn’t give a zero for something that wasn’t turned in by a student and then next you have students going into the work force and being stunned that there are deadlines that need to be met.”

Kappa also agreed that, in the real world, there are consequences when a job is not completed and found that many students have the attitude or belief that “if I don’t do my job, I’ll be able to do it again, or I don’t have to do it and it’s fine.” Theta and Kappa

discussed their beliefs that students are reluctant to engage in, or have difficulty with, problem solving and spending time on tasks. Kappa was frustrated with the fact that students don't seem interested in solving problems when they are too difficult. Kappa said, "It's like if it's too difficult, they don't even try and problem solve, it's like, it's just too difficult, and that's it! And then they just stop and then it's like well, if you can't do it then what are you going to do to solve the problem, what are you going to do to solve your problem... and it's like, I don't know". Like they don't even attempt they are just done." Theta commented on students' resiliency in this capacity. He asserted that, "if [students] aren't spoon fed or it isn't quick and easy... or [they] have to go and look for solutions or you give an assignment where the kid has to go home and talk to somebody or figure something out, it's difficult. They don't have that resiliency and desire to stick to it." Theta also agreed with the notion that students today feel that it is "easier" and "less unpleasant to just not try." Theta then expressed that time on task, "is not there like it used to be." Gamma contributed by adding that, "students can also sit there for 20 minutes but at the same time accomplish nothing."

Epsilon then encouraged the group to consider that students themselves have indicated that they feel unequipped and unprepared as well. Epsilon then shared a discussion that occurred among family members (i.e., a niece who is just out of university and daughters who are just coming out of high school) and stated that:

"...the perception that we do not do a good job preparing kids coming out of high school for university and for the work force and like those skills that we need that we are talking about... is it because we have lowered our expectations for those

kids? I don't know... but I think we need to think about our expectations that we ask of these kids..."

Zeta agreed and shared some thoughts:

"I think that our expectations are a response to kids coming in and so I don't know that it's actually the school that can change or societal structure, because we really have... we are not getting the kids coming in that have the background and support, knowledge and resilience so we have to respond to... well it's like out conversation today about math, you have to teach kids where they are, you can't teach them something that's three years down the road..."

Social-Emotional Challenges. The participants all indicated that many of their students' were experiencing emotional challenges to varying degrees. Gamma, who works at Oscar School, which has a partnership with a ballet company in Western Canada, indicated that there were students who "struggled a lot with body image...eating disorders, and general perceptions of themselves." Theta reported that while there have always been some instances of anxiety and mental health issues, the cases and severity seem to be increasing. Zeta posited that today's youth might have greater difficulty coping with unpleasant emotions. Zeta stated:

"Well ya and I kind of wonder if it's when your doing something that's unpleasant to you it's an unpleasant emotional and physical feeling and I see kids and people in general not knowing how to manage those unpleasant stressful kind of feelings and is it generally and avoidance of that feeling? Because you don't know how to cope with it or you're not familiar with it and those feelings are

unpleasant for everybody when you're doing something that you don't enjoy doing that takes a lot of effort, it's easier to avoid it."

Zeta also reported that many students are lacking social skills such as "how to get along or what do we do when we are anxious" and other "self-coping strategies". Epsilon agreed with Zeta and said, "that impedes their learning for sure, that's a piece." Gamma stressed the importance of kids needing to have their social-emotional needs met so "they feel safe and valued and welcomed." Zeta later reiterated her concern for today's youth struggling to manage conflict and anxiety and pondered what that would mean for these children in adulthood. Zeta indicated that today's youth, "see their parents taking medication for anxiety and medication for headaches and for everything else, is that the example we want our kids to have or do we want them know that it's okay to have those strong feelings, it's okay to be upset, and that when mom and dad say no, and take your iPod away for two days... it's okay to be mad and it's about how you manage your anger." Theta agreed that they have been seeing more anxiety and mental health related issues. Epsilon then joined the conversation and said that, "I find that for challenges, I find the accepting responsibility is out the window." Epsilon then stated that, "in schools kids are "encouraged to make mistakes" because it is part of being human; however, students do not take responsibility for their mistakes and Epsilon often heard, "it's not my fault".

Kappa indicated that students' can also have difficulty because of a situation at home. Kappa posited that:

"A lot of students are very focused on things that have happened in their home either that morning or the night before that they are coming to school, and that is

the thing that they are focusing on and that they are most concerned about and it distracts them from being able to participate in what we are doing in class because they have a strong concern and fear about what's happening at home.”

Current Programming and Resources. Gamma noted that there were a multitude of programs geared towards helping students with their social-emotional needs. While Gamma did not go into detail about each of the programs, he or she did name them. The programs that were mentioned by gamma were: Friends for Life, Roots of Empathy, Responsive Classroom, Triple P (parenting program), Metis Come Sign with Me (literacy support), and Mom and Me. Some participants felt that it was primarily the middle class, “more affluent” families that took advantage of these programs.

Theme Four – The Dual Role of Educators and Meeting the Needs of Today's Youth

All of the participants shared examples of how they were often asked to fill roles that they felt belonged to someone else. While they seemed to accept and the dual role of counseling and mentoring kids socially and emotionally, in addition to teaching them academically; the data revealed that they were less tolerant of also having to fill the role of a parent in many instances. The data from the focus groups led to the development of 2 two sub-themes in this area: (a) balancing social-emotional learning and academic learning and (b) the parent-teacher.

Balancing Social-Emotional Learning and Academic Learning. The participants acknowledged that the role of educators has changed and in more ways than one. They all indicated that in many instances they were asked to fill multiple rolls. The participants were more comfortable with some rolls than others. All the participants acknowledged that the shift from a primarily academic educational focus to one that now

includes social-emotional learning, was an important development in teaching and learning. The participants were more comfortable in the above-mentioned dual role than others; although they did acknowledge that, because of the amount of time spent on social-emotional learning, they felt that the academic piece was now suffering. The participants were less comfortable filling a parental role when it came to boundaries and disciplining.

According to Zeta, much of the professional development days they participate in now, are geared towards a social-emotional focus and rarely cover academic subjects such as reading or math. Zeta states that:

“Well and look at the PD... Kappa has been math teachers for so many years and how many PD days are there for math? Every PD day that we have is a social-emotional one. And so that says that obviously as a society, a North-American society, that this is the thing that is causing the biggest problems in schools, that’s why the PD days on it, because all of these professionals are looking into why is it that kids are not being successful academically and clearly it’s because of the social-emotional stuff. So we have to teach teachers how to deliver that. Now if that becomes our job, how do we do the academic stuff?”

Theta agreed that the role of teachers “has changed quite a bit and there has been a shift over the last few years”. Theta also mentioned that while the focus was never solely on education; more than before, teachers are “coaches through a lot of different parts of their [students’] lives.” Theta also stated that teachers spend a significant amount of time on the social-emotional aspect of teaching and that, in fact, teachers are “getting pretty good at it”. Kappa indicated that there are many students “who are just not healthy mentally”.

Kappa also mentioned that much of the teaching time at the beginning of the year is spent on social-emotional learning. Kappa states that, "...in September and October it's all about how to be a student and we don't even get to the academics until November, and the November and December then we actually get into here's what we are doing in school." Kappa stated that while teachers are spending a lot of time on "classroom dynamics" and creating a space that's "accepting and inviting", teachers are unable to do both without more support. Zeta mentioned that many students are "coming with a background and belief" of social interaction that is not appropriate. So teachers, "try and teach a different set of skills... then [that] becomes our role..." and there is not a lot of time. Theta agreed that while teachers are managing well in the social-emotional department, now there are "conversations about the fact that our academic specs are out the window." Kappa and Zeta agreed with Theta. Kappa stated that the "academic piece is falling apart". Zeta said, "and then the government wonders why our math scores are at the bottom of the pile."

The participants also discussed the impact that the focus on social-emotional learning was having on their relationships with students. Some of the participants compared today's situation to when they were students. There was an acknowledgement by the participants that today's teachers had a different relationship with their students than the one that they had had with their teachers when they were young adolescents.

Kappa indicated that:

"When I was in grade 8 or 9, I don't think I would have ever gone to my teachers and been like hey – this is happening to me or you know when I was in high school.... I never went back to by grade 7 and 8 teachers and we may have been

close but I never looked at them as me needing somebody to go to but I just find that these kids, there is a lot more that continue coming back where they are in grade 12 or grade 10 or in grade 9.... I have had lot's of students once they leave grade 7 and 8 come back and look to me to help them with issues they are having before they go to their parent. Like they find out that they are pregnant or other things have happened and I'm the first person."

Theta remembered his youth and said that while he, "didn't necessarily fear the teachers [he] didn't really have a relationship in any kind of way that [he] would go to them for anything." Zeta commented on feeling a bit scared of her teachers, who she later indicated were nuns. Theta also indicated that, "students would come to our junior high teachers and they will cry and they will share with the teachers what happened." Theta posited that the teacher-student relationship is "very different now than it used to be" but that the change "is a healthy thing." Theta also acknowledged that teachers are in the dual roll of friend and counselor more and more often. Epsilon indicated that one of the problems with this arrangement is that it can, "make it difficult when you are trying to do the academics and you are firm with them and then they look at you like you've broken that trust." Zeta questioned whether the problem was a lack of boundaries being set at home resulting in a difficulty in managing boundaries when they are set at school.

In addition to the dual role that teachers are playing in the area of academic learning and social-emotional learning, the participants also indicated that they were often asked to play a parental role as well.

The Parent-Teacher. Many of the participants indicated that, as teachers, they had filled a role that generally would be understood as a "parent role" in more than one

instance. The teachers discussed these situations as well as the downfalls of this dual role. Many of the participants indicated that in some instances they felt that the parent wanted the teacher to play the primary parenting roll while they played a secondary supporting role. Kappa reported that parents:

“...want us to present the boundaries and lay them out and then they will support the boundaries. Especially with like sex and drugs and alcohol, and once we get into those topics parents will often come and say well, I’m worried about this, and you talk to them about drugs or sex ed because I don’t know what to say or how to tell them not to do it...”

Gamma stated that she agreed with what Kappa was saying and shared that she has been in a similar situation. Gamma said:

“I think similarly to what they are speaking to, we’ve been in situations where we’ve been asked, you know, can you take their cell phones for the weekend, because then if you have it then I can say it’s at the school and it’s tough until Monday, but then you know that really damages a lot of the relationship that you have with students when you’re being the parent...”

Kappa agreed that when you “have to be the bad guy in everything” it is damaging. Zeta indicated that, in the area of social conflict, many parents expected teachers to “restrict social interaction.” Zeta indicated that if two children are in conflict and their parents get involved and, for example, the parents don’t want their child to sit next to the other child, and expect teachers to restrict the interaction. Kappa agreed and gave the example of a parent saying, “I don’t want my child interacting with this child, so please make sure it doesn’t happen at school.”

Theme Five – Attitudes about Managing Students’ Challenges

During the course of both focus groups, the participants indicated the challenges faced by today’s youth that they felt most equipped to handle and those they felt less able to manage. The participants seemed to agree that they were more comfortable managing the “typical” or “common” challenges of adolescence. They indicated that students who had issues that were rooted outside of the school and the more “extreme” cases posed the greatest difficulties.

Epsilon indicated that managing issues that were friendship related or involved goal setting was easy. Theta stated that when “things happen at school” those “tend to be the easier ones.” Gamma indicated that while she felt equipped to help students, there was “a lack of time and a lot of problems.” Zeta also indicated that time was an issue. Zeta also noted that while it was possible to meet the needs of some, it was not possible to meet the needs of all children.

Theta then continued to say that when there are difficulties or challenges that occur at the child’s home, it becomes more difficult to help. Theta also mentioned that when there are problems at home, it can have “an on-going effect” and can cause issues in the classroom. Theta then said that when the cause of the problem is at home, its “harder to address” because, in many instances, it’s difficult to call a parent and say “stop doing that” or “spend more time with your kids.”

Gamma discussed how each child was different and also has different needs. So, there are some children you can help to manage their challenges, but there are some where “the scope of what they needed was beyond what could be provided.” Epsilon felt that, “the hard ones [are] where there is abuse.” Gamma also mentioned that the long-

term complications of mental health issues can also be difficult to manage. Zeta indicated several forms of conflict that are challenging to manage. Zeta stated that:

“...I find it difficult when you are dealing with some kind of disconnect with the child’s needs and the direction of what the family expects and is okay with. And even too... we have a lot of immigrant families coming in and kids are exposed to different things from what their parents would have been and maybe what their religious and cultural beliefs are, so the kids will come and say well I’m not allowed to blah blah blah but I want to be able to and you know you can’t say well that belief is just stupid so go ahead and do whatever it is so you know treading that line of being supportive of the student and the parent even though you believe that the student is not necessarily being supported by what the parents are... the direction they are going in is very difficult. And sometimes that’s even the peer piece where you have parents telling kids... well it’s the other person’s fault and there is even conflict between the two families so for the adults and that’s very tricky.”

The other participants agreed and nodded after Zeta spoke. Kappa added that, “sometimes the kids can solve things in terms of the problem but the parents get involved and it gets bigger and on a larger scale and more complicated and more difficult...”

All participants indicated that when students have severe mental health issues, they felt the most unequipped. In this discussion, severe mental health issues referred to extreme behavior, self-harm, severe depression and anxiety. Kappa indicated that there were many students who were “extreme students” who were not healthy mentally and who struggled with tasks such as putting their hands up to ask questions or walking in the

hall. Kappa said that others did not always understand the severity of their issues. The participants also indicated that, in many instances of extreme mental health issues, the families were in need of resources, but that adequate supports were not available. Kappa indicated that:

“I find that that’s the most frustrating and the most difficult and disheartening and I think that it’s the point that’s the hardest for me to handle is when we’ve exhausted everything and we take the next steps and it’s cause there is nothing for these kids.”

Zeta and Kappa also discussed how families had been turned away by hospitals when they sought support for severe mental health issues. According to Kappa, if the severe behaviours were not occurring at the exact instance that support was sought from hospitals, they did not provide any help and so families and educators were left struggling to manage the issues. Epsilon and Theta also indicated that, in some instances, there were parents who refused to acknowledge that their child had a mental health issue. Kappa also added that he or she felt there had been an increase in significant mental health issues since he or she first began teaching. Most of the participants agreed with Kappa on this point.

Theme Six – Benefits of Using Proactive Non-therapeutic Counselling Strategies with Adolescents

The majority of the participants felt that using traditional counseling methods in a proactive way would be beneficial for students and teachers. The Participants also identified possible trouble areas that might be addressed and made suggestions for implementation.

All in all, the strategies that were presented in the professional development workshop (the workshop took place after the first focus group, but prior to the second focus group) were well received by the participants. Many of the participants felt that these strategies were useful. Zeta commented that this, “is something that would be useful to kids, to help kids see that they can take control of their lives and with scaling they can see the improvements in an incremental way...” Epsilon indicated that she could, “see this as a whole class activity and using this [as] a journaling project.” Epsilon also stated that she, “could picture [herself], especially in the starting of the year... having this set up as a journal that’s between me and the child so that it could be individual and go through these kinds of things with them and we could write back and forth and do check-ins.” Kappa felt that it was a good way to “get students involved in their own problem solving, and take a step back and see where they need to go...” Kappa also reported that the more students use these steps the easier they will become and that these strategies are “empowering them to be stronger individuals as opposed to relying on other people all of the time to solve their problem... they can learn how to solve a problem themselves.” Theta agreed with Kappa and said:

“ Well and you are teaching kids to gain perspective on the situation rather than feel that it’s overwhelming all of the time. Like it’s starting to teach strategies for working through their problems or their issues rather than just going from a 1 to a 10 because something happened and not knowing how to manage it.”

Kappa and Gamma agreed and acknowledged the importance of structure and commented on the positive aspects of providing a structure to students so they can apply it in different settings. Kappa stated that:

“Yes and I think that like what you’re talking about is making it part of the academic structure in the class and then if you are speaking with them, well do you remember what we did in class, how about we try that structure here so it’s making it kind of a foundational strategy... rather than just use one strategy.”

Kappa also discussed the importance of students coming to understand that one large goal can be broken down into a series of very small realistic goals. Zeta enjoyed the strategies and stated that:

“It’s not such a prescribed set of steps that it’s restrictive like, I thought when I was originally watching... oooh, I’d only be able to use this here and I think there are still some places where this might not be the strategy that you are going to use but I think that it’s a strategy that any of us can use in the classroom and then you extend it to health class and you extend it to language arts and then you extend it to math and then you can extend it to problem solving with your teacher or student services the you extend it and it becomes a common way of thinking and a common way of talking in a school then I think it’s more likely to be a strategy that’s going to be helpful because it’s something that they are being exposed to over and over and over and becoming an expert at. And it’s also not something that someone is doing to them, it’s something they are doing themselves.”

Epsilon discussed the visualization component of the presentation and indicated that, “...I was connecting it to sport, there was a study that was done and if you visualize yourself doing a sport [versus] actually doing it, you’re very close to the same level... so that visualization piece and that telemetry is going to be really important...?” Theta also

agreed that visualizing success was important. Epsilon continued to discuss how visualization might actually help students to act. Epsilon said that:

“And knowing what to do in a certain situation, like if your friends are being racist and making jokes and if you visualize it, it may not happen the next day but if you keep thinking about it day in and day out before bed, at one point your... it’s just going to happen and you’re going to say it’s not okay.”

Kappa indicated that there are applications for these strategies in academic subjects and then discussed the subject of math in particular. Kappa stated that:

“...[she] could see herself being able to use it in academics for example in math, well asking students what are two things that are really difficult in math so okay well pick one of them and if you could wish anything what would you wish and going through the steps of okay well where are you on that scale and what are you going to do to move to a 2 or a 4 or a 5.”

Theta agreed with Kappa and posited that scaling also helps students to gain perspective on their improvements over the span of a year. Epsilon agreed and stated that sometimes students “have difficulties see where they have improved to...” but having “that metacognition piece” within the strategy is helpful. Kappa mentioned that scaling in small steps “made sense to me”. Theta stated that:

“...I like this because it targets everyone, not just the three or four kids that are having some sort of crisis and you need to start going over all of this all of a sudden. But if you laid the foundation with the entire group and talked about a little problem they have going on with everybody with each individual and journal

it like you said and build those skills into your daily or weekly lessons or however you want to do it...”

Theta felt as though the, “cognitive reframing piece is something that is huge” since many students have a negative inner dialogue that impedes their success in many areas and can prevent them from trying all together. Kappa agreed with Theta and indicated that “getting students to look at the positive part, and what’s the end goal is much more effective... than getting stuck on I can’t do this, I suck, I’m never going to be able to do this.”

Epsilon agreed with Theta and stated that “if you embed this into your class, if there are those big issues, they have something to help them with the big issues.” Kappa indicated feeling as though it was “what a lot of kids are missing”. Theta agreed and stated that, “I think there is a place for this and it could be very valuable.”

Theme Seven – Participants’ Suggestions and Considerations for Strategy

Implementation

The participants mostly agreed that the strategies presented in the professional development workshop were useful and would be beneficial to students. The participants had several suggestions for the proactive implementation of the strategies that were presented during the professional development workshop based on their own experiences and perceptions.

The first suggestion was to increase parental support in connection with the use and learning of these strategies. Kappa stated that:

“...I think the things that you had in your presentation, you know the structure of counselling and problem solving processes... They are great and I think we can

all agree on that, and that to varying degrees use some of what you had in your presentation. But if we are the only ones that are modeling that, it's not going to be internalized for the vast majority of the kids, anything that... I mean how many hours do they save it takes to become an expert of something, like those professional athletes, it's like hundreds and hundreds..."

Theta mentioned that it takes, "10,000 hours" and that it was "Malcolm Gladwell" who posited that theory. Theta also said that while parents may be doing the best they can, given their abilities and what they know, the structures of families were different than in past generations when there were more people involved in the education of a child and that skills were passed down differently than they are today. Kappa thought it would be valuable to give families the "sense that they have the resources, financial and whatever, to be able to participate in those things and actually spend time with their kids...". The participants also thought it would be helpful to have models, examples, and templates to use while teaching proactive strategies to students. Theta indicated that having models and a lot of examples are helpful for children. Theta also mentions that it would not be realistic to expect every teacher "to invent [his or her] own models." Kappa also agreed and said that, "when looking at 95% of teachers in a K-8 school", having resources that they know how to use makes it much more likely that they will use them and also transfer their usage to other areas of learning. Kappa, Theta, and Epsilon then posited that starting a conversation with parents around implementing proactive counselling methods would be useful in terms of time management and the overall success of students learning the strategies. Kappa stated that:

“Whether it’s a kit for parents so that they are actually able to hear this and maybe really jumping into this with both feet at school and parents are hearing this at home going what the heck is this, and so having a parent evening where your teaching, well exposing parents too it, not necessarily teaching them but exposing them to it so that they can use language too and really I think that that’s what we’ve really said, is that there is too much for us to be able to do an explanation....”

The participants also suggested that a plan designed to teach proactive strategies to students should be simple to employ, use common language in all the areas, and address all students rather than solely students in crises. According to Theta:

“...it’s a sort of structure or model that teachers and students can use and it has to be simple, simple language, something that almost has steps, like describe it, read it, and say what you need to do to improve it by one little bit. Or whatever, just thinking in terms of a skeleton for teachers and students that could be implemented easily into the classroom and followed.”

Kappa and Epsilon also agreed that the whole classroom should be taught rather than only those individual students who are in crisis. They agreed that “easy use” would be helpful for teachers, especially in terms of use across curricula. Kappa also noted that when students were in crisis, they would already have a foundation that could benefit them in terms of working towards a solution or a positive resolution to the crisis. Kappa also said that this is where common language would be beneficial in helping students to internalize the process. The participants also indicated areas of the curriculum where these strategies would fit well such as the health curriculum, English language arts, and math. In the same context, the participants also indicated that they would like to meet

more that one curricular outcome through the embedding of the strategies. Epsilon states that, “If I were to include this into health and ELA that would include two curricular embedded outcomes where I can assess two different things which is way easier than, this is health class today and you know.” Epsilon also indicated that she could envision these strategies being used in an ongoing journal with students, which would also give students and the teacher a on-going chance to check in, reflect, and receive feedback. Theta also agreed there is a place for “a larger scale in more of a proactive way” type of initiative.

The data revealed that the participants also felt that incorporating various scenarios, similar to the ones presented in professional development workshop, as well as roll playing opportunities and templates would be useful in terms of implementation and students’ internalization of the strategies.

Zeta, Gamma, and Epsilon each mentioned that roll playing scenarios, while possibly uncomfortable, would be beneficial to both teachers and students because they would increase their level of comfort using the strategies. Epsilon also indicated that, “for their friends to be able to help them [by] using the same process and language...” would also be beneficial. All participants felt that it would be useful to have templates that were adaptable across the curriculum. Some participants also felt that it should extend beyond school to include examples from other areas of life. For example, Kappa stated that:

“School problems, home problems, sports problems, boyfriend problems and girlfriend problems. Like I think the more they see this the more they will understand it’s not just for when I have a math goal or in ELA.”

Epsilon also agreed and indicated that the strategies don’t just need to be introduced and employed with a grade 7 and 8 population; but that they could be done “all the way

through". The other participants agreed and gave examples such as having the strategies presented in picture books and case scenarios for the younger kids. Gamma stated that early intervention was an important component of providing any type of support. Gamma also stated that as early as daycare, "high flyers" are identified. One participant stated that this could be used with his or her five-year-old daughter.

The participants also listed some potential problems to consider with respect to implementation. For one, Gamma indicated that there could be a risk of running "artificial scenarios" with students, which can affect their "transference" of the strategies. Epsilon and Theta also agreed that having examples that were real and authentic to students was important. Gamma and Kappa also indicated that students may list goals but that doesn't necessarily mean that they will work towards them. In addition, they noted students may not be able to look at themselves "critically enough" or may not be "reflective enough" to identify things they need to work on. Gamma added that students might have difficulty making connections between social-emotional learning and real life unless they were shown how they relate.

Epsilon and Kappa also indicated that students would also need to be in able to set goals that they had control over. For example, Epsilon and Kappa indicated that if a student's goal is to eat healthier but there "isn't enough food in their house [then] there isn't enough food", or "if they want to play football but they don't have the stuff for football, how are they suppose to learn how to play football." Kappa also indicated that students might come up with goals that they would have a difficult time achieving, because they do not have enough control over the circumstances. The participants also

indicated that, while there are pieces of the strategies that can be used in many places and instances; they may not be able to be used in all contexts and situations.

The participants also felt that feedback and a reflective process were important, but might be difficult to track. They all agreed that, while these strategies “lay the groundwork”, it would be important to ensure that a feedback loop was established. Theta indicated that reflection is just as important for the teacher or student service provider as it is for the student. Gamma also felt that having a person in charge or a “point person” to ensure the methods and strategies were being properly implemented and used was also important.

Kappa indicated that:

“And I can see that being the hardest part for all of us because we get so busy, so particularly with a kid, I mean I think that in class it would be easier, cause it’s part of your programming in class...”

The participants also indicated that getting parents involved might pose a challenge. The participants discussed different formats for getting parents involved such as parent’s nights, yardsticks for parents, parent kits, and parenting tips in a newsletter. However, some participants felt as though, even if these ideas were implemented, parents would still lack the time and resources to do it.

Theme Eight – Personal Attitudes Towards Problem Solving

The participants had several comments about their own approaches and strategies when it came to solving problems. During the first focus group, prior to the professional development workshop, many of the participants indicated that collaboration with others and taking time to work through the issue were common strategies they employed when

problem solving. Theta stated that, “I’m definitely a person that needs to collaborate. I’ll go to somebody and run my thoughts by them and talk it out. Try and bounce it off somebody.” Epsilon also agreed that speaking with close friends “whose opinions I value and I know will give me their honest opinion” is helpful. Zeta agreed and also added that taking the time to “work through it in my head” is helpful because “my impulse is always to quickly try and fix it.” Theta also agreed that the general tendency is to sometimes “react”. Kappa, Epsilon and Zeta both indicated that going back to the root of the problem and thinking it through was also a strategy that they employed often. Theta also added that sometimes it’s possible to consider strategies that you or someone else has used in the past and try those. Gamma stated that the professional code of practice was where he or she turned when confronted with problems, since after looking, “at the situation carefully...it’s almost never what it seems on the surface...”. The participants also indicated that at work (as opposed to at home) they found it easier to maintain professionalism and remove emotions from impacting on problem solving approaches when working with students. For example, Theta stated:

‘I am always reminding myself that I am under the microscope here, so that how I respond is always being interpreted by whomever I’m responding to or with or around. So if it’s a student, I generally try to keep pretty even keeled no matter what it is. I think that I do that with most people but then I blow off steam when I’m really upset with someone I know that I can do that with. But I always feel like I’m modeling for kids, so I have to filter what I say and how I say it, with students especially.’

Zeta also agreed indicated that it was easier to keep cool at work than at home. Gamma indicated that, “as professionals we’re probably pretty good at knowing when we are mad and angry and shouldn’t respond....” and that modeling proper behavior is more important than having an elevated level of agitation with students or colleagues. Kappa also indicated that stepping back and assessing his or her feelings before reacting was important.

During the second focus group, after the professional development workshop, some participants indicated feeling as though they could apply the strategies presented in the workshop to problems or goals they personally had right now. Zeta stated, “I can totally see myself using this because it’s small steps. It’s not just one big thing. Ya so, because it’s small steps, I would use this. I can see myself using it to set goals. Kappa also indicated that “...if I [were] setting a goal and I want to be able to run the marathon, and that’s like way down there right, so there are all these steps... so I like the ranking because I can’t even walk up the stairs right no so what do I need to do to get to a two...” Theta and Zeta agreed but did not provide any commentary.

Part Two: Analysis and Discussion

This qualitative study sought to:

- Explore teachers perceptions regarding the usefulness, effectiveness, and viability of methods derived from positive psychology, solution focused therapy, and cognitive behavioural therapy in a proactive intervention designed to equip junior high school students with the skills they need to navigate life challenges before the arise.

- Explore how teachers felt about their own problem-solving abilities before and after having learned about these methods.

A whole group analysis was done which means that the group is the “unit of analysis” and is handled in the same way as data from an individual participant (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). In this section, I interpret the eight themes that emerged from the data in relation to scholarship and research.

The eight themes that emerged from the data were: (a) perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes about parental involvement, (b) cultural climate, (c) the challenges facing today’s youth, (d) the dual role of educators, (e) attitudes about managing students’ challenges, (g) benefits of using proactive non-therapeutic counseling strategies with adolescents, (g) participants’ suggestions and considerations for strategy implementation, and (h) personal attitudes towards problem solving. Figure 5.0 provides a snapshot of each theme. Interestingly, the majority of the themes fit within the framework and relate to the literature provided in Chapter Two. However, the connections did not occur as originally anticipated.

Parent involvement. The participants in this study generally felt that parents were spending less time with their children. In addition, the participants felt that the time the parents were spending with their children was not being spent on education as it relates to the development of social skills or academic skills. The participants, for the most part, also indicated that many children are spending less time participating in organized activities outside of school and have more free time without parental monitoring. It was also believed that many parents lack the time, energy, skills, or

abilities to set boundaries for their child and, when problems occur as a result, are reluctant to accept responsibility for their child.

According to Galambos and Ehrenberg (1997), the family unit is central to the socialization and psychosocial maturity of children. In today's reality, dual-income families are the majority in Canada (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2011). A recent study conducted by Wada, Backman, Forwell, Roth, Joseph, and Ponzetti (2014), that researched the ways in which men and women with young children conceive of balance in everyday life, found that, "many participants recounted experiences of imbalance from not fulfilling the needs of their lives at home." This included time with the family as a whole, as well as looking after children. In this study, the parents also indicated that work obligations disrupted family time more than the money gained from paid work benefited the family (Wada et al., 2014).

The participants' perceptions and beliefs that parents are less able to model or teach social skills, discipline, set boundaries, monitor, and provide educational support at home may be a result of "work-overload" or even a result of being unable to effectively balance the quantity and quality of time attributed to various areas of life. According to Galambos et al. (1995), parental stress caused by work overload can lead to less accepting behaviours towards children.

The participants also felt that students today are participating in fewer activities outside of school and have more unmonitored free time. This may be a result of parents lacking the time and resources to accompany and monitor their children after school. Parental monitoring, or the lack of it, also can be extended to the online activity of adolescents.

The influence of technology. According to Subrahmanyam and Greenfield (2008), who explored online communications and adolescent relationships, many networking sites (e.g., Facebook) employ privacy controls that limit parental access to written posts, pictures and images, and personal profile information making parental monitoring quite challenging. In addition, teenagers can often choose which areas of their personal profiles their parents can access and restrict certain areas as well. According to Subrahmanyam and Greenfield (2008), some teenagers create multiple profiles and permit parental access to doctored profiles but also operate under profiles that may not be known to exist by their parents.

In the literature review, romantic relationships and peer relationships were two of the areas listed in which adolescents can experience challenges. However, romantic and peer relationships were not discussed within the context of technology.

The data revealed that many peer relationships and interactions occur online. The participants stated that peer relationship challenges were complicated by the students' "lives on the internet" and that it was noticeable at school. They also discussed how online gaming was a form of peer interaction that they had observed. The participants reported that this was very different from the way that they grew up. So how do various forms of online communications and social networking affect peer relationships and romantic relationships? In a nutshell, there is research indicating that online communications can improve interpersonal relationships (Brandtzaeg, 2012; Wang & Wellman, 2010) and there is research indicating that it can negatively impact interpersonal relationships (Anderson, 2001; Milani, Osualdelle & Di Blasio, 2009). According to a meta-analysis on *The Effects of Social Network Sites on Adolescents'*

Social and Academic Development: Current Theories and Controversies (2011), the issue is extremely complex and more research utilizing a “social informatics approach that examines the interaction between technical features” of social networking sites and how teenagers adopt and use them are needed (p.1435).

Contemporary challenges of today’s youth and the preparedness of educators. The participants identified two broad areas in which adolescents’ are experiencing challenges: (a) in the academic realm and (b) the social-emotional realm. The participants reported that most youth experienced challenges with process related tasks such as problem-solving, staying on task, spending time on tasks, and overall effort. The participants also stated that many students were lacking in academic resiliency and social-emotional resiliency. They also stated that students lacked self-coping strategies for managing anxiety, anger, and other unpleasant emotions. In addition, the participants said their students lacked conflict resolution skills.

The literature review covered various contexts in which the challenges experienced by youth typically occur (i.e., family issues, relationships and sexuality, racism and social stratification, etc.) and also discussed possible impacts when challenges in these areas occur and are not managed or resolved (e.g., risky behaviours, problematic behaviours, anxiety, fear, sleep habits, etc.). However, the participants primarily reported on the symptoms that they were noticing in students, rather than the contexts in which they occurred. The participants stated that students have a difficult time managing unpleasant emotions. While the participants indicated that they felt equipped to support students managing “common” or “typical” adolescent challenges, such as peer relationships; they did not feel well equipped when it came to managing the emotional

outbursts displayed by some students: especially when the students' problems were rooted in the home or when there were mental health issues. For example, a teacher might feel comfortable and well enough equipped to talk to a young adolescent student about the conflict going on between her and her best-friend, but less equipped in terms of teaching the student strategies for managing his or her emotions in relation to the conflict. It is possible that the same may be true in the realm of academics. While teachers may feel well prepared to teach content related topics to their students, they may feel less equipped to teach process related skills like problem solving or how to foster character strengths such as resilience, motivation and perseverance. The participants also stated that they felt less equipped in managing challenges that students experienced as a result of conflict happening in the home.

There are other considerations that must be taken into account when it comes to teachers abilities to meet the academic and social-emotional needs of today's youth. The participants reported that balancing academic learning and social-emotional learning is a difficult feat. The participants also stated that they were often placed into rolls other than "teacher". In many instances, the participants had to act as a parent or a counsellor, which was sometimes uncomfortable for them and also impacted their relationships with their students. The participants said that they felt more comfortable with the dual role of teacher-counselor than the dual role of teacher-parent. They acknowledged also that the friendlier, more positive, and more trusting relationships that teachers have with their students in current times is significantly different from what they had experienced as young adolescents. The participants indicated that, all around, this change was a "healthy thing"; however, they thought there were complications that could arise from "broken

trust” when a teacher is in a position where disciplinary action is required. The participants felt less comfortable playing the role of “parent” with their students. They felt that this was damaging to the relationships they shared with students, especially when they were expected to present or maintain boundaries that are typically understood as the responsibility of the parent(s).

Building Academic and Social-Emotional Competence. Overall, the participants reported that traditional counselling methods used in a proactive way, would be beneficial to adolescent students. The participants enjoyed the process related strategies and the overall structure that students could use for problem-solving and setting goals. The participants particularly enjoyed scaling and stated that scaling (breaking down large goals in to smaller more manageable goals with the goal to move up the scale) would be very beneficial and would be helpful to students with both academic goals and social-emotional goals for several reasons. First, it provides students with a structure and process for problem solving and goal setting. Second, it makes achieving goals more manageable. Third, students are able to keep track of their progress. The opinions provided by the participants are consistent with many of the outcomes of scaling reported in the literature review in Chapter Two.

They also reported that the cognitive reframing strategy would be beneficial for students who struggle with a negative internal dialogue. Many of the participants reported that students often feel unable to accomplish a particular goal or task so they are reluctant to even try. They thought the process of cognitive reframing might be helpful for students when it comes to creating more adaptive and positive beliefs and attitudes about themselves and their capacities.

The participants also made several suggestions for the implementation of these strategies in a proactive program designed to equip students with the skills they need to navigate common life challenges. First, they stated that parental support is needed. The participants felt that parents and teachers need to work together and use the same language.

In the subsequent chapter, I look at the findings in relation to the broader field of education, the limitations of this study, and explore considerations for future research and practice.

Chapter Five

Significance of Findings and Implications for Future Research

In this chapter, a summary of the data analysis will be provided. Implications for future research will also be considered.

Significance of Findings

While this study had a small amount of participants, several important conclusions may be drawn from the data. Each may have significant implications and considerations for the future of proactive counselling and social-emotional education. Based on this study and the perceptions and insights of the participants, we can conclude that there is a place for the proactive non-therapeutic use of traditional strategies in schools. The challenges experienced by today's youth may be complicated by the technological world and the overall cultural climate of contemporary Western Canada (Ahn, 2011; Lai & Gwung, 2013; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008). In addition, with dual earner families being the majority in Canada, the home environment is impacted and the quantity and quality of time is diminished, which in turn affects the academic and social-emotional development and health of today's youth (Wada et al., 2014; Dilworth, 2004). It may be that this phenomenon puts educators in a position where they are required to fill multiple roles and balance social-emotional education of children with their academic growth and development. While teachers may feel more comfortable with the content of "typical" adolescent challenges, they are less comfortable coaching students through the emotional and behavioural outcomes that occur as a result of these challenges. Educators may feel a need for more process related strategies to support students (e.g., managing unpleasant emotions, problem-solving, goal setting, etc.) in

meeting goals and challenges however, one must also ensure that the context (e.g., peer relationships, family, health, etc.) is taken into consideration as well. In addition, proactive strategies and opportunities for social-emotional learning need to take place within a larger context rather than behind closed doors.

A program or plan designed to teach proactive strategies to students should be simple to employ, use common language across all areas, and taught to all students. The program also should be implemented in all grade levels and meet multiple curricular outcomes. Parents also need to be actively involved in supporting this initiative and looking for opportunities to use the same strategies and language at home. This may lead to successful internalization and increase the capacity and resiliency of today's youth by equipping them with strategies and fostering character strengths such as resilience, motivation, and perseverance. These strengths will enable them to meet the challenges of adolescence and, eventually, adulthood; thus decreasing the demand on school and adult counselling services and increasing overall happiness and positive practices in school and society. Interestingly, many of the suggestions made reflect the characteristics that were adapted from the principles inclusion and of universal design for learning (Council for Exceptional Children, 2005) presented in Chapter Two.

Limitations

This study had some limitations. The first area is in relation to focus groups in general. The second area is in relation to qualitative research in general and the third area is in relation to the study more specifically.

There are a few limitations of focus group research. The first limitation is that focus groups are generally comprised of less than 10 participants, as was the case in this

study. As a result of a small participant sample, the findings may not be as generalizable however; it is reasonable to assume that other teachers might feel the same way about these issues. The second drawback of focus groups is that the participants are generally volunteers. In this study the participants were purposefully sampled to meet certain inclusion criteria however, participation was still voluntary. The third limitation of focus group research is that the discussion that takes place along with the quality of the data collected depends on the competency of the moderator. The moderator must be able to ensure that the discussion develops in such a way that ensures that all participants feel they have an open space to participate. While this may be a concern in some instances, in this study, there was a fairly open and equal level of participation from all participants. The last limitation is that participants may answer or behave differently because they are among the other members of the group.

The second areas of limitations are constraints that apply to all qualitative research. Similar to the drawbacks of focus groups, qualitative research is also limited in terms of sample size and lack of random sampling, making it more difficult to generalize to a broader population. Another limitation is the time qualitative research demands. Data collection and data analysis can take a long time to complete. In addition to time constraints, researcher biases are “built-in” to the study and in many ways are unavoidable.

The final area of limitations is in relation to the study itself. This study had a small but purposeful sample of five participants, which may affect the generalizability of the results. As mentioned previously, researcher bias is a limitation of qualitative researcher. In this case, I am a proponent of proactive forms of intervention so it is

natural that I wish that my ideas were well received by others. However, in order to ensure this bias did not affect the data, open-ended questions that encouraged the exploration of both positive and negative aspects were asked. Furthermore, as mentioned in Chapter Three, many steps were taken to reduce the effects of researcher bias (e.g., triangulation, member checking, detailed account of procedures). The inexperience of the researcher also may be considered a limitation however; this was offset by the researcher's advisory committee comprised of an expert in qualitative methods and specialists in the field of counselling and psychotherapy. Finally, the invitation that was sent to the participants may have contained demand characteristics as a result of the informed consent process.

Implications for Practice

There are several implications for practice that should be considered. The first implication is to help teachers and educators understand more about the challenges faced by today's youth. In addition, we need to learn and understand more about how technology impacts common areas of adolescent challenges. While educators may be able to identify the area in which the student is experiencing conflict (e.g., friendship, romantic relationship, family, etc.) it does not necessarily follow that they are well enough equipped to help students manage the emotions and coach them through positive change. This means that in addition to being taught what the problems are, teachers also need to be taught how to help students manage them. Having properly trained guidance counsellors to train teachers and provide teachers with reflection and debriefing opportunities may be one implication to embedding these skills into the current curriculum. Research that thoroughly explores the context (e.g., Who the students are?

What are their backgrounds? What are their experiences and needs?) also should be considered. Research also needs to be conducted to gain a better understanding of the perceptions of parents in regards to what they see as important issues. In addition, research that investigates bridging schools and families together for the betterment of the students is needed. These above mentioned implications are where the greatest needs lie and I plan to further investigate them during my Ph.D. program and dissertation.

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Appendix A

Scenarios

The following scenarios describe a student at the beginning of a “decision making” course of action. Each scenario is marked for use with either the group of teachers or students.

Scenario #1

Area: Health and Fitness

Scenario 1A (teachers): A moderately overweight young adolescent tells you he would like to play football this year for the junior varsity team. You ask him if he has ever played football before and he says no. You know that he stands little chance of making the team.

Scenario 1B (students): Imagine you are a moderately overweight and you would like to play football this year for the junior varsity team. You have never played football and you know that you stand little chance of making the team.

Scenario #2

Area: Relationships and Sexuality

Scenario 2A (teachers): A young teenage girl tells you she is being ridiculed by her friends because she has feelings for a boy who is in a “lower-status” peer group. She says that she knows the boy likes her too because he asked her out on a date. She might like to go out with him but risks losing her friends if she does and will open herself up to ridicule from her friends and others.

Scenario 2A (students): Imagine you develop feelings for a boy/girl that your friends don’t approve of. You know this person likes you to because he/she asked you out on a date. You think you might like to go out on the date but you are scared that your friends might make fun of you and you might lose them.

Scenario #3

Area: Racism and Social Stratification

Scenario 3A (teachers): A young student in your classroom has recently been coming to class with a sad expression on his face. One day after class, you ask him if something’s been bothering him lately. He tells you that particular clique of students have been saying racial slurs to him as when he passes them in the schoolyard at lunch.

Scenario 3B (students): Imagine during the lunch break a clique of students have been using racial slurs when you pass them in the schoolyard.

Scenario #4

Area: Family Conflict

Scenario 4A (teachers): A young female student of yours whose parents have recently divorced is moving to another province with her mother and sister while her father stays here in Winnipeg. This student has been very distracted lately and you see her crying with her group of volleyball teammates outside the gym in the hallway.

Scenario 4B (students): Imagine your parents have recently divorced. It has just been decided that you are moving to another province with your mother and your sister while your father stays here in Winnipeg. You've been very involved with sports especially volleyball which is where you met your group of friends who have been at your side and been a huge support during the divorce.

Appendix B

Enhancing Emotional Well-Being and Positive Self-Affect

Using traditional counselling
techniques in a proactive way

Introduction

- Many adolescents face developmental, social, and personal challenges as they grow toward adulthood.
 - family issues
 - relationships and sexuality
 - health and fitness
 - racism or social stratification
 - work and security
 - other areas.
- Many teenagers may sometimes feel unequipped to deal with life events and may feel fearful about entering adulthood.

Rationale

- An individual's ability to cope with stressors may be dependent on his or her personal development and resiliency skills (Coleman, 2008).
- Great deal of attention to dysfunction and disorder.
- Intervention occurs after problems or crises have occurred.
- This workshop presents traditional counselling methods being used in a proactive way.
- The ultimate goal is to help students develop the skills to manage challenges with success.

Overview of five traditional counselling methods

- While there are several techniques used in counselling, five of them may be particularly useful for adaption towards proactive use.
 - The miracle question
 - Goal setting
 - Scaling and identifying strengths
 - Cognitive reframing
 - Future and strategy talk/building resources

The Miracle Question

- Technique used in Solution-Focused Therapy (SFT).
- Designed to help clients describe and visualize their goals (O'Connell, 2001).
- Sets the stage for goal articulation and allows the counsellor and client to get on track immediately.
- In this workshop, the miracle question has been adapted for proactive use.

The Miracle Question

- The adapted version of the miracle question is:
 - “Imagine when you go to sleep one night a miracle happens and overnight you are transformed into a person who feels whole and all of your hopes, dreams, and aspirations have been achieved. When you woke up, what would be the first signs for you that a miracle had happened.? What would your miracle look like?”

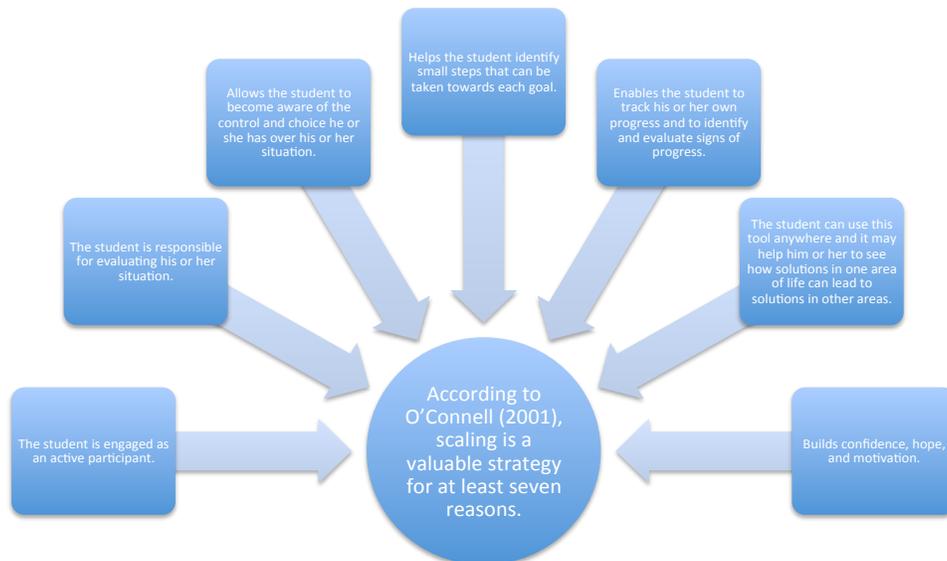
Goal Setting

- This strategy is designed to clarify goals.
- In SFT, the counsellor assists the client to define realistic and concrete goals.
- Goals can be considered realistic if accessible resources can be identified, external circumstances do not inhibit the goal from being accomplished, the goal is sustainable, and the benefits outweigh the costs.
- According to O'Connell (2001), empowering goals meet the following four criteria: (a) grounded and concrete, (b) the goals are simple and clear, (c) the goals are measurable, and (d) the goals respect the values of the individual.

Scaling and Identifying Strengths

- Scaling is used in counselling to help individuals express their thoughts and feelings about a problem they are facing. The individual is asked to rate how challenging a problem is on a scale of one to ten.
- Scaling will be adapted for proactive use and as a way to measure progress towards a goal and help the student to track and identify steps that he or she may need to take to move towards his or her goal.
- Anchors are first given to one and ten. Ten being the goal fully achieved and one being the furthest away from the goal. The student is then asked to describe where he or she is in relation to both anchors and describe why that is. Next, the student is asked what it would take to move up a number and then encouraged to identify strengths/resources that he or she possesses that could help him or her move towards the goal.

Scaling



Identifying Strengths

- Strength identification can be done as the student moves up the scale closer towards his or her goal.
- Through scaling, the participants create mini positive experiences that contribute towards their goals.
- Scaling also plays an important role when considering ones strengths.
- Youth will become more aware of their resiliency strengths and utilize them as they move closer towards their ideal futures, and in turn, solidify these strengths and maybe even develop new ones.

Cognitive reframing

- Cognitive reframing a technique used in counselling to help individuals become more mentally equipped as they reframe unhelpful thinking styles that may have been holding them back.
- Students will learn helpful thinking styles through this process that will contribute to positive experiences and relationships. In addition, adopting more adaptive thinking patterns will contribute to the development and the duration of positive psychological traits.

Future and Strategy Talk/Building Resources

- Future/Strategy talk is a strategy used to transition the individual from thinking to acting.
- Parsons (2009) identifies four elements of strategy talk:
 - using “change” language (i.e., having a positive orientation),
 - identifying and employing individual strengths,
 - externalizing (i.e., seeing things objectively),
 - developing specific tasks.

Future and Strategy Talk/Building Resources

Both these forms of “talk” help the individual to:

- feel hopeful
- recognize that he or she can improve his or her current situation,
- develop strategies based on his or her individual strengths,
- discover resources that will help him or her achieve his or her goal strategies.

Now that you’ve heard about some traditional counselling strategies let’s look at how they can be used proactively to equip students to negotiate certain experiences.

Scenario #1

Area: Health and Fitness

Consider a male student who is moderately overweight wants to play football this year for the Junior Varsity team. The student has never played football before and knows he is unlikely to make the team.

Miracle question

- By visualizing the details of a dream future the individual is actually imagining a series of positive experiences and relationships and begins to consider realizing this ideal future.
- This young man might envision a future in which he weighs his ideal weight. In this dream, he might describe himself as being athletic and playing football for the junior varsity team. He might discuss feeling confident and popular. In this example, the young man is actually imagining a set of positive experiences (i.e., being at his ideal weight, being athletic, playing football, feeling confident, and having many friends). He is envisioning positive experiences and positive relationships through this technique. In fact, each of these areas is actually a potential goal.

Goal Setting

- In this example, after considering his ideal future, he might have prioritized his goals as – increasing his athletic skills, playing football, and make more friends, as the positive experiences and relationships he would like to work towards.

Scaling/Identifying Strengths

- This student may rate himself at a “three” because he has played a little football in the past and felt he had some potential talent for it because he wasn’t afraid to get hurt.
- When asked what a “four” for him would look like, he might say that he would be actively training to play fullback and learning more about the rules and regulations of the game. When asked what would it take for him to get to a “four” he responds that he will need to play on a community team for a year to gain experience in the fullback position and to learn more about the rules and regulations.
- As a result, he decides to take the initiative to sign-up for a community football team. In this example, the young man has designed the positive experience he would like to have (play football as a fullback), decided what steps he would need to take to move towards his goal (sign up for a community team), and identified a personal strength (i.e., bravery) through the process of scaling.

Cognitive Reframing

- This young man may have had some unhelpful thinking patterns that have gotten in the way in the past and may continue to get in the way as he works towards his goals. For example, he may say things to himself like, “I’m too fat to play football, I am not in good enough shape”.
- Helping him to identify limiting thoughts and replace them with more adaptive ones can help him as he works towards his goal.
- In this example, the young man has replaced his maladaptive thoughts with thoughts that are more forgiving and helpful in the pursuit of his goal.

Scenario #2

Area: Relationships and sexuality

Consider a young teenage girl who develops feelings for a boy she knows her friends won’t approve of because he is part of a lower status social group that is. She is confused because she thinks she might like to go out with the boy but is scared her friends will ridicule her.

Miracle question

- In this instance, the young woman might imagine herself going out with the boy she likes and having her friends support. She might envision her friends feeling happy for her new relationship.

Goal Setting

- In this example, after considering her ideal future, she might have prioritized her goals as – having a relationship with the boy she likes, while having the support of friends.

Scaling/Identifying strengths

- When considering, where she feels she is on a scale of one to ten in relation to her goal she may see herself at a “four” because to date her friends have been supportive of the boys she’s dated. Also, she knows the boy likes her and she knows she likes him.
- When she thinks about what it might take to move up to a five she considers telling only one of her friends (the one who she believes is most supportive).
- One of her strengths happens to be her ability to be fair, she figures she may be able to explain the situation in a way that allows her friends to see things from her side as well.

Cognitive Reframing

- This young woman may have had some unhelpful thinking patterns that have gotten in the way in the past and may continue to get in the way as she works towards his goals. For example, she may say things to herself like, “I’ll never be able to get my friends to support me”.
- Helping her to identify limiting thoughts and replace them with more adaptive ones can help him as she works towards her goal.
- For example, instead she might say “They may not all support me but I know one or two will.”

Scenario # 3

Area: Racism and Social Stratification

A young student who is in a peer group is uncomfortable with a few of his friends who have been using racial slurs more frequently. However, at the same time he wants to fit in with the group.

Miracle Question

- In this instance, the young student may envision a world in which he had the gumption to stand up to his friends and maybe even influence them that racism isn't cool, it's wrong.

Goal Setting

- In this example, after considering his ideal future, he might have prioritized his goals as developing greater self-esteem and leadership qualities.

Scaling/Identifying Strengths

- When considering, where he feels he is on a scale of one to ten in relation to his goal he may see himself at a “two” because to date he feels as though he goes along with just about everything his peer group decides and doesn’t provide much input to any group decisions.
- When he thinks about what it might take to move up to a three he considers speaking up today when the group decides where to eat lunch.
- Since open-mindedness is one of the his strengths he considers suggesting a nearby place within walking distance that serves ethnic food.

Cognitive Reframing

- In this situation the young student may have had some unhelpful thinking patterns that have gotten in the way in the past and may continue to get in the way as he works towards his goals. For example, he may say things to himself like, "If I just stay quiet I'll always my group of friends".
- Helping him to identify limiting thoughts and replace them with more adaptive ones can help him as he works towards his goal.
- In this example, the young student may replace maladaptive thoughts with thoughts that are more forgiving and helpful in the pursuit of his goal such as, "My opinion and ideas are just as valid as anyone else in the group."

Future and Strategy Talk

- In each of these example scenarios students should use future talk and strategy talk to move from thinking to acting. Speaking as though change were imminent will help students to move up the scale and closer towards their goals.

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Appendix C

The Problem Solving Inventory (adult)

Form B

P. Paul Heppner, Ph.D.

Directions: People respond to personal problems in different ways. The statements on this inventory deal with how people react to personal difficulties and problems in their day-to-day life. The term “problems” refers to personal problems that everyone experiences at times, such as depression, inability to get along with friends, choosing a vocation, or deciding whether to get a divorce. Please respond to the items as honestly as possible so as to most accurately portray how you handle such personal problems. Your responses should reflect what you actually do to solve problems, not how you think you should solve them. When you read an item, ask yourself: Do I ever behave this way? Please answer every item.

Read each statement and indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with that statement, using the scale provided. Mark your responses by circling the number to the right of each statement.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Moderately Agree
3. Slightly Agree
4. Slightly Disagree
5. Moderately Disagree
6. Strongly Disagree

1. When a solution to a problem has failed, I do not examine why it didn't work.
2. When I am confronted with a complex problem, I don't take the time to develop a strategy for collecting information that will help define the nature of the problem.
3. When my first efforts to solve a problem fail, I become uneasy about my ability to handle the situation.
4. After I solve a problem, I do not analyze what went right and what went wrong.
5. I am usually able to think of creative and effective alternatives to my problems.
6. After following a course of action to solve a problem, I compare the actual outcome with the one I had anticipated.
7. When I have a problem, I think of as many possible ways to handle it as I can until I can't come up with any more ideas.
8. When confronted with a problem, I consistently examine my feelings to find out what is going on in a problem situation.
9. When confused about a problem, I don't clarify vague ideas or feeling by thinking of them in concrete terms.
10. I have the ability to solve most problems even though initially no solution is immediately apparent.
11. Many of the problems I face are too complex for me to solve
12. When solving a problem, I make decisions that I am happy with later.
13. When confronted with a problem, I tend to do the first thing that I can think of to solve it.

14. Sometimes I do not stop and take time to deal with my problems, but just kind of muddle ahead.
15. When considering solutions to a problem, I do not take the time to assess the potential success of each alternative.
16. When confronted with a problem, I stop and think about it before deciding on a next step.
17. I generally act on the first ideal that comes to mind in solving a problem.
18. When making a decision, I compare alternatives and weigh the consequences of one against the other.
19. When I make plans to solve a problem, I am almost certain that I can make them work.
20. I try to predict the result of a particular course of action.
21. When I try to think of possible solutions to a problem, I do not come up with very many alternatives.
22. When trying to solve a problem, one strategy I often use is to think of past problems that have been similar.
23. Given enough time and effort, I believe I can solve most problems that confront me.
24. When faced with a novel situation, I have confidence that I can handle problems that may arise.
25. Even though I work on a problem, sometimes I feel like I'm groping or wandering and not getting down to the real issue.
26. I make snap judgments and later regret them.
27. I trust my ability to solve new and difficult problems.
28. I use a systematic method to compare alternatives and make decisions.
29. When thinking of ways to handle a problem, I seldom combine ideas from various alternatives to arrive at a workable solution.
30. When faced with a problem, I seldom assess the external forces that may be contributing to the problem.
31. When confronted with a problem, I usually first survey the situation to determine the relevant information.
32. There are times when I become so emotionally charged that I can no longer see the alternatives for solving a particular problem.
33. After making a decision, the actual outcome is usually similar to what I had anticipated.
34. When confronted with a problem, I am unsure of whether I can handle the situation.
35. When I become aware of a problem, one of the first things I do is try to find out exactly what the problem is.

Appendix D

**Permission to Forward Letter of Invitation
(Sent Via Public Email to Superintendents)**

Trevi B. Freeze
M.Ed. (Candidate)
Advisor: Dr. Grace Ukasoanya
Faculty of Education, University of Manitoba
R3T 2N2

February XX, 2015

Dear [SUPERINTENDENT],

My name is Trevi Freeze, and I am a graduate student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba. I am writing to request your permission to forward a letter of invitation to the teachers in your school division for potential participation in a research study that is focused on teachers' perceptions on the use of tradition counselling strategies being used in a proactive rather than a reactive approach to address the struggles of young adolescents. The secondary purpose of this research is to discover if any changes occur in the participants' perceptions of their own problem solving behaviours and attitudes, after having learned about a variety of strategies used in counselling. The strategies that I will use are: (a) the miracle question, (b) goal setting, (c) scaling and identifying strengths, (d) future and strategy talk and building resources, and (e) cognitive reframing. These strategies are derived from positive psychology, solution-focused therapy, and cognitive behavioural therapy. This research has been approved by the University of Manitoba Research Ethics Board.

The title of the research project is, *A Qualitative Study of the Proactive Use of Traditional Counselling Methods: The perceptions of teachers in education.*

I am requesting permission to conduct this research based on the following parameters:

- Teachers would be approached via email by a designate (i.e., superintendents or principals) on my behalf with an invitation to participate (attached) in the study. All individuals who are interested in participating will be asked to contact the researcher by email or phone. The researcher will allow two to three weeks for individuals to inquire about the study and contact the researcher. The researcher will gather names, addresses, phone numbers, and email addresses from those indicating a willingness to participate.
- The inclusion criteria for this study are adults between the age of 18 and 65 who are certified teachers with the Manitoba public school system. Participants also must have a minimum of 5 years of teaching experience and involved with middle years education.
- After the two-to-three week recruitment period, the researcher will mail out a written description of the study, the informed consent form, and the pledge of confidentiality. The researcher will also include a letter indicating where and when the research will take place. The study will take place in Winnipeg, Manitoba.
- Each individual who indicates a willingness to participate will also be given a pre-addressed, pre-stamped envelope to mail back the signed informed consent form and the pledge of confidentiality back to the researcher.
- Participants will be emailed the date and time once more after the informed consent and pledge of confidentiality has been mailed back to the researcher.
- Just prior to the onset of the first focus group, participants will reminded of the pledge of confidentiality that was signed and what exactly that means. Participants will also be reminded that their participation is voluntary and they are free withdraw at any time and that any data collected on them up to date will be destroyed.
- On the day the data collection occurs. Participants will participate in a focus group (duration 30 minutes), a professional development workshop (duration 40 minutes), and then another focus group (duration 30 minutes), which will all take place on the same day. 10 minute breaks between each activity will be provided so the total time required by each participant will be approximately 120 minutes.

- During both focus groups data will be collected on how participants view traditional counseling methods being used in a proactive way. The participants also will be asked open-ended questions adapted from the Problem Solving Inventory (Heppner, 1988) aimed to understand how teachers feel about their own ability to manage and solve problems.
- In between both focus groups, participants will be exposed to a Professional Development Workshop that presents specific counselling techniques and how they can be used proactively. The workshop will also include several scenarios that describe a student at the beginning of a decision-making process and suggest ways that counselling techniques may be used by the student, or someone who is supporting the student
- All data acquired through the focus groups will be reported in aggregate form. No identifying information will be used.
- Electronic data will be stored on a password-protected computer. All hard data will be kept locked securely in a file cabinet in the principal researcher's home office at all times and not shared with anyone. All electronic data will be trashed from the computer and all hard data shredded within five years of study completion (as the data collected in this study may be used as part of researcher's Ph.D. dissertation).
- Participants will be notified on the letter of invitation that they will be able to access a copy of results by emailing the researcher directly at Trevi.Freeze@umanitoba.ca. Participants will be notified that the results may be used for publication and presentation purposes.
- My thesis advisor is Dr. Grace Ukasoanya ([REDACTED]).

****The support I am requesting from you consists of:**

- **Permission to approach principals in Foxtrot School Division with the attached email script and description for teachers.**

Your signature on the Permission Form will authorize your approval for this research project and agreement to provide the listed supports above. Thank you for your time and consideration.

This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba. If there are any concerns or complaints about this project contact any of the above-mentioned persons or the Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122, or email margaret_bowman@umanitoba.ca

Sincerely,

Trevi B. Freeze

Research Project Title: *A Qualitative Study of the Proactive Use of Traditional Counselling Methods: The perceptions of teachers in education.*

Dear Ms. Freeze:

I hereby agree to forward a letter of invitation to organizational members on behalf of Trevi Freeze for potential participation in the research study, *A Qualitative Study of the Proactive Use of Traditional Counselling Methods: The perceptions of teachers in education*, to be conducted during the month of March 2014. I understand that I will designate a representative or administrative assistant to forward the invitation to participate via email to [principals and teachers] through our organizational listserv. I understand that participants will be invited to participate in focus groups regarding their perceptions on the use of traditional counselling strategies being used in a proactive way as well as ask their own problem solving behaviours and attitudes. I understand that participants will also be invited to participate in a professional development workshop that explores traditional counselling strategies and their possibility for proactive use.

I understand that my signature on this form indicates that I have understood to my satisfaction the information regarding participation and supports listed in the request. In no way does this letter waive my legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. I am free to withdraw my consent from the study at any time, and I am free to ask for clarification or new information throughout the study.

Superintendent's Signature

Date

I would like to receive a summary of the results of this study. To that end, my contact information for receipt of study findings is included below.

Contact Information:

Appendix E



UNIVERSITY
OF MANITOBA

Research Ethics
and Compliance

Office of the Vice-President (Research and International)

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AMENDMENT APPROVAL

December 15, 2014

TO: Trevi B. Freeze
Principal Investigator

FROM: Lorna Guse, Chair
Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board
(ENREB)

Re: Protocol #E2014:003
"A Qualitative Study of the Proactive Use of Traditional
Counselling Methods: The Perceptions of Teachers in
Education"

This will acknowledge your Amendment Request dated December 2, 2014
requesting amendment to your above-noted protocol.

Approval is given for this amendment. Any further changes to the protocol must
be reported to the Human Ethics Secretariat in advance of implementation.

Appendix F

Email to be sent in verbatim and attachments are on UM letterhead

Dear Principal _____,

My name is Trevi Freeze and I am a graduate student in the Faculty of Education, University of Manitoba. As part of my Master's thesis, I am looking for teachers who may be interested in participating in a professional development opportunity and focus group. I was wondering if it was possible to request a brief 10 minute meeting with teachers who are involved with middle years education.

I've attached the following documents: (1) Email from your superintendent who granted permission for this study to be carried out in the "*Foxtrot School Division*", (2) letter for participant (explaining the study and it's parameters), and (3) my ethics approval certificate from ENREB.

I've copied my advisor, Dr. Grace Ukasoanya (Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba) on this email please feel free to email or call either one of us if you have any questions.

Trevi Freeze (204) 474-7946 and Dr. Grace Ukasoanya 

Trevi Freeze,
Faculty of Education
University of Manitoba
Trevi.Freeze@ad.umanitoba.ca
204-474-7946

Appendix G

Trevi B. Freeze
M.Ed. (Candidate)
Advisor: Dr. Grace Ukasoanya
Faculty of Education,
University of Manitoba
R3T 2N2

February XX, 2015

Dear Participant

My name is Trevi Freeze, and I am a graduate student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba. I am writing to invite you to participate in a research study that is focused on teachers' perceptions regarding the use of traditional counselling strategies being used in a proactive rather than a reactive approach to address the struggles of young adolescents. The secondary purpose of this research is to discover if any changes occur in the participants' perceptions of their own problem solving behaviours and attitudes, after having learned about a variety of strategies used in counselling. The strategies that I will use are: (a) the miracle question, (b) goal setting, (c) scaling and identifying strengths, (d) future and strategy talk and building resources, and (e) cognitive reframing. These strategies are derived from positive psychology, solution-focused therapy, and cognitive behavioural therapy. This research has been approved by the University of Manitoba Research Ethics Board.

Research Project Title: *A Qualitative Study of the Proactive Use of Traditional Counselling Methods: The perceptions of teachers in education.*

Researcher: Trevi B. Freeze
M.Ed. Candidate

Advisor: Dr. Grace Ukasoanya
Professor

This letter will provide you the basic idea of what this research is about and what participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

Teenagers experience several problems and stressors that can cause feelings such as fear and hopelessness (Strom, Oguinick & Singer, 1995). Consequently, many teenagers sometimes may feel ill equipped to deal with life events and may feel trepidation about entering adulthood. The fear and stress that are caused by the above-mentioned difficulties may be causing more unhappiness than necessary. Traditional methods of counselling tend to be reactive in the sense that they respond once a crisis or challenge already has occurred. While reactive methods are valuable, they may not be the most effective or efficient way of supporting young adults as they navigate through or negotiate the challenges of maturation. Given that these challenges are, to some degree, inevitable and likely to affect virtually all members of the adolescent population, it seems counterproductive to respond only when they have been defeated by a challenge. An alternative approach is to prepare adolescents to meet common challenges, before they occur, by arming them with the attitudes, skills, tools, and knowledge of resources needed to enhance their personal strengths, resiliency, and coping ability. Such an approach may decrease human suffering, increase human happiness, reduce the demand for adult counselling services, and support greater wellness in the general population for years to come. You are being asked to participate in this study because you work directly with students in this population.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you work directly with students in this population. I am inviting you to first, participate in a focus group that will be used to collect data on how participants view traditional counseling methods being used in a proactive way (duration 45 minutes – 60 minutes).

Next, I am inviting you to participate in a professional development opportunity that presents specific counselling techniques and how they can be used proactively. The workshop will also include several scenarios that describe a student at the beginning of a decision-making process and suggest ways that counselling techniques may

be used by the student, or someone who is supporting the student (duration 45 minutes – 60 minutes). Finally, I am inviting you to participate in a second focus group that will be used to collect data on how participants view traditional counseling methods being used in a proactive way after having been exposed to the professional development workshop (duration 45 minutes – 60 minutes). The participants again will be asked open-ended questions adapted from the Problem Solving Inventory (Heppner, 1988) aimed to understand how teachers feel about their own ability to manage and solve problems after having been exposed to the professional development workshop (duration 45 minutes – 60 minutes). The inclusion criteria for this study are adults between the age of 18 and 65 who are certified teachers with the Manitoba public school system. Participants also must have a minimum of 5 years of teaching experience and involved with middle years education. Your participation in this research is voluntary.

If you are interested in volunteering to participate in this study, please call (204)-474-7946 or email me (Trevi.Freeze@umanitoba.ca).

After the two-to-three week recruitment period, I will mail you a written description of the study, and informed consent form for you to sign, and a pledge of confidentiality for you to sign. I will also include a letter indicating where and when the research will take place. The study will take place in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

If you volunteer to participate you will also be given a pre-addressed, pre-stamped envelope to mail back the signed informed consent form and the pledge of confidentiality back to the researcher.

Participants will be emailed the date and time once more after the informed consent and pledge of confidentiality has been mailed back to the researcher.

Because this invitation has been emailed to you by a superintendent or principal, there may be a possibility that he or she will know if you have chosen to or not to participate. Also, due to the nature of focus groups, participants will be exposed to each other and therefore may be exposed to identifying information about one another. To minimize the risk, each participant will be asked to sign a pledge of confidentiality. It is anticipated that the participants will enjoy the process and benefit from the acquisition of improved personal planning skills. No identifying information will be used in this study. Participants and/or schools will not be named. All data acquired by the survey will be reported in aggregate form. All identifiers will be stripped from the analysis and dissemination of the results of the study. Any supporting quotations will be stripped from all identifying information or will not be used in the dissemination of findings. Should you choose to withdraw from this study at any time, your data will be destroyed.

Electronic data will be stored on a password-protected computer. All hard data will be kept locked securely in a file cabinet in the principal researcher's home office at all times and not shared with anyone. All electronic data will be trashed from the computer and all hard data shredded within five years of study completion (as the data collected in this study may be used as part of researcher's Ph.D. dissertation).

You will be able to access a copy of results by emailing the principal researcher directly at Trevi.Freeze@umanitoba.ca. The results may be used for publication and presentation purposes.

If you do not wish to participate, please discard this information.

This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board. If there are any concerns or complaints about this project contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122, or email margaret_bowman@umanitoba.ca.

Sincerely,

Trevi B. Freeze
M.Ed. (Candidate)

University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, MB
R3T 2N2
Tel: (204) 474-7946
E-mail: Trevi.Freeze@umanitoba.ca

Informed Consent

Dear Participant,

I am a graduate student from the University of Manitoba. I am writing to ask your consent to collect data from you for my thesis. This means that I will be collecting data from focus groups.

The first group you will participate in will be about 45-60 minutes in length and I will require your participation in a second focus group that will also last 45-60 minutes long. After the first focus group, you will attend a one-hour professional development workshop. I will digitally tape record and transcribe both focus groups. I will transcribe the information soon after using pseudonyms and without any identifying information. I will store the digital recorder in a locked cabinet in my home and permanently delete the tape after the study is completed. Information and data collected that may be presented or published will not be able to be identified with any participant.

Your participation in these focus groups is **voluntary** and you have the right to discontinue providing data at any time. You can withdraw by informing me or my advisor verbally or in writing. I may be publishing all or parts of these research results in a professional journal at a later date, or using the information to present at a scholarly presentation. No identifying information about you will be evident.

Included in this letter is a consent form. This consent form, a copy that will be left with you for your records and reference is only a part of the process of informed consent. It should give you a basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something that is mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information. A more detailed description of the study is attached.

If you are willing to accept this information and participate in the study, I would ask that you read and sign the enclosed Consent Form and return it to me in the enclosed self-addressed envelope. If you have further questions, please contact me at: Trevi Freeze (474-7946 or freeze@cc.umanitoba.ca) or you may contact my advisor, Dr. Grace Ukasoanya at [REDACTED] at the University of Manitoba, Faculty of Education.

Sincerely,

Trevi Freeze

INFORMED CONSENT FORM – Participant

Research Project Title: *A Qualitative Study of the Proactive Use of Traditional Counselling Methods: The perceptions of teachers in education*

Researcher: Trevi Freeze, M.Ed. (Candidate)

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction, the information regarding your participation in this research and agree to participate in the study. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from this study at any time, and/or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. You may withdraw by informing me or my advisor. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

The University of Manitoba may look at your research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way.

Principal Researcher: Trevi Freeze
474-7946; email Trevi.Freeze@cc.umanitoba.ca

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Grace Ukasoanya


This research has been approved by the University of Manitoba, Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB). If you have any concerns or complaints about this project, you may contact the above named persons or the Human Ethics Secretariat at 204-474-7122, or email Margaret_bowman@umanitoba.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

Researcher's Signature _____ Date _____

PROMISE OF CONFIDENTIALITY - Participant

Researcher: Trevi Freeze, M.Ed. (Candidate)

This form is intended to protect the confidentiality of what members of this focus group sat during the course of this study, *A Qualitative Study of the Proactive Use of Traditional Counselling Methods: The perceptions of teachers in education*. Please read the following statement and sign your name, indicating that you agree to comply.

I promise that I will not communicate or talk about information discussed during the course of these focus groups with anyone outside of my fellow focus group members and the moderators.

Participant's Name: _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Researcher's signature _____

Appendix H

Guide for Semi-structured Focus Groups #1

(Expected Time Frame: 60 minutes)

I will read the following information to each participant before the interview:

Thank you for participating in this study exploring the use of traditional counselling strategies being used in a proactive way. The following questions are designed to obtain information about your perceptions regarding the usefulness, effectiveness and viability of these strategies. I want you to include information about the negative characteristics of these strategies or the overall process. It is especially important for me to be aware of and understand criticisms and potential problems with these strategies from your perspective.

Please remember that you are free to withdraw from this study at any time and that you have the right to refuse to answer one or more of the questions at your discretion. When I am transcribing our interview information, I will use a pseudonym for each you and will not transcribe any identifying information. I will be digitally audio taping this interview so that I can have an accurate record of it and I will take notes during our conversations. The audio taped will be transcribed and then destroyed. The transcripts of the tape and my field notes will be kept in a locked cabinet in my house and will be destroyed within 8 years following the completion of this study. Do you have any questions or concerns?

1. Tell me a bit about your teaching background?
 - How long have you been a teacher?
 - What grade levels have you taught?
 - What grade levels are you currently teaching
 - Do you have any experience as a counsellor?

2. What challenges are the most relevant for adolescents today?
 - What are the biggest challenges adolescents' faces?
 - Which challenges are the most difficult or pose the biggest threat?
 - How do you feel about how today's challenges in comparison with the challenges you faced as a young teen?
 - What are your thoughts on the readiness or preparedness of junior high students in their ability to manage these challenges successfully?

3. How do you feel about your own abilities when it comes to equipping students with what they need to navigate common and more difficult challenges?
 - What challenges do you feel comfortable in helping your students manage?
 - What challenges do you feel less comfortable in helping your students manage?
 - What strategies have you used that you have found effective when working with students to manage challenges?

4. What do you think about the use of traditional counselling methods being used in a proactive way?
 - Do you think that a program designed to equip students with resiliency skills would help students to better manage challenges when they occurred?

- Do you think such program would be effective?
 - Do you think such program would be useful?
 - Do you think such program would be viable?
5. How do you feel about your own problem solving ability?
- Tell me about your approach to problem solving?
 - Does how you feel about a particular problem affect how you try and solve it?
 - Does anyone feel as though some problems that you experience are too complex to be solved?
 - What happens after you've solved the problem?
 -
6. Is there anything else you wish to share?

**Guide for semi-structured focus group #2
(Expected Time Frame: 45 minutes – 1 hour)**

I will read the following information to the participants before the focus group begins:

Hi everyone, thank you for your participation in the professional development workshop. We will now move on to the second focus group in this study exploring the use of traditional counselling strategies being used in a proactive way. The following questions are designed to obtain information about your perceptions regarding the usefulness, effectiveness and viability of these strategies.

The directions are the same as in the first focus group but I will tell you them again to ensure that everyone is case any were forgotten. There are no right or wrong answers since it is your perspectives that I am interested in. Also, it is important to understand that you do not have to agree with everyone else in this room if that's not how you really feel. There are ten different people in this room and it's expected that there will be different views. It's also important that we learn about all the views that represented in this group so I would like to ask that you speak one at a time so that we can get everyone's thoughts on tape. Please also feel comfortable to comment on both the good things and the bad things when it comes to these strategies or the overall process.

Please remember that your participation in this study is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from this study at any time and that you have the right to refuse to answer one or more of the questions at your discretion. When I transcribe the focus group, I will use a pseudonym for each you and will not transcribe any identifying information. I would again like to remind you about the pledge of confidentiality you signed. Please ensure that you do communicate or talk about information discussed during the course of these focus groups with anyone outside of this group. I will be digitally audio taping this conversation so that I can have an accurate record of it and the moderator and I will take notes during the conversation. The audio taped will be transcribed and then destroyed. The transcripts of the tape and my field notes will be kept in a locked cabinet in my

house and will be destroyed within 8 years following the completion of this study. Do you have any questions or concerns?

1. How do you feel about your own abilities when it comes to equipping students with what they need to navigate common and more difficult challenges?

- What challenges do you feel comfortable in helping your students manage?
- What challenges do you feel less comfortable in helping your students manage?

2. What do you think about the use of traditional counselling methods being used in a proactive way?

- Do you think that a program designed to equip students with resiliency skills would help students to better manage challenges when they occurred?
- Do you think such a program would be effective?
- Do you think such a program would be useful?
- Do you think such a program would be viable?

3. How do you feel about your own problem solving ability?

- Tell me about your approach to problem solving?
- Does how you feel about a particular problem affect how you try and solve it?
- Does anyone feel as though some problems that you experience are too complex to be solved?
- What happens after you've solved the problem?
-

4. Is there anything else you wish to share?