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Strength – Based Education

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Strength – Based Education

by

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Strength – Based Education

Strength – Based Education
By Katie Eaves

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This research study was interested in assessing school social workers' attitudes towards strength – based education. It was hypothesized that school social workers would demonstrate favorability towards strength – based educational principles, but not without some initial hesitations. Identifying these attitudes would highlight receptivity of social work professionals within the school systems towards strength – based education. An informed consent letter along with a research questionnaire was emailed out to 140 school social workers within the Minneapolis School District. The questionnaire included inclusionary and demographic questions in addition to nine strength – based questions that attempted to assess for the participant's attitude towards these variables. Qualtrics was used to organize and analyze the data**.** Out of 140 participants, four completed the survey; causing the results to not be statistically significant. The results, however, did demonstrate favorability towards strength – based variables among all participants. The results also found correlations among licensure and employment status: LICSW participants and those employed for 1 – 2 years rated strength – based variables more favorable when compared to the other groups. Due to the small sample size and the lack of available research within this area, additional studies should be conducted.

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Introduction

Strength-based education is primarily founded upon positive psychology; 'the science of optimal human functioning' that explores 'positive subjective experiences (well-being and flow), positive individual traits (optimism and forgiveness), and positive institutions (collective well-being)' (Passarelli, Hall, & Anderson, 2010, p. 121). Research from other viable fields (such as education, social work, organizational theory and behavior); have been pivotal within the strength-based educational approach (Lopez and Louis, 2009). The belief that all children have natural gifts and have the ability to overcome adversity is a general theme intertwined throughout the philosophy (Resiliency Initiatives, 2011). The strengths perspective operates on the assumption that every human being has resources that can create and sustain success in various aspects of life (Lopez & Louis, 2009). Generally defined, strength-based education encourages students to identify and utilize natural-born strengths, positively recognizes effort and achievement, and believes that success within the environment is accomplished through talent-driven initiatives (Passarelli, Hall, & Anderson, 2010). 'Transforming students into confident, efficacious, life-long learners whose work is infused with a sense of purpose' (Lopez and Louis, 2009, p. 2) is at the core of strength-based education.

Cantwell (2006) summarizes the previous research within strength-based education: Strength-developmental programs impact student optimism, strength awareness, self-confidence, self-acceptance, goal directedness, affirmation of others, sense of control, realistic expectations, grade point averages, avoidance of disciplinary action, quality of effort, school involvement, timely class attendance, ability to effectively collaborate with colleagues, clarity for developing a career path and goals, confidence to assume advanced

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administrative or leadership roles within public schools, academic self-efficacy, positive

self-concept, positive perception of others, and awareness of others' strengths (p. 161).

Anderson (2004) asserts that tapping into growth and change is through talent

application, not through weakness identification and fixing. Talents may not only be dismissed

but these skills may also be perceived negatively; leading to suppression of one's natural-born

gifts. Rather than guiding children or students to channel the strength into positive application,

weakness identification perpetuates negativity and loss. Once a child has an opportunity to fully

explore and engage within one's natural-born skill sets, motivation, authenticity, relational and

personal fulfillment consequently increase and develop (Anderson, 2004).

Gallup's Research on Excellence (as cited in Anderson, 2004) studied top achievers and

determined that high achievement is largely related to talent identification and maximization of

these skills. High achievers do not necessarily have more talent but instead have invented ways

to use these skills effectively within chosen roles and fields that allow for and encourage strength

application and development. It is through fully engaging, discovering, and applying one's

greatest strengths, while managing weaknesses, that leads to reaching one's full potential

(Anderson, 2004).

Strength-based education is a relatively new concept that has been launched within

hundreds of American and Canadian colleges (Lopez & Louis, 2009). However, this model is

not the norm and still is being studied and refined. Regardless, the various research data

consistently demonstrates that students increase talent awareness, personal and academic

confidence, achievement motivation, future optimism, talent application, strength development,

interpersonal understanding and relationships, authenticity, value, and peace (Anderson, 2004).

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This correlates with Cantwell's (2006) summarized assessment. Strength-based education greatly adds to personalized skill development, self-awareness, and intrinsic motivation (Anderson, 2004); all of which contribute to strength development. Fox asserts (2008) that low self-esteem and misguided character assets will eventually manifest into negativity whereas children that have cultivated their strengths and celebrated these victories become purposeful, connected, resilient, and joyful human beings.

Despite the strength-based education research, most school models continue to defer to the traditional model of schooling. The predetermined core subjects of reading, writing, and math are taught through a narrowed learning scope by the teacher, whom is perceived as the expert within the classroom. The students are required to take annually mandated tests that are utilized to categorize and judge growth within the student and school setting. Students that struggle through these specific, highly biased modes of educational delivery are often negatively labeled; formally or informally. Children that struggle within these dated, prejudiced, and predetermined measures of success are largely disadvantaged within the school system; thus, potentially leading into life-long consequences.

This study is interested in quantitatively assessing the following question: what are the attitudes of school social workers towards strength-based education within the Minneapolis school districts? Because Strength Based Education is a relatively new concept (not widely understood) and is extensive, this paper explored major themes within this model; therefore, attitudes will be assessed based upon these same themes presented within the paper. School social workers were the chosen participants to survey because of the relatively similar theoretical

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orientations that both the strength-based educational model and the social work profession

operate from and within.

Recognizing that school social workers have been trained to identify and work from a

strengths perspective, it is theorized that school social workers will be the most likely school

professionals to embrace, understand, and implement the strength-based educational strategies

more quickly and without major reservation. Thus, school social workers will be instrumental in

implementing and refining this curriculum in addition to educating other professions into the

necessity of the strength-based model. Consequently, it is necessary to begin gauging the overall

attitudes and beliefs that school social workers have towards the strength-based educational

model. It is hypothesized that school social workers, largely, will favorably embrace this model

but not without some initial hesitation. It is of interest to this researcher that both the optimistic

and cautious attitudes are identified. Without this knowledge, implementing this unfamiliar,

profoundly different curriculum will become far more difficult if the most likely supportive

school professionals' beliefs are not examined and understood more thoroughly.

Conceptual Framework

Strength-Based Model

The strength-based therapeutic model has been promoted and is often utilized within the

social work profession. It is considered holistic in nature and is founded upon strength

identification, empowerment, and resilience through one's innate capabilities (MacArthur,

Rawana, & Brownlee, 2011). According to Rawana and Brownlee strengths are defined as 'a set

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of developed competencies and characteristics that is valued by the individual and society and is

embedded in culture' (as cited in MacArthur, Rawana, & Brownlee, 2011).

Smith (2006) states that after more than 50 years of research, not one specific therapy

model trumps another; however, the research unquestionably demonstrates that the therapeutic

alliance is vital to a positive and long-standing therapeutic experience. Informal studies have

demonstrated that those receiving therapy prefer counselors that focus on affirming and building

upon strengths verse therapy that focuses on diagnosing and problem identifying (Smith, 2006).

Smith (2006) argues that confidence, determination, and personal empowerment ensue when

building upon one's strengths; thus, this strengthens the therapeutic alliance and investment into

the process.

The strength based practice [SBP] requires commitment and is time-consuming. The

definition of SBP, according to Saleebey (2010), is 'based on facilitating the discovery and

embellishment, exploration, and use of the clients' strengths and resources in the service of

helping them achieve their goals and realize their dreams' (as cited in Manthey, Knowles, Asher,

& Wahab, 2011, p. 127). SBP is founded in the belief that each individual has strengths and

through uncovering these strengths, success is possible for everyone. Achieving one's goal or

purpose is most possible when strengths, abilities, and assets are uncovered, refined, and utilized.

The premise of SBP lies within self-reflection on personal ambitions while working towards

accomplishing these through discovery; the intention being on improving one's quality of life

(Manthey, Knowles, Asher, & Wahab, 2011).

Because identifying strengths is a large component to SBP, the formalized strength

assessment process is methodically delivered and most often based within the present context.

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SBP believes that the community surrounding the individual offers many beneficial resources and when paired with one's strengths and aspirations, substantial growth and progress can be made. The relationship between client and therapist within SBP is based on hope, which is permeated through acceptance, understanding, and partnership. The therapist entrusts the client to make choices while offering support and clarity when needed. SBP does and will acknowledge pathologies, negative labels, and diagnosis; however, uncovering one's resiliency in spite of these concerns is of primary importance (Manthey, Knowles, Asher, & Wahab, 2011).

Strength-based education correlates with many of the same principles that SBP is founded upon: strength recognition, student centered, community involvement, self-discovery, and a profound belief in one's capabilities and resiliency. Both processes involve a great deal of time and commitment from the facilitator (clinician or teacher) and the learner (student or client). Collaboration, empowerment, optimism, and confidence placed within the student as being an expert within their own learning further coincides with this model.

. **Literature Review**

This paper first reviews common traditional practices within mainstream schools and how these methods can and do fail students within the immediate and long-term academic realm: outcome based, labeling and diagnosing, structured curriculum agendas, favored learning modes, and the traditional teacher-centered philosophy. Following the additional educational analysis, the strength-based educational approach is then condensed down into similar groups and analyzes how these processes would offer immediate support and long-term progress for each individual student: process orientation, strength naming, core competency focus, expanded learning options, and relationship focused.

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Customary School Procedures

Fox (2008) asserts that the American educational system early on identifies the winners and losers based upon biased criteria that is not representative of the whole child; thus, creating an anxiety-filled environment for children and adolescents. Anxiety depletes children's energy and often times are expressed through frustration, anger, isolation, or addiction (Fox, 2008).

Weak lives begin in childhood, yet often the damage done then is subtle and doesn't show up until later in life, when many factors and events merge together to create feelings of uncertainty, a lack of creativity, a loss of direction, and an insatiable hunger for something more (Fox, 2008, p.8).

The school system, a largely influential environment for children, undermines the developing child through the various concepts and practices that are widely accepted by both school personnel and parents alike (Fox, 2008). According to Anderson, Cave, and McDowell (as cited in Laursen, 2003) 'practices that are preoccupied with deficits can interfere with achievement and excellence' (p. 12). Eroding of self-confidence, negative stigmatization, community alienation, poor motivation and aspirations, and a negative outlook are consequences imposed on youth through the current schooling philosophy (Laursen, 2003). The defined outcomes, the learning expectations, and the pre-determined content requirements within the classroom often demoralize students and do not allow the child to holistically develop nor be authentically involved within the learning process (Fox, 2008). The following methods (outcome focused, labeling/diagnosing, predetermined content, conditioned learning styles, and teacher centered orientation) provide examples as to how children are divided, limited, and conditioned to fit a specific schooling model. Although some students benefit from the

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traditional structured educational setting, other children are not fundamentally equipped to thrive in such a specific, defined environment.

Outcome Focus. The No Child Left Behind [NCLB] Act, signed into law in 2002 (Gardiner, Canfield-Davis, & Anderson, 2008), strongly emphasizes testing as a basis to determine academic achievement within the school yet lacks scientific evidence to support the provisions set forth (Chapman, 2008). Public schools are mandated by NCLB, thus increasing the amount of "rigorous," "demanding," "academic," and "secular, neutral, and non-ideological" (as cited in Chapman, 2004, p. 4) state-approved tests given to 99 percent of students (Chapman, 2004; Jennings & Rentner, 2006). Additionally, at the time of NCLB implementation, schools were required to prove that 95 to 100 percent of students score at a proficient or advanced level within reading, mathematics, and science by 2014 (Chapman, 2004). Most recently the United States [U.S.] Department of Education issued waivers to more than a dozen states requiring that teacher evaluation be tied to student test scores; further exasperating cross comparisons against various students, groups and schools, perpetuating negative labeling, and limiting skill development, individualized student focus, and content exploration (Jorgenson, 2012; Jennings & Rentner, 2006; Gardiner, Canfield-Davis, & Anderson, 2008).

Schools that do not meet adequate yearly progress [AYP] within reading, mathematics, and science are penalized, further pressuring the educational system to abide by federal test-outcome standards (Chapman, 2004). As a result, school administrators and teachers have narrowed classroom activities to benefit testing results thus limiting critical, research-based acquisition (Hollingworth, 2009). Fox (2008) asserts that learning new concepts is most achievable and effective during elementary and adolescent years yet many opportunities are lost

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due to the narrowed curriculum focus. According to Jorgenson (2012), testing 'builds low-level

skills such as memorization and recall at the expense of higher-order aptitudes – and at the

tremendous cost to our community and future' (p. 13). Further, testing skills are highly

correlated with the child's socioeconomic status and the parental educational background

(Jorgenson, 2012). Creativity, improvisation, presentation, public-speaking, research

acquisition, among various other relevant, highly-sought after skills post high school are not

validated nor assessed through the current testing system. Additionally, factors that are proven

to correlate with high academic success (perseverance, resiliency, and determination) are not

measured and strengths outside of test-taking assessments are not acknowledged or built upon

(Jorgenson, 2012). Students internalize expected outcomes, often perpetuating a belief in failure

if they cannot compete against peers. This creates disengagement and a loss of interest within

education (Fox, 2008).

> **Labeling and Diagnosing.** In 1973, the State Federal Information Clearinghouse stated:
>
> To drop labels entirely is to give up categorical legislative aid for the handicapped … The
>
> minute you give up the categories, the legislature will dump you right back into general
>
> education. The legislature does not understand something that does not have the word
>
> handicapped on it (as cited in Lauchlan & Boyle, 2007, p. 36).

Students that resist or lack growth are often negatively labeled, formally or informally, by the

school personnel; thus strengths become less obvious and capabilities further diminished (Fox,

2008). Although labels largely focus on the weakness of the student, they do offer additional

resources to the struggling students. While labels and diagnosis may offer alternative treatment

options and bring developmental challenges into focus, labels by and large are centralized around

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the deficit, the perceived flaw within the child. Rather than providing other educational outlets

for students, a disability likely has to be identified before the child is allowed to explore other

avenues within the educational realm (Lauchlan & Boyle, 2007).

'People with learning disabilities do not have low intelligence; in fact, many have

average or above-average intelligence and some are even double-labeled as gifted and talented'

(Fox, 2008, p. 54). Despite this, labeling still focuses only on the individual, denying any social

or structural factors that may be present. Lowered student expectations, less educational

opportunities, stigmatization, social isolation and bullying are common, immediate consequences

to labeling. These costs to labeling can potentially manifest into life-long, debilitating costs:

negative self-perceptions, self-doubt, and feelings of inferiority (Lauchlan & Boyle, 2007).

Foley-Nicpon, Rickels, Assouline, and Richards (2012) conducted a study to

purposefully explore how self-esteem and self-concept were impacted by an Attention Deficit

Hyperactivity Disorder [ADHD] label. The quantitative study included a sample of self-referred

children, ranging in age from six to 18, that were all identified as being gifted students; 48

percent (54 participants) of the 112 gifted children had an ADHD diagnosis and the remaining 52

percent (58 participants) did not have a diagnosis. It should be noted, however, that the 56

percent of the participants with a gifted/ADHD diagnosis also had a diagnosis of anxiety,

depression, adjustment, oppositional defiant, or a learning disorder. The study measured each

participant's intelligence, behaviors and emotions, and self-concept through a series of scales.

The results of the study concluded that the group with the gifted/ADHD label reported a

lower self-concept within behavior (.001 significance), less overall happiness (.001 significance),

and was twice as likely to report low self-esteem (.001 significance) when compared to the

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gifted-only group. Limitations from the study include it being a convenience sample of a mostly

White, mid-western population. Additionally, the gifted group did not have any comorbid

psychological diagnosis' whereas 56 percent within the gifted/ADHD group did, thus increasing

uncontrolled outliers within the study. Although the study cannot definitively determine whether

labels, gifted and/or ADHD, impact individuals' perceptions and/or outcomes, it does suggest

that a correlation between the labels and self-esteem/self-concept exist (Foley-Nicpon, Rickels,

Assouline, & Richards, 2012).

In addition to self-esteem being impacted by labels, Alesi, Rappo, and Pepi (2012) were

interested in looking at self-sabotaging behaviors among children that were labeled or not

labeled with a deficit. The researchers' study was conducted over a three month period that

assessed seven to nine year old students of a third grade level that represented an average

socioeconomic status. Each participant underwent intelligence quotient (IQ), reading

comprehensive, oral reading, dyslexic evaluations, and math evaluations. Each participant,

totaling 56 children, was divided into four groups (14 students per group) following the

screening scores: students with dyslexia, students with comprehension disabilities, students with

mathematic disabilities, and students that scored normal within all evaluations. Once placed into

one of the four groups, the students were administered self-esteem and self-handicapping

(defined as defensive strategies such as procrastination, defiance, and underage drinking)

assessments (Alesi, Rappo, and Pepi, 2012).

Following analysis, statistically significant results were found within self-esteem and

self-handicapping evaluations among the groups. The control group, students identified as being

within normal learning abilities, scored higher on academic self-esteem than the groups of

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children that had a learning disability (dyslexia, comprehension disability, or math disability).;

corroborating Foley-Nicpon, Rickels, Assouline, and Richards' (2012) study results.

Additionally, the control group scored lower in self-handicapping strategies when compared to

groups that had disabilities; indicating a correlation among self-sabotage and students with a

learning disability. It should be noted, though, that self-esteem and self-handicapping behaviors

did not establish a statistical significant correlation (Alesi, Rappo, and Pepi, 2012).

Although all students that were identified as having a learning disability/deficit

demonstrated lower academic self-esteem and a higher rate of self-handicapping behaviors, the

group of children with a dyslexic disability demonstrated a higher incidence of defensive

strategies among all four groups surveyed (Alesi, Rappo, and Pepi, 2012). Alesi, Rappo, and

Pepi (2012) suggest that based on this study and previous research, the more specified a learning

disorder is along with frequent academic disappointments, the more likely one is to self-

sabotage. Alesi, Rappo, and Pepi (2012) theorize that this likely leads to a negative long-term

cycle in which the student actually exasperates the disability with self-sabotage rather than

working to achieve success; potentially laying the foundation for a belief pattern of expected

failures within this realm to occur over the course of one's life.

Predetermined Curriculum Agenda. Fox (2008) challenges the structure and delivery

of curriculum within mainstream schools, stating:

> The system cheats students by failing to provide them with learning experiences that will
>
> engage their sense of uniqueness, inspire their creativity, and bolster their ability to solve
>
> real-life problems. We cheat our students out of real opportunities for growth and insight
>
> when we fail to connect their learning experiences to what they already know about

themselves and their lives. When this connection is not made, students see the entire

process as a game that they are forced to play (p. 45).

Fox (2008) questions why various topics emphasize various aspects of the subject area yet

ignores other viable information. Students' expectations, desires, and areas of interest within

school are not only not considered but often ignored; suppressing intrinsic motivation and

strength development. Rather than focusing on the adaptable, more useful skill of learning,

schools focus on specific topics and facts. Forcing students to study seemingly irrelevant content

does not stimulate growth and curiosity; rather it stifles one's innate interests (Fox, 2008).

Additionally, the NCLB Act has further limited the curriculum scope to focus most on

math, reading, and science. The Counsel on Basic Education has stated that the curriculum

content has become "atrophied" (as cited in Chapman, 2008, p. 13) due to NCLB testing

standards not crediting academic success within various other subjects such as history, music,

physical education, and art (Chapman, 2008). Further, Chapman (2008) asserts that achievement

gaps will continue to expand and biased learning objectives will continue to intensify so long as

the curriculum focus continues to narrow. According to the Center on Education Policy, NCLB

testing policies has pressured schools to limit the educational focus from other subjects outside

of math and reading within 71 percent of schools (Hollingworth, 2008; Jennings & Rentner,

2006). Reducing other subject areas limits students' exposure to other forms of education that

can be attained through cooperative learning, independent direction, meta-cognitive

development, organizing, logic and reasoning, and problem solving activities. Rather than

focusing on the student's growth and natural abilities, content that is measurable and pre-

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determined to be more useful long-term trumps the child's individual learning process (Gardiner, Canfeld-Davis, & LeMar Anderson, 2008).

      Conditioned Learning Style. Each student compiles information through a specific but highly individualized process yet the school system often utilizes minimal avenues to deliver information: lecture, readings, exercises, and independent practice are the most common (Minotti, 2005); consequently, students that learn best through reading and writing are often times the children that fare well in the traditional school system and thus, are labeled positively, formally or informally. Children that learn through other mechanisms are often faced with difficulty, frustration, and disappointment. As discussed earlier, Alesi, Rappo, and Pepi (2012) and Foley-Nicpon, Rickels, Assouline, and Richards (2012) identified a correlation among deficit-labeled, struggling students with lower academic self-esteem and increased self-handicapping behaviors, further highlighting the life-long ramifications that limited modes of learning can impose on children. As Fox (2008) vehemently asserts, intelligence is not wrapped up within a limited, definitive means of conditioned learning. However, the school often suppresses the student from tapping into these realms due to the expected, pre-determined mode of learning.

      Fox (2008) asserts that placing full responsibility on the child for learning material though a pre-determined, biased mode of acquisition is the greatest mistake schools make. As many as 34 different learning styles have been identified and eight basic intelligences have been acknowledged yet schools often zone into the reading, science, and math intelligence spectrum and test these skills through one instrument: pen and paper assessment. Misjudging students due to learning style differentiation does happen, according to Fox (2008). Minotti (2005) further

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states that traditional study regiments and homework assignments are inadequate for many.

Children that are able to engage within their natural learning process score significantly higher

on test scores (Minotti, 2005), furthering the misrepresentation within testing statistical data.

Minotti (2005) conducted a quantitative, experimental research design that intended on

focusing on how an individualized, learning style approach impacted academic achievement and

attitudes within sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students. The convenience sample took place in

a parochial elementary school in New York City that comprised of 57 percent Hispanic, 39

percent African-American, and 4 percent Caucasian; all participants predominately from a low-

socioeconomic background. The students were randomly assigned to the experimental and

control groups. The experimental group was given individualized homework prescriptions based

upon one's preferred mode of learning whereas the control group was given traditional

homework and study strategies; all other measurements were given to both groups (Minotti,

2005).

Prior to treatment, each group were academically similar within the four tested subject

areas (reading, math, science, and social studies). Following treatment and analysis, however, the

researcher found significant differences between the experimental and control groups. The

experimental group, whom utilized the learning-style based homework prescriptions,

demonstrated significantly larger gains within reading, math, science, and social studies when

compared to the control group; indicative of a statistical significance within the experimental

group and not within the control group (Minotti, 2005).

Similarly, both groups tested comparable within the attitude assessment measurement

prior to treatment (experimental: 46.02; control: 45.87). However, following treatment, the

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experimental group demonstrated a ten point (56.81) statistical difference (p < .05) in increased

attitude whereas the control group demonstrated an approximate three point increase (48.44), not

statistically significant (Minotti, 2005).

Although the research demonstrated gains within both groups following treatment, the

data suggests that oral instruction combined with traditionally-based study strategies was largely

ineffective when compared to the experimental group. The data suggests that current,

conventional homework assignments and study-based strategies utilized within most American

classrooms today is insufficient and does not generate a positive attitude when compared to

individualizing the learning process.

Teacher Centered. Jorgenson (2012) states that the Department of Education recently

granted waivers to more than ten states, with additional states pending, requesting that that

student achievement based upon testing outcomes be tied to teacher evaluation; further

encouraging teacher-centered approaches (Garrett, 2008). Garrett (2008) states that a teacher-

centered philosophy tends to foster the following beliefs and behaviors: leadership is embodied

by teachers only; teachers create and enforce all rules; consequences are immediate and static;

rewards are extrinsic; limited responsibilities are delegated to students; and community

involvement is not encouraged.

Despite prior research demonstrating that growth, development, and/or change are highly

dependent upon the establishment of meaningful, purposeful relationships and engagement

practices, instruction is often impersonally delivered through lectures and structured discussions,

presentations, and displays (Garrett, 2008; Resiliency Initiatives, 2011). Teachers often create

specific routines and rituals in which the student is expected to model; accordingly, causing a

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specific answer to a specific concept to be delivered. Classroom conformity, manifested through

rigid structure and rules, can limit active learning and cognition progression in addition to

fostering passivity (Garrett, 2008). According to Garrett (2008), controlling the classroom

through hierarchical measures allows the teacher to employ power and regulation over the

student. Teachers that choose the method of content delivery, determine and appoint quarter

grades and tests and provide both consequences and praise; likely resulting in the teacher having

a significant influence over the child's experience.

Strength-Based Education Model

According to Anderson (2004):

> Strengths-based education involves a process of assessing, teaching, and designing
>
> experiential learning activities to help students identify their greatest talents, and to then
>
> develop and apply strengths based on those talents in the process of learning, intellectual
>
> development, and academic achievement to levels of personal excellence (p.1).

Although seemingly clear, implementation of a strength-based educational model within schools

will force school professionals and parents to challenge ingrained beliefs and perceptions; thus,

requiring one to shift from a negative focus to that of a positive emphasis (Fox, 2008). Strength

identification and development is unique to each person, causing the focus to shift to inherent

thinking, feeling, and behaving patterns that can be both personally and collectively impactful

(Anderson, 2004). Anderson (2004) defines these dominant traits as talents and states that one's

most central aptitudes are the foundation for life-excellence and achievement, the difference

between a meaningful life verse that of complacency (Fox, 2008). A strength, according to

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Anderson (2004), is 'the ability to consistently perform a specific task at a nearly perfect level'

(p.2).

The objective within the strength-based educational model is to identify talents and then

transform these capabilities into strengths (Anderson, 2004). Anderson (2004) asserts that many

highly developed talents, when harmoniously and strategically engaged with one another, is

often what leads to excellence. This process requires talent themes to first be identified followed

by exploration and discovery. Once talents have been methodically discovered, affirmation and

celebration of these skills ensues; further creating a sense of fulfillment and confidence within

one's abilities. Upon talent identification, building self-worth within safe, nurturing

relationships sets the premise for strength development: a focused, intentional process that is

best developed within many settings (Anderson, 2004).

Measurement, strength and weakness identification, and weakness reducing goals

(Passarelli, Hall, & Anderson, 2010, p. 122) is the traditional and preferred approach utilized

within most school settings. According to Lopez and Louis (2009), the strength-based

educational model should identify and measure strengths and positive psychological outcomes

that can then lead to individualized learning plans that best serve, utilize, and further refine

students' gifts. A positive support network is also cited as an important factor within this model

(Passarelli, Hall, & Anderson, 2010).

Strength Focus

Process Based. Resiliency Initiatives, a consultation group that educates, develops, and

implements a strength-based culture and practice within varying settings, was founded in 2001

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and is based upon scholarly research and extensive professional experience. According to

Resiliency Initiatives (2011), children attain personal power through transformation and growth;

not through precise techniques, procedures, and timelines. Within the learning process, students

need to be challenged, held to high standards, and encouraged to preserve, critically think, and

develop innovative ideas or points of view. Clear expectations are important as is celebrating

both large and small successes. Individual improvement is recognized and celebrated rather than

ranking and comparing students against fellow classmates (Resiliency Initiatives, 2011).

'Learning should be a journey, an exploration, rather than an evaluation' (Fox, 2008, p. 27). Fox

(2008) stresses the importance of teacher observation; a process that is scientifically based and

ongoing throughout a student's educational career. Scientific observation aids teachers in

bringing these strengths to a student's awareness; encouraging and guiding the cultivation and

developmental process (Fox, 2008).

Resiliency Initiatives (2011) suggests that children begin with activities that are familiar

and have provided prior success; building off of several positive experiences develops and

enhances one's internal drive towards growth and acceleration. The individualized learning

process should be choice-driven, structured activities that guides students towards increasing

self-determination and a since of achievement (Resiliency Initiatives, 2011). This process likely

will require more time, focus, organizing, attention, intention, and reflection than outcome-based

schooling directives (Anderson, 2004). Assessment and goal setting involves consultation with

the student as this promotes meaningful discussion and intimate reflection into what personal

success means, further alleviating stress and anxiety within the evaluation process (Resiliency

Initiatives, 2011).

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Although the process of learning is most significant, positive outcomes are celebrated. In addition to academic, social, and vocational growth, an increase in self-confidence, relationship development, and culturally desirable characteristics is likely to mature and progress (Resiliency Initiatives, 2011). Anderson (2004) highlights reflection as a critical component within strength identification and development. Aligning these skills and talents with values and beliefs significantly bolsters satisfaction and excellence (Anderson, 2004).

Strength Naming. As previously mentioned, students labeled as gifted show an increase in happiness, self-esteem, and self-concept when compared to other peers that have both a gifted and a negative label attached (Foley-Nicpon, Rickels, Assouline, & Richards, 2012). Although prior research has shown that children labeled positively (gifted) has increased self-esteem and concept, this study suggests that a positive label was less influential when a negative label was also attached to the student. According to Fox (2008), these correlations reinforce one another, thus demonstrating the importance in identifying, building upon, and mastering strengths rather than only reducing weaknesses.

According to Anderson (2004), people are generally blind to natural skills due to the ordinariness these talents have become in routine, everyday events. Further, people's self-reflective perception is impacted by critical feedback given by others. Labeling personality traits as negative and then feverishly working to change the often unchangeable is counterproductive for schools and life-altering for students. Channeling dominant, innate tendencies into productive life-sustaining qualities strengthens children and children's' futures (Fox, 2008). Fox (2008) asserts that strength recognition is an ongoing, continuous process of unraveling preferences down to the 'core of the strength' (Fox, 2008, p. 111). Although adults are

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influential and important components within this process, Fox (2008) affirms that the adult's role is to guide the process and help cultivate the trait but only after the student acknowledges and embraces it.

Identifying internal strengths and resources is a continuous, life-long process. Rather than only labeling potential concerns and problems, opportunities and solutions are instead highlighted; transforming potential ineptness into hope. Zeroing in on dysfunctional, negative patterns typically results in weakness eradication programs, not growth and mastery. Those that understand and recognize their strengths are likely to utilize these traits more effectively and consistently, creating a life built around repeat successes rather than perpetual failures (Fox, 2008). This is not to suggest, though, that concerns are not addressed. Rather, the response remains grounded upon one's abilities and upholds high, positive expectations while capitalizing on opportunities for growth. Creative implementation of various resources for students is included within one's learning process as a means to enhance one's strengths (Anderson, 2004).

Growth Opportunities

Core Competencies. Focusing on and fostering core competencies, defined as 'essential skills, abilities, and knowledge that are central to health, well-being, and success in life,' is a critical component within the strength-based educational model (Resiliency Initiatives, 2011, p. 17). Allowing the student to be actively engaged within the learning process further peaks interests, uncovers talents, and naturally instills curiosity and a sense of wonder (Fox, 2008).

Strength-based education emphasizes the importance of expression (e.g. imagination, ideas, and opinions), making choices, problem solving, collaborating, and giving back to the community. Students that participate and feel vested within various academic programs and

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activities (peer meditators, tutoring younger children, assisting within classrooms, school

campaigns, sport team member, etc.) reinforces the student's commitment, value, and belonging

within the educational program (Resiliency Initiatives, 2011). According to Fox (2008), children

need to be involved in choosing the educational content and guided through the process of

synthesizing and assimilating the wealth of information that is now available. When relevant,

stimulating content is paired with strength application, it is then that motivation, appreciation,

and a dedicated interest in learning begins to expand and multiply (Fox, 2008).

Expanded Learning Options. Minotti's (2005) findings related to an increase in

academic performance and personal fulfillment when individualized learning modes were

developed is further corroborated by Griggs (2013). Griggs (2013) states that several studies

have found grade point averages and attitudes significantly improve when learning styles are

properly matched to the learner. According to Minotti (2005) a learning style 'is the way each

individual begins to concentrate on, process, internalize, and retain new and difficult

information' (p. 68). Teachers that are unable to effectively engage a student through a

complimentary, relatable teaching approach significantly reduce one's academic prognosis.

Thus, it is essential that individual learning styles are accounted for, understood, and accessible

(Minotti, 2005).

Minotti (2005) asserts that the first step towards improving academic excellence within

students begins with identification of one's learning style: understanding which tools best serve

the unique systematic function of concentration, process orientation, and retainment within each

student. According to Minotti (2005) 'parents and educators unwittingly have hidden the truth

from children concerning individuals' differential abilities, learning styles, and strengths in

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diverse areas' (p. 83). Minotti (2005) states that children are fully capable of identifying their

own strengths and weaknesses and implementing one's uniquely inherent learning ability but

cannot begin this self-reflective and exploratory process unless it is allowed and nurtured.

Relationship Based

> **Student Centered.** Cummins states (as cited by Resiliency Initiatives, 2011, p. 1)
>
> Human relationships are the heart of schooling. The interactions that take place between
>
> students and teachers and among students are more central to student success than any
>
> method of teaching literacy, or science, or math. When powerful relationships are
>
> established between teachers and students, these relationships frequently can transcend
>
> the economic and social disadvantages that afflict communities and schools alike.

Therefore, teachers must engage students through relationships and embrace each child's

individual characteristics and capacities, believing that students must be active members within

the learning process. The teacher embodies the role as a guide and not as an authoritative leader,

wanting to learn and collaborate with the student; the purpose of ensuring the most meaningful

and positive learning experience for each child is the goal. Safe, nurturing relationships provides

the foundation for a child to begin assessing and implementing a personal value system, a sense

of hope, and an optimistic perspective. 'When powerful relationships are established between

teachers and students, these relationships frequently can transcend the economic and social

disadvantages that afflict communities and schools alike' (Resiliency Initiatives, 2011, p. 1).

It is critical that support from school staff is conveyed through validation, gentleness,

compassion, respect, and attentiveness.   Allowing children to be acknowledged and actively

engaged within the process and outcome goals naturally promotes ownership and responsibility,

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thus enhancing intrinsic motivation within development. (Resiliency Initiatives, 2011). Guiding

students through issues; encouraging reflective thinking, exploration, and autonomy; seeking

personal truth beneath facts; and offering choices is the teacher's agenda (Garrett, 2008).

Furthermore, Resiliency Initiatives (2011) promotes group collaboration when problems arise.

Classroom discussions develop broader perspectives, promote conflict resolution and problem

solving skills, and an overall greater cohesion among students (Resiliency Initiatives, 2011).

The strength based education philosophy believes that genuine teaching talent surfaces

during student disengagement and impediment as the teacher has a profound belief in the child's

ability; the teacher continues to persevere with the child until competency and understanding is

attained (Fox, 2008). A student-centered approach shares leadership responsibilities, encourages

development of high level cognitive skills, and balances the needs of both teacher and student

(Garrett, 2008). The learning process is viewed as a dynamic, steadily evolving initiative that

persists throughout one's lifetime as a meaningful venture. Student-directed activities that are

paired with an authentic teacher relationship(s) are the essence of what a student-centered

approach entails (Resiliency Initiatives, 2011).

Community Involvement. Resiliency Initiatives (2011) states that schools should be

orientated towards addressing various obstacles (social, personal, cultural, structural) that impede

one's ability for further growth, self-determination, and identified personal goals. However,

these resources should coincide and align with strengths that feel purposeful to the student.

Support offered through the community enhances youth development and is beneficial to all

students, not just 'at risk' children, further empowering students. The activities and relationships

created within the community are not intended for only 'at risk' populations nor should it be

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focused on attaining self-services. Rather, it is about being an active, participating member of

society that is aimed at achieving liberation and personal responsibility (Resiliency Initiatives,

2011

   Leadership staff, families, and various community members are encouraged to engage in

open and honest communication; the agenda within the strengths-based philosophy is outlined in

addition to what the roles and responsibilities of each participating member is. According to

Taylor, LoSciuto, and Porcellini nurturing a cohesive, community-oriented team that is focused

on youth and familial resiliency will aid the overall community in becoming 'more resourceful in

dealing with crises, weathering persistent stresses, and meeting future challenges as opposed to

developing a dependence on the system (as cited in Resiliency Initiatives, 2011, p. 11). The

vision and responsibility to achieving that vision is communally based; therefore, success is

celebrated as a whole (Resiliency Initiatives, 2011).

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Methodology

The research study is focused on identifying school social workers' attitudes towards the strength-based educational philosophy. The study utilized a quantitative, purposive research design. The study attempted to measure school social workers' attitudes toward nine different variables that are presented in a likert scale format that covered different aspects of the strength-based educational model: strength focus, growth opportunities, expanded learning options, relationship centered, and community. The participants were asked to rate the factors based on a five point scale: strongly agree (measurement 1), agree (measurement 2), neither agree or disagree (measurement 3), disagree (measurement 4) and strongly disagree (measurement 5).

Sample

The population for this study was school social workers within the city of Minneapolis, Minnesota. Four participants participated in this sample. The participants selected were assumed to be employed full or part-time (per the school's website listing) through the Minneapolis school district, ranging in Kindergarten through 12th grade levels. All participants were required to be licensed as a Licensed Social Worker (LSW), Licensed Graduate Social Worker (LGSW), a Licensed Independent Social Worker (LISW), or a Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker (LICSW).

Demographics. All social workers who participated in the research study were licensed at the graduate level. Two of the participants were at the LICSW level; one participant was at the LCSW level; and one at the LGSW level of license. Two of the participants had been school social workers for less than two years while the remaining two participants had been school

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social workers for 12 or more years. All participants were employed through the Minneapolis

school district, Kindergarten through 12th grades.

Collection of Data

A purposive sample of school social workers (N = 140) was compiled by finding all

school social workers (ranging from K-12 grades) from the Minneapolis school district website:

http://socialwork.mpls.k12.mn.us/social_workers_2 . All 140 participants were emailed an

informative letter (Appendix A) introducing the researcher's background, purpose, and agenda

through Qualtrics (a research software program). The research questionnaire (Appendix B) was

also included in the e-mail. It stated in this introductory e-mail that sending the survey back to

the researcher was giving the researcher consent to utilize their data in the project.

Within the emailed message, a voluntary survey link from Qualtrics was included.

Clicking this link did not disclose any identifying information; all data collection is anonymous

through Qualtrics and requires the research participant to submit the answers through this same

program. The survey was open for approximately four weeks to ensure adequate time to

complete the survey questions. Potential subjects were invited to fill out the Qualtrics survey on-

line and then to send it back to the researcher.

Protection of Human Subjects

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed the study prior to it being conducted;

gauging a risk-benefit analysis on the research participants. Before survey participation, an

informed consent letter that included participatory risks and benefits, the study's purpose and

method, and the researcher's contact information was enclosed. Further, the participants were

ensured confidentiality and privacy through the Qualtrics software program; all responses remain

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anonymous. Potential participants were informed that by submitting their questionnaires, they

were giving consent to use their information in the research. Upon completion of data analysis

the account was deactivated and rendered electronically terminated.

Measurement

A likert-scale questionnaire was utilized to obtain data from the participants. Themes

from the questions centered on demographics of the participants and attitudes toward strength-

based education principles.

Data Analysis

The data was attained and analyzed through Qualtrics. The analysis focused on attaining

descriptive statistics on what the average, urban public school social worker attitude is towards

strength-based education. Due to the low number of returns it was not possible to statistically

measure the relationships between level of licensure and length of time as a school social worker

with attitudes towards strength-based education.

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Findings

</div>

The survey generated a total of four participants that finished the survey. More

participants began the survey but stopped answering questions that measured the participant's

attitudes towards the strength-based educational philosophy, which was the bulk of data analysis.

This caused those participants to not be included within the data analysis and results.

Table I, below, demonstrates the participants' responses that pertain to the participants

attitudes towards the strength-based educational philosophy. All participants agreed that

developing and individualized and self-determined process for each student was important with

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one participant 'strongly agreeing' and three participants 'agreeing'; (M = 1.75; SD = .50). All participants agreed that involving students within the academic assessment was important with one participant 'strongly agreeing' and three participants 'agreeing'; (M = 1.75; SD = .50). Participants also agreed that it was important to involve students within goal setting with two participants 'strongly agreeing' and two participants 'agreeing'; (M = 1.50; SD = .58). All participants agreed that it was important to cultivate each student's strengths with all participants 'strongly agreeing'; (M = 1.00; SD = 0.00). Additionally, all participants agreed that it was important to base academic curriculum on the advancement of health, well-being, and long-term success with two participants 'strongly agreeing' and two participants 'agreeing'; (M = 1.50; SD = .58). All participants agreed that it was important to offer a learning environment that is conducive to each student's individual learning style with two participants 'strongly agreeing' and two participants 'agreeing'; (M = 1.50; SD = .58). All participants agreed that it was important to create a safe, nurturing collaborative relationship between the student and teacher with all four participants 'strongly agreeing'; (M = 1.00; SD = 0.00). All participants also agreed that it was important to share leadership responsibilities between the student and teacher with two participants 'strongly agreeing' and two participants 'agreeing'; (M = 1.50; SD = .58). All participants agreed that it was important to encourage the use of and engagement within purposeful community resources with two participants 'strongly agreeing' and two participants 'agreeing'; (M = 1.50; SD = .58).

Of the nine questions answered all four participants selected either 'strongly agree' or 'agree', indicating an overall favorability towards strength-based education. "Cultivating strengths" and "creating safe, nurturing, collaborative student/teacher relationship" were rated the highest scores among the variables that measured participants attitudes toward strength based

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education. The two questions that were equally rated as 'strongly agree' among all four

participants were variables four (mean 1.0) and seven (mean 1.0) of question five; demonstrating

the most favorable trend being related to strength naming and student/teacher relationship

development. As Table I suggests the variables "individualized and self-determined process"

and "student involvement within academic assessment" received the lowest mean scores when

measuring attitudes toward strength based education. While it was deemed the lowest score it

should be noted that it was still seen favorably by participants.

Table I. Attitudes towards Strength-Based Educational Factors (N=4)

	Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total Responses	Mean
1	Developing an Individualized and self-determined process for each student	1	3	0	0	0	4	1.75
2	Involving students within academic assessment	1	3	0	0	0	4	1.75
3	Involving students within goal setting	2	2	0	0	0	4	1.5
4	Cultivating each students' strengths	4	0	0	0	0	4	1
5	Basing academic curriculum on the advancement within health, well-being, and long-term success	2	2	0	0	0	4	1.5
6	Offering a learning environment that is conducive to each student's individual learning style	2	2	0	0	0	4	1.5
7	Creating a safe, nurturing collaborative relationship between student and teacher	4	0	0	0	0	4	1
8	Sharing leadership responsibilities between student and teacher	2	2	0	0	0	4	1.5
9	Encouraging the use of and engagement within purposeful community resources	2	2	0	0	0	4	1.5

Table II, below, illustrates how participants' licensure status impacted attitudes on

strength-based education. The participants with an LICSW tended to rate the strength-based

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variables higher overall when compared to the LGSW and LISW participants. Since there were

so few participants statistical significance could not be measured.

Table II. Mean Scores Among Licensure Groups' Attitudes

Among the three licensure groups, the LICSW participants scored lowest among the

overall mean score within all nine variables. The LICSW group had a mean score of 1.3 whereas

the LGSW group had a mean score of 1.6 and the LISW group had a mean score of 1.7. This

suggests a trend among the licensure groups: the LICSW participants favored strength-based

variables more highly than the LGSW and LISW groups. Once again, due to the sample size no

statistical significance could be determined.

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  Table three, below, illustrates how length of employment as a school social worker impacted attitudes toward strength-based education. Among the four participants, those that were employed one to two years demonstrated overall higher favorability within the strength-based educational components when compared to those employed for 12 or more years.

Table III. Mean Score Attitudes Among Employment Groups:

		(1) Strongly Agree	1.5	(2) Agree	2.5	(3) Neither Agree nor Disagree
1	Developing an Individualized and self-determined process for each student		1-2 Years	12+ Years		
2	Involving students within academic assessment		1-2 Years	12+ Years		
3	Involving students within goal setting		1-2 Years / 12+ Years			
4	Cultivating each students' strengths	1-2 Years / 12+ Years				
5	Basing academic curriculum on the advancement within health, well-being, and long-term success		1-2 Years / 12+ Years			
6	Offering a learning environment that is conducive to each student's individual learning style		1-2 Years / 12+ Years			
7	Creating a safe, nurturing collaborative relationship between student and teacher	1-2 Years / 12+ Years				
8	Sharing leadership responsibilities between student and teacher	1-2 Years		12+ Years		
9	Encouraging the use of and engagement within purposeful community resources	1-2 Years		12+ Years		

  Of the two participants that have been employed one to two years, the results show an average mean of 1.3 whereas the participants that have been employed for twelve or more years demonstrated an overall mean of 1.6. These results suggest a trend between the two employment groups: the participants whom have not been employed as long as a school social worker

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demonstrated more favorability within the strength-based educational philosophy than those

participants that worked as a school social worker for 12 or more years.

Discussion

Summary of Findings

The results indicate that the strongest favorability the strength based variables which

received the highest scores were "cultivating strengths" and in "creating safe, nurturing,

collaborative student/teacher relationship". The strength – based variables that developed the

lowest score among participants were "creating individualized and self-determined process" and

"involving student within academic assessment". This suggests less confidence within these

aspects of the strength-based process by participants.

Among the LICSW social workers, highest favorability was shown in the strength –

based variables of "involving student within goal setting", "cultivating strengths", "offering each

student's individual learning style", and "creating safe, nurturing, collaborative teacher/student

relationship". Participants at this licensure level tended to rate all strength-based factors highest

overall compared to the LISW and LGSW participants. The LISW participant highly favored the

strength variables "strength naming", "basing curriculum on health, well-being, long-term

success", and "creating safe, nurturing, collaborative student/teacher relationship". The LGSW

participant largely favored "strength naming", "sharing leadership responsibilities", "creating

safe, nurturing, collaborative teacher/student relationship", and "encouraging community

engagement".

Among the four participants, those that were employed one to two years demonstrated

higher favorability within the strength-based educational components when compared to those

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employed for 12 or more years. The participants employed for one to two years demonstrated

highest favorability within "cultivating strengths", "sharing leadership responsibilities",

"creating safe, nurturing, collaborative teacher/student relationship", and "encouraging

community engagement". The participants employed for 12 years or more demonstrated the

highest favorability in "cultivating strengths" and "creating safe, nurturing, collaborative

student/teacher development".

To date there is not any known additional research measuring any other school

personnel's attitudes towards the strength-based educational model. Therefore, these findings

stand alone and cannot be compared against other relevant studies. Regardless, the overall

findings suggest that the strength-based educational philosophy is positively received among

school social workers. This finding makes sense since in the profession of social work because

"strength –based" theory is widely incorporated (Manthey, Knowles, Asher, & Wahab, 2011).

This aligns with the initial hypothesis in that school social workers would demonstrate

favorability towards the strength-based educational components. The hypothesis also states,

though, that social workers would demonstrate some hesitations as well. The participants either

'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' to the strength-based variables; therefore, making it not possible to

adequately identify areas of strong hesitation. Additionally, the sample size did not allow for

any of these results to be statistically significant.

Regardless, the components that were most frequently rated highest ("cultivating

strengths" and "creating safe, nurturing, collaborative student/teacher relationship") are highly

centralized to the overall strength-based educational philosophy. Although it still remains

common practice for school systems to label children based upon deficiencies (Lauchlan &

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Boyle, 2007), these results suggest sensitivity among the participants towards strength

identification and cultivation. Developing strong relationships among teachers and students has

also shown strong favorability among the participants. Although the traditional model of

schooling tends to foster a teacher-centered approach (Garrett, 2008), these results indicate a

belief in developing a strong student/teacher relationship among the sample of school social

workers within this study.

Limitations

The study has several limitations. The most relevant and obvious limitation to the study

is related to the sample size. Due to only four participants completing the survey, the results

were statistically insignificant; resulting in the findings to be far less generalizable to the urban

school social worker population. Additionally, no social workers that were employed over two

years and less than 12 years were surveyed; leaving a large gap between the employment groups.

All graduate level licensure groups were surveyed; however, the LGSW and LISW only

represented one participant while the LICSW group represented two participants. The

undergraduate licensure group, LSW, was not represented.

Furthermore, the survey questions may have been interpreted differently among the

participants. Question five, 'how important are the following to a typical student's mainstream

educational development and success', may have generated different ideas. For instance, the

definition of educational development and success can vary greatly between people.

Additionally, the nine variables listed within question five were presented in a more layered,

complex fashion rather than through a simplified statement; further increasing the likelihood of

mixed perceptions being involved within the outcomes of the study.

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Future research could identify if these opinions expressed by these participants were reflective of today's current methods and/or if the participants felt these strength-based factors were realistic to incorporating within the school system.

Social Work Implications

Despite these limitations, the study does contribute to the overall field of social work by providing additional insight into the relatively new strength-based educational concept. The results provided a brief assessment of beliefs towards this philosophy among licensed social workers within the school setting. Although not generalizable, this study does indicate that school social workers, a small professional population within the school system, are optimistic towards strength-based objectives overall.

Recognizing which professionals are more likely to adopt a new approach is a necessary requirement within any major structural reform. The strength-based model cannot transcend long-standing values and beliefs without support from school professionals. School social workers, as these results suggest, may be the leading professional group that aligns with and advocates for this movement. These findings may encourage collaboration among school social workers and the strength-based movement to begin; allowing for strength-based educational reform to continue and progress.

Further, these results help assess for which objectives within the strength-based educational philosophy are more favorable than others. Identifying areas within the model that highlight more resistance allows the movement to be more attune to general concerns. Before any major reform can occur, specific, organized educational materials and plans must be developed and readily available to those being marketed to. The findings within this study, again

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not statistically significant, have begun the process of uncovering which areas within the model are celebrated, which areas are challenged, and which areas fall in between the two. Refining, developing, and implementing the strength-based educational model requires the movement to be abreast of the overall professional attitudes and opinions of all variables involved.

Implementation of this model would be beneficial to social workers as it strongly correlates with the fundamental principles and research-based practices that drive the profession. Working within a school system that adopts a similar social work value system allows for a high collaborative approach of blending processes, objectives, and goals among all school personnel to occur. Additionally, the school system can lay a strong foundation that is founded upon growth, perseverance, and empowerment among all students. This ultimately cuts to the core of academic success, further propelling students towards higher aspirations and long-term goals. Nurturing this type of student not only benefits individuals but the society at large, including the social work profession.

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Appendix A
INFORMED CONSENT

Katie Eaves
Strength Based Education
Letter of introduction

I am conducting a study about Strength Based Education and I invite you to participate in this research. You were selected as a possible participant because you are listed online as a School Social Worker within the Minneapolis school district. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Katie Eaves and Colin Hollidge within the Department of Social Work at the University of St. Thomas. The purpose of this study is to assess School Social Workers' attitudes within the Minneapolis School District towards Strength Based Education.

The survey is expected to take five minutes or less. I will ask you to do the following things: first, before beginning the survey, I will ask you 2 questions that verify your eligibility to participate within this study. If you meet those requirements, you will then begin the survey; consisting of 2 multiple choice demographic questions and 9 Likert Scale questions that relate to Strength Based Education.

The study has risks. First, the researcher attained the participant's contact information through a public website which may cause discomfort and anxiety. Second, the survey does require loss of time on the participant's part to complete and submit the survey. Thirdly, the anonymously submitted data will be stored in a password protected hard-drive, however, the data could be subjected to tampering from outside sources. Although all risks are possible, the expected likelihood of these risks is considered minimal.

The records of this study will be kept confidential. In any sort of report I publish, I will not include information that will make it possible to identify you in any way. The types of records I will create include the survey responses you submit through Qualtrics. This data will be anonymous and will not be identifiable to the researcher or Advisor upon submission. Analysis of the data, by myself and Colin Hollidge (Academic Professor) will end prior to May, 31, 2014 in which all data will be permanently destroyed.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of St. Thomas. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time up to and until April 1, 2014. After the first two questions, you are free to skip any questions, however, this may disqualify your surveyed response from being used within this research study due to potentially missing information that is necessary for research analysis.

Strength – Based Education

My name is Kathleen Eaves. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at 612-986-9304 along with my Advisor, Colin Hollidge, at 651-962-5818. You may also contact the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board at 651-962-5341 with any questions or concerns.

By continuing forward with this survey you are consenting to participation within this research study.

Follow this link to the Survey:
Take the Survey

Or copy and paste the URL below into your internet browser:
http://stthomasbusiness.az1.qualtrics.com/WRQualtricsSurveyEngine/?SID=SV_6As2vqqbvJ5Ez89&Preview=Survey&_=1

Follow the link to opt out of future emails:
Click here to unsubscribe

Strength – Based Education

Appendix B
SURVEY QUETSIONS

Strength Based Education

Q9 Inclusion Criteria Questions

Q6 Are you currently licensed as a Social Worker within the state of Minnesota?

◯ Yes
◯ No

Q7 Are you currently employed by the Minneapolis School District?

◯ Yes
◯ No

Q10 Demographic Questions

Q2 What is your current level of social work licensure?

◯ LSW
◯ LGSW
◯ LISW
◯ LICSW

Q3 How many years have you worked as a School Social Worker?

◯ 1-2 years
◯ 3-5 years
◯ 6-8 years
◯ 9-12 years
◯ More than 12 years

Q11 Likert Scale Questions

Q4 How important are the following to a typical student's mainstream educational development and success?

Strength – Based Education

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Developing an Individualized and self-determined process for each student	○	○	○	○	○
Involving students within academic assessment	○	○	○	○	○
Involving students within goal setting	○	○	○	○	○
Cultivating each students' strengths	○	○	○	○	○
Basing academic curriculum on the advancement within health, well-being, and long-term success	○	○	○	○	○
Offering a learning environment that is conducive to each student's individual learning style	○	○	○	○	○

Strength – Based Education

Creating a safe, nurturing collaborative relationship between student and teacher	○	○	○	○	○
Sharing leadership responsibilities between student and teacher	○	○	○	○	○
Encouraging the use of and engagement within purposeful community resources	○	○	○	○	○