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THE EFFECTS OF A STRENGTHS BASED FACULTY COACHING INTERVENTION ON FIRST-YEAR UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT ACADEMIC CONFIDENCE: A MIXED METHODS ACTION RESEARCH STUDY

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THE EFFECTS OF A STRENGTHS BASED FACULTY COACHING INTERVENTION
ON FIRST-YEAR UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT ACADEMIC CONFIDENCE: A
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DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Education in the College of Education at the University of Kentucky

By
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2021

ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

THE EFFECTS OF A STRENGTHS BASED FACULTY COACHING INTERVENTION
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Deficiency remediation models of education imply that students may enter the university with deficiencies, problems, or needs that imply the student needs to be "fixed" before they can proceed in their academic studies. In contrast, strengths-based education models infer that students come to the university with inherent talents, natural propensities, and behaviors that can be leveraged to overcome their challenges. These differing perspectives can influence the effectiveness of university policies designed to improve student retention. This mixed methods action research study, undergirded by student development theories, examined the effects of a strengths-based, faculty-led coaching intervention on first-year undergraduate students' academic confidence. The results of the intervention showed an increase in first-year student strengths awareness and understanding, along with increased confidence in applying and building their personal strengths. The participants all agreed that the different elements of the workshop (e.g., the facilitator, their peers, the workshop activities) increased their academic confidence. Implications of the study are that students desire small group interactive workshops that encourage them to learn of themselves by developing strategies to become aware, understand, build, and apply their strengths towards academic gains.

KEYWORDS: Academic Self Efficacy, Academic Confidence, Remediation, Coaching, Strengths Based Education

Conrad A. Davies, Sr.

(Name of Student)

April 30, 2021

Date

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MIXED METHODS ACTION RESEARCH STUDY

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Conrad A. Davies, Sr.

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May 6, 2021

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Date

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to all of those who seek to find their full potential in life.
We are on the same team and I am cheering you on!!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As I finalize this dissertation, my children are ten, eight, six years old, and my wife and I have been married for more than 13 years. *Davies Family*, you are the greatest gift to me, and I hope that my mental and physical absence has not created any "sore spots" in our relationships. I apologize for lost quality time and the emotional absence. *Please forgive me for hurting you in any way or causing any emotional wounds*. I give you what I have now and what I will have in the future. I love each of you uniquely and I desire the best for each of you. Thank you for being gracious with me as I "pulled" out what was inside of me for many years now and finally placed it on paper. I trust that the fruit of this work will bless you as well. I love each of you so much!!

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

Chapter 1: Study Context, Overall Study Design, & Diagnostic Phase

Introduction

Retention is one of the most complex topics researched in higher education today (Tinto, 2006). The complexity of retention relates to the student population's diversity and the diversity of their institutions. For instance, in 2015, over 20 million non-traditional and traditional-age students, underrepresented ethnic groups, first-generation students, males, females, and those from different socioeconomic statuses attended universities and colleges in the United States (Institute for Educational Sciences, 2016). Retention strategies for each demographic of students tend to be different. Because student demographics are complex and there are many differences in institutions, a universal student retention strategy is challenging to create, but there are some common themes each institution can implement.

Among effective retention programs, four foundational principles tend to positively impact retention and attrition (Tinto, 1987). First, institutions must know they are integrating students into a social and intellectual community, emphasizing the "communal nature of institutional life" (Tinto, 1987, p. 9). Second, institutions must make commitments to their students by ensuring all community members invoke a caring institutional tone. Third, members of the institution must understand that admitting and retaining students is not about retention itself but about educating students through their social, personal, and intellectual development. The last principle of effective retention involves the institution taking responsibility for welcoming students into a community, providing them an education, and being committed to their success (and students knowing the institution takes that responsibility seriously). These four foundational principles above invoke a response that

requires university administrators to manage students' diversity that enters the university, thus not creating one-size-fits-all programs.

Since each institution must develop multifaceted strategies to address the complexity of retaining their students, research studies and various interventions must focus on specific areas. For instance, Tinto's (1987) third principle of addressing students' social, personal, and intellectual development becomes important because developing resiliency towards degree completion in students requires the constant building of academic self-efficacy and academic confidence, realistic appraisal of one's weaknesses and strengths, encouragement of habits to seek help, and connecting their academic success with any future career and economic security goals is valuable (Morales, 2014). Many members of the university community can help in this process. Yet, faculty can and should assist in this process since faculty are catalysts who can inspire learning, become mentors to students, and personally show their students support and care (Crabtree, 2019). Thus, a faculty-inspired intervention could be appropriate to help students develop. As a faculty member and a certified talent and strengths development coach, I want to understand better the impact of a strengths-focused faculty coaching intervention on first-year undergraduate student academic confidence.

This study examines the role of a strengths-focused faculty-coaching intervention on first-year undergraduate student academic confidence with an eye to improve student retention. The rest of this chapter will outline the journey of how this focus was developed, placing the study in the context of my practitioner-researcher role at the University of Kentucky. I outline the problem of practice and identify supporting literature.

Study Context

This study took place at the University of Kentucky (UK), a land-grant institution located in Lexington, KY, with 19 different colleges. Participants for this study were recruited from a healthcare living-learning community (LLC) housed under the College of Health and Human Sciences; their Director, Dr. Brenden O'Farrell, leads the community. The LLC serves hundreds of students, offering connected courses with other colleges (e.g., Composition and Communication or Academic Orientation) to their first-year students, of which I recruited a few participants for this study.

Researcher's Role

I am a faculty lecturer with a two-year renewable contract with the University of Kentucky who regularly teaches four sections of a Composition and Communication course. My faculty role primarily includes classroom instruction and evaluating student assessments to further their writing and public speaking needs. The course curriculum highlights college-level writing skills, communication skills, public speaking, rhetoric, and group dynamics. According to my Distribution of Effort (DOE), I teach 100% of the time with no other university responsibilities. Since the fall of 2016, I have taught one additional class above my contract: The Interprofessional Healthcare Residential College (IHRC) UK 101: Academic Orientation course.

Additionally, I am a Gallup-certified strengths coach and an entrepreneur with a registered limited liability corporation (LLC). As a coach, I have personally worked with hundreds of students to develop their strengths. I have also conducted several strengths-related workshops and have integrated the strengths-philosophy into my classroom instruction strategies. As an entrepreneur, I started a limited liability corporation (LLC)

called Davies & Associates, LLC, and we focus on coaching, consulting, and communication services. Our vision is to A.ctivate, C.ultivate, and E.mpower people to reach their full potential, for we want everyone to become an A.C.E. My coaching certification, classroom experience, and entrepreneurial endeavors contribute to the development of this mixed methods action research study.

Statements on my Teaching Philosophy

To provide transparency in my research and understand some of my positionality, I have provided some brief statements on parts of my teaching philosophy. I have embraced this philosophy since fall 2013 and have partially modified it over the years.

As of this writing, I am in my 16th year of teaching at the university level. I recognize that I am a teacher-coach who tends to challenge, inspire, mentor, and emotionally care for my students' overall well-being. I often do not instruct my students practically, for I often remain abstract, philosophical, and ethereal. I believe in the value of helping people change their thinking; thus, I call myself a "thought-leader." I acknowledge that many of my students do not learn well from my style, so I regularly develop strategies that balance integrating both the practical and philosophical together.

As a teacher-coach, I understand how my natural talents and propensities affect the academic and relational environment I create in the classroom. My mind naturally craves information that I store in specific groupings, allowing quick retrieval when asked and needed. This natural talent makes me a resource collector of many things. My students tend to recognize that, especially when many come to me after class, email me, or text me with scores of pertinent and seemingly random questions. In addition, I tend to be quite accepting

of people and desire for them to remain "close" to me, for I perceive my students will learn more from me the more relatable I become to them.

Furthermore, my mind naturally takes acquired data and regularly reconfigures and processes different perspectives on the information, providing insight to my students as I operate as a co-learner alongside them. I don't claim to know it all, nor do I expect anyone else to know it all. Last, I believe that my students understand that I desire to know them, learn of them, believe in them, and want the best for them; I take their lives seriously.

Shifts in the Curriculum and Informal Research

In 2013, I began integrating the CliftonStrengths for Students (formerly known as StrengthsFinder) philosophy into my lectures, practical classroom activities, student reflections, student meetings, and student assignments. Undergirded in a positive psychology paradigm, the strengths philosophy focuses on human flourishing and potential.

> The goal of positive psychology is to enable a greater percentage of the world's population to flourish. Flourishing people have high levels of emotional, psychological, and social well-being; they are productively engaged with other people…the goal of flourishing exists within a broader theory of well-being that is useful in understanding how positive psychology can best influence the work of college faculty, staff, and administrators…there are five elements of well-being that enable humans to flourish: positive emotion, engagement, meaning, accomplishment, and positive relationship. (Schreiner, 2015, p. 4).

My choice to integrate this philosophy changed my teaching style, and I anecdotally noticed it empowered my students to flourish and increased their engagement in the classroom.

To verify my anecdotal intuition, I informally analyzed a few randomly selected assignments from the spring 2016 semester using an open coding approach. I took one assignment set, which asked students to write a reflection on their CliftonStrengths for Student assessment report, engage a conversation with a trusted family member or friend about the results, and connect the results to future aspirations and goals. The reflections suggested that the assessment's use enhanced their self-awareness, increased diverse types of self-efficacy, and conceptualized their natural talents; it helped them apply their skills to their careers, major/minor, relationships, and daily lives. I did a similar analysis of a video reflection assignment in which several students identified that the CliftonStrengths for Students integration was the most impactful part of the course. Based on that analysis, I perceived that integrating this strength's philosophy into the course curriculum impacted my students. These analyses inspired my desire to learn more about how a faculty member (me) as a coach increases first-year undergraduate students' academic confidence using this strengths-focused philosophy, again, this study's aim.

The Ed.D. Program as a Motivation

When I entered the Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) in Educational Leadership Studies (EDL) program, I chose the transformative leader track of the four available leadership curriculum tracks. The program taught me about different leadership frames, politics in education, various research methods, organizational change, etc. Thus, my perspective began changing regarding how I framed my assignments, how the research process functions, and which courses are best for transformative leadership. The Ed.D. program and the action-research focus led me to a more focused approach to my classroom activities, my allowed

curriculum changed, and how I pursued certain professional development activities (e.g., selecting specific Gallup strengths-coaching courses).

The Importance of Strengths-Coaching as a Focus of the Study

A strengths-focused approach undergirded by positive psychology focuses on coaching people to seek development in their natural talents and strengths instead of focusing on remediating one's weaknesses. Convinced by this philosophy, I utilized my annual faculty development funds to purchase one of Gallup's strengths coaching kits during the fall of 2013. I integrated what I learned into my course curriculum and began refining using the assessment to help students. Now, after many years of use, I have personally conducted several strengths-focused coaching sessions, conducted several strengths-focused workshops, taken several of Gallup's strengths courses, and officially earned a strengths-coaching certification in January 2018. I am persuaded that people are encouraged towards success when they learn about, conceptualize, and apply their natural talents towards productive gains.

I value strengths-focused coaching conversations inside and outside of the classroom because it provides an opportunity to understand my undergraduate students as people and help them identify their innate strengths. I believe that each of my students has natural talents that frame how they see life, though they may or may not be aware of them. Chamorro-Premuzic (2016) states that "people are generally unaware of their abilities and incapable of evaluating their own performance" (p. 3). Thus, I intentionally help my students gain awareness of their uniqueness and practically apply themselves to functional gains. After students take the CliftonStrengths for Students assessment and I become aware of their results, I can uniquely craft coaching conversations within moments to help them, for

instance, learn strategies for effective writing and public speaking. The coaching is specific.

It speaks the language of their natural talents. It gives the student and me a shared bridge of

connection that lets them feel known, perpetuating their success. These are perceived

components of academic confidence and academic success. As an educator, I value guiding

students inside the classroom towards specific curriculum objectives. Yet, I also appreciate

my additional mentor, advisor, counselor, and coach roles both inside and outside the

classroom.

Summary of Study Context

My role as both a faculty member and a certified strengths coach influences why I

selected a strengths-focused faculty-coaching intervention for this study. I want to learn of

the impact of this strengths-focused faculty coaching intervention on first-year undergraduate

student academic confidence using student development theory to frame the study (discussed

later); it focuses on developing the whole student (Abes, 2016). This section identified the

context of the research and its rationale. The next portion will focus on the overall study

design and then the problem of leadership practice and why a shift in perspective is needed.

<div align="center">

Overall Study Design: Mixed Methods Action Research

</div>

I am implementing a mixed-method action research design to help me, a practitioner-

researcher, learn about a practical problem or issue (Ivankova, 2015). The six phases of the

approach begin with diagnosing a problem (i.e., diagnosing phase), gathering facts about the

problem (i.e., reconnaissance phase), planning an action to address the problem (i.e.,

planning phase), implementing the intervention (i.e., acting phase), evaluating the

intervention (i.e., evaluation phase), and then considering revisions of the intervention (i.e.,

monitoring phase). This document is outlined according to this mixed-method action research

<div align="center">8</div>

model, and each of the subsequent sections will be titled according to these phases. Figure

1.1 below gives a graphical representation of the action-research cycle's six phases.

Figure 1.1

The Mixed Methods Action-Research

DIAGNOSING PHASE
Identify a Problem

RECONNAISSANCE PHASE
Data collection, analysis, and interpretations of the Problem

MONITORING PHASE
Use inferences to test, revise, and/or modify the intervention

EVALUATION PHASE
Data collection, analysis, and interpretations of the intervention

PLANNING PHASE
Use information from reconnaissance phase to development action plan

ACTING PHASE
Implement the intervention plan

Diagnostic Phase: The Problem of Practice

There is a prevailing perspective in higher education that focuses on a student's entry into the university and how they must reach or obtain a certain academic standard. Thus, if the student does not meet a certain threshold, they are identified as deficient or under-prepared for university studies. Deficiency approaches are "dedicated to 'fixing' the student by first diagnosing the students' needs, problems, ignorance, concerns, defects, and deficits" (Anderson 2005, p. 181), implying there is something wrong with the student rather than something wrong with the institution's perspective or its strategies. It is counterintuitive to try to empower students by consistently analyzing what is wrong with them in hopes that they change. As a result, this deficiency-inspired perspective has led many to use deficiency-remediation approaches to address retention rather than strengths-focused methods.

The concept of deficiency-remediation refers to using "standardized or faculty-developed assessment instruments as the basis for placing students with those advised to enter developmental courses defined as underprepared" (Richardson, 1990, p. 3). The effects of deficiency-remediation approaches are inconclusive, meaning that it is not clear that deficiency-remediation practices work consistently across multiple contexts (Jamelske, 2009). In other words, the results of one deficiency-remediation approach may not be generalizable to another context because of the diversity of students, the application of different programs, and the various academic environments of each university. Thus, there is room for more complex research strategies other than deficiency-remediation strategies to be implemented.

The deficiency-remediation perspective has influenced university administrators, faculty, staff, and even students to believe that certain people are not "college material" or

"college-ready," which perpetuates a "broken" student mindset. Instead, it is more important to focus on how students can thrive by implementing strengths-focused development interventions (e.g., a strengths-focused faculty coaching intervention) that empower students in what they do well and leverages their strengths to overcome areas of improvement. If they realize that the university is not an environment to help them reach their potential, then so be it. Yet, to be connotatively identified as one with problems, needs, deficiencies, and the like, is unfair when only one entity (e.g., a schooling system) is making that judgment.

More about deficiency-remediation and strengths-focused methods will be discussed in the literature review. Yet, before that, a bit more needs to be addressed regarding why deficiency remediation is the problem of practice. More of the problem will be seen through the brief history of positive psychology as a discipline created in response to mainstream psychological thought. The mainstream psychological postulations have influenced many aspects of society, especially education. The rationale for why it's essential to focus on strengths-focused education rather than deficiency remediation models will become more evident.

The Problem of Practice: Brief History of Positive Psychology

As noted briefly in the study context section, the positive psychology paradigm focuses on human flourishing and potential, yet the general history of psychology leans towards pathology or psychopathology (Macaskill & Denovan, 2013). In other words, the history of psychology has identified what is wrong with humanity (e.g., ill-being) and how to create interventions to fix humanity. This philosophy has produced scores of perspectives and interventions that have indeed helped "fix" humanity's problems. Interestingly before World War II, the American lens of psychology had three aims: 1) addressing mental illness,

2) helping advance humanity's productivity and fulfillment, and 3) nurturing and identifying high talent. However, after the war, the focus became on mental illness and the pathological (i.e., disease) models because money was available through federal grants and the private market for both areas (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The world war was a catalysis for the psychology profession to change fundamentally.

Martin Seligman conceptualized positive psychology with his colleagues right around his American Psychological Association presidency in 1996. Seligman's mentor asked him if he would be a transactional president or a transformative president; Seligman chose to be a transformational president (Seligman, 2019). Thus, Seligman (2019) reasoned that his development of positive psychology was about opposing the concerns of clinical psychology by focusing on well-being instead of ill-being (i.e., What does it mean to be healthy and sane?). He and his colleagues, especially Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, knew that the audience had to be newer, not yet tenured researchers who had the skills to lead the positive psychology profession for years to come. Also, Seligman knew that funding would not come from federal tax dollars because of American politics and national ideologies focused on disease and deficiency; they would have to pursue resources other than federal grants to catalyst this endeavor. The new discipline was born, and its core tenets included well-being, contentment, hope, optimism, flow, happiness, positive individual traits, interpersonal skill, and many other subjective value-driven experiences (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Seligman was subsequently named the "Father of Positive Psychology."

The Problem of Practice: Why?

Because an action research dissertation is a part of the requirements for completing the Executive Doctor of Education program in Educational Leadership Studies at the

University of Kentucky, I immediately knew I had to address something strengths-related because of my strengths-focused teaching experiences. In other words, I want to know my students personally (e.g., learning their names, building rapport, creating opportunities for out-of-class communication) so that I can personalize and maximize my influence as a faculty member on their lives. Thus, when I upgraded to a strengths-focused philosophy, I pondered what type of formal action research study I could do to fulfill the requirements for my doctoral program. I went on a journey of having conversations with colleagues, conducted informal research on my students' responses to their assignments, and read more about action research.

As a result, the nature of action research and the strengths-focused philosophical thought stimulated my final decisions as to why I chose to address the problem of practice that focused on deficiency-remediation models versus strengths-focused educational models. Ivankova (2015) stated that the purpose of action research is

> To produce practical knowledge that will contribute to the increased economic, political, psychological, health, and spiritual well-being of persons and communities, and will help promote a more equitable and a more sustainable relationship with the wider ecologic context of the society. (p. 65).

My individual experiences with the strengths-focused models of education, the frustrations of viewing students as problems, and the desire to empower students for the future, inspired this direction. I recognized that a deficiency-remediation perspective simply does not encourage students to move forward; it may remove barriers for the student. The model itself is not inherently empowering but inherently critical. A change needed to occur. In simple, one of Professor Edward "Chip" Anderson's (2005) confessions became my confession "the deficit-

based remediation programming I had used actually prevented students from becoming top

achievers…" (p.183).

Graphical Representation of the Comparison Between the Problem of Practice and

a Solution to the Problem of Practice

Figure 1.2 below is a graphical representation of the models, mindsets, motivations,

and movement of retention in higher education. It is a visual representation of how the

different perspectives view the student, have their assumptions, and have a different focus of

how the student will progress. More details to come in the supporting literature section, yet

the diagram is incorporated here to help visualize the problem(s).

Figure 1.2

A Graphical Representation of the Comparison between the Problem of Practice:

Deficiency-Remediation Models and the Solution: Strengths-Based Educational Models.
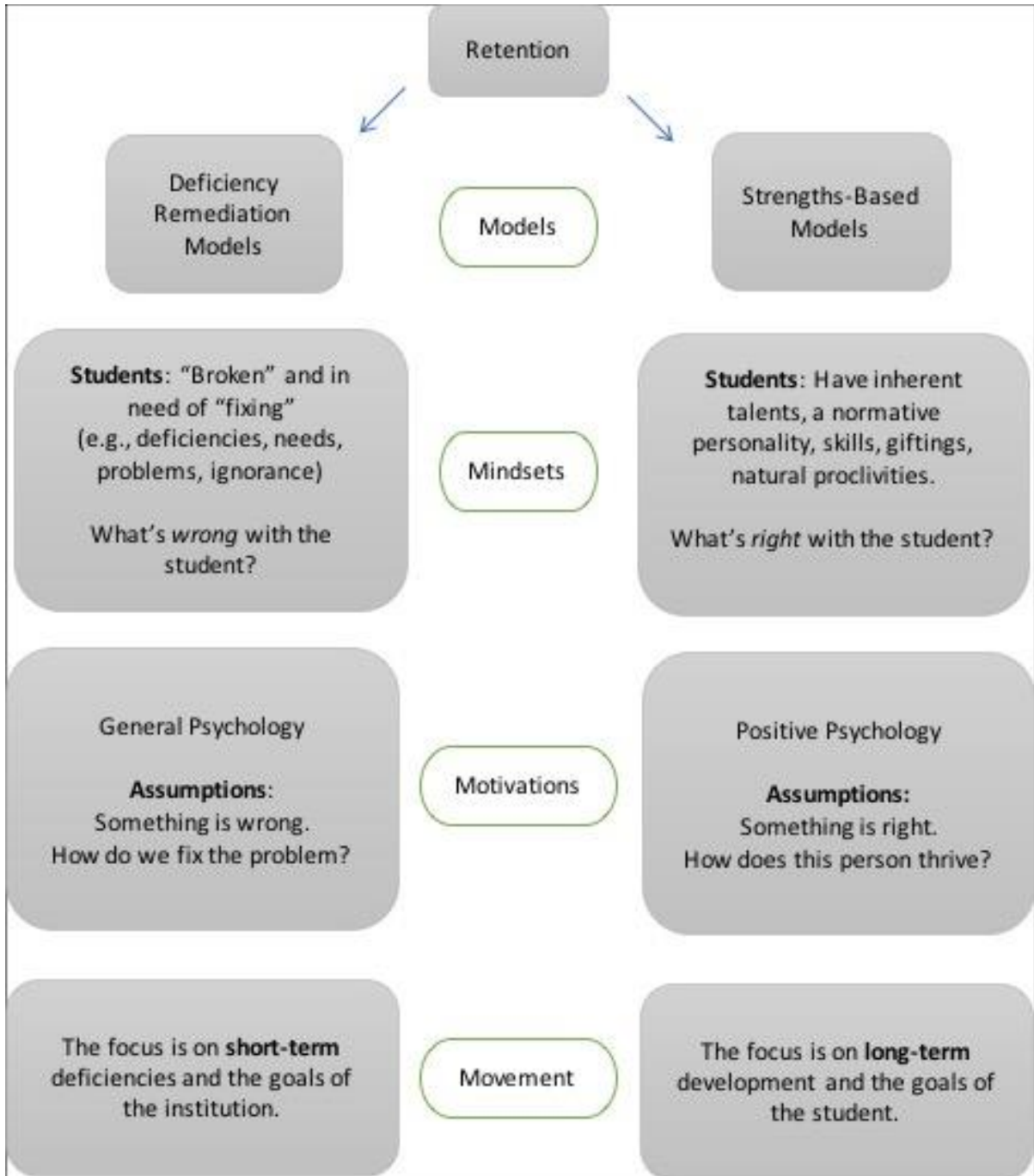
Conversations with Stakeholders

Over the years, I have had several conversations with faculty colleagues, student affairs staff, and students about the option of integrating the CliftonStrengths for Students tool into the classroom curriculum. The tool uncovers and labels an individual's natural talent themes and could develop these talents into strengths through the appropriate application and use. The implication is that if individuals become aware of their natural skills, they can leverage those specific talents towards success in all areas of life. Moreover, since retention strategies are not applicable in all contexts and are context-specific (Tinto, 2006), the tool could more universally assist leaders in understanding themselves and their students better. After most of these conversations with my colleagues and many students, they regularly agreed with the idea, especially when I gave them examples of how empowering the tool has been in my personal and professional experiences, along with anecdotes of various students and professionals I have coached.

I found that several entities at the University of Kentucky are using the CliftonStrengths for Students assessment as a standard practice: individual departments (e.g., units in the College of Business), living-learning communities (e.g., Interprofessional Healthcare Residential College), whole faculty of specific academic disciplines (e.g., College of Pharmacy), and specific individual faculty who have integrated the tool into their course curriculum. However, only within the last few years has the university invested in a few individuals on campus who have obtained a strengths-coaching certification and utilize them for mass training. For instance, the Assistant Director of Leadership Education at UK is a Gallup-certified strengths coach and participates in training the university community (e.g., faculty, students, and administration) almost daily by conducting workshops on strengths

development, yet her role is rare. While other UK community members may utilize the CliftonStrengths for Students tool (e.g., heard, read about, or taken the assessment), applying a regular coaching strategy or regular training tends not to be present for all.

More Conversations…

I have had additional conversations with student affairs professionals (e.g., Residence Life, former Office of First-Generation Initiatives, Student and Academic Support, and the Stuckert Career Center) who wanted faculty integrated into their retention efforts. My colleagues all desire to see students succeed, and they acknowledge that the faculty member is a critical component to student success. "In fact, along with student peers, faculty members are regarded as the primary agents of socialization in college" (Fuentes, Alvarado, Berdan, & DeAngelo, 2014, p.288). These conversations further perpetuated my desire to learn of what effect I was having on my students as a faculty coach. In the next section, I discuss some intentional changes I made to my course curriculum using the CliftonStrengths assessment to enhance my students' experience.

I provide some introductory comments on strengths-focused interventions, academic confidence and academic self-efficacy, coaching, and faculty-student communication in the following sections. The literature review will have more details on each subject.

Brief Rationale for Strengths-focused Interventions

Strengths-focused methods assess students individually to learn of their natural strengths and talents (compared to assessments for remediation purposes). Two notions undergird strengths-focused education: that individual students already have personal resources which, when leveraged, promote success, and educators who use these frameworks believe students can attain excellence in their lives (Soria & Taylor, 2016). Lopez and Louis

17

(2009) created an outline for successful strengths-focused education, which has become the standard for educators and administrators who use the strengths approach. Their five tenets of strengths-focused education will be explained in more detail later.

Brief Commentary on Academic Confidence and Academic Self-Efficacy

I will use academic confidence and academic self-efficacy interchangeably throughout the rest of this discourse. The common adjective "academic" will refer to regular activities of the students to participate in within the educational space. The concept of confidence is "a feeling or consciousness of one's powers or of reliance on one's circumstances" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Self-efficacy is one's perception of their perceived capabilities of a specific construct (Bandura, 1990). Academic self-efficacy is the perceived confidence a student has in accomplishing academic tasks (e.g., study, complete homework, write exams). It "is well documented in scholarly research as positively associated with students' academic performance in college and persistence" (Soria & Stubblefield, 2014, p. 73). Although I use academic confidence and academic self-efficacy interchangeably, self-efficacy is a theory, and confidence is a colloquial term (Bandura, 1997). Both concepts are used throughout the research and impact student academic success with effects on student retention.

Brief Commentary on Coaching

One method in building student confidence is to expose them to coaching. Coaching is an approach that can create a safe environment for students to learn and grow, whether the coaching comes from members of the institution or outside entities. For instance, InsideTrack is a student success coaching service that partners with several universities and colleges to provide coaching for prospective students, first-year undergraduate students, transitions,

18

careers, and other services. To confirm InsideTrack's influence, they work with thousands of educational programs across the United States alone (InsideTrack, 2019). On the other hand, university administrators have created student support services for academic coaching intended to encourage and empower students towards academic success. The University of Kentucky, for instance, has its educational coaching program under a student support unit called Transformative Learning. The program utilizes graduate students who follow an International Coaches Federation's (ICF) Core Competencies and Ethical Guidelines in their practice (University of Kentucky, 2019). Thus, the question arises: Where is the influence of the faculty member in building student confidence?

Brief Commentary on Faculty-Student Communication

Faculty contact with students plays a vital role in student retention (Kim & Sax, 2009; Tinto, 1975). However, faculty now spend less time counseling, advising, and having outside of class communication with students (O'Meara & Braskamp, 2005). In the early 2000s, Jaasma (2001) identified that of "the few studies that have been conducted on student-faculty outside of class communication (OCC) …student-faculty contact outside of the classroom is fairly infrequent and superficial" (p. 2). Thus, if faculty are not participating in the social integration process with students, some students may not connect to the university culture. This non-participatory faculty process was once likened to suicide for the students (Durkheim, 1961), emphasizing its need in the university social integration process. Therefore, it is crucial to create an environment that invokes faculty-student communication, especially outside of the classroom, and provide opportunities for interventions that include faculty (e.g., a faculty-student coaching intervention).

The following section identifies the supporting literature that begins with how university administrators may view interventions to help with retention, then the discussion transitions to approaches to retention through means of deficiency-remediation compared to strengths-focused approaches to education. Next, the discussion shifts its focus on the role of academic confidence on retention, how coaching is a method that could help in confidence-building and explore the nature of the faculty-student relationships in the retention process.

Supporting Literature for the Problem of Practice

Universities intend to help students through induction efforts to quickly and effectively connect them to the university community. These efforts fall under two general themes: social integration and academic integration. The interventions usually take many forms, including, but not limited to, living-learning communities (Jamelske, 2009), tutoring services (Brooman & Darwent, 2014), remedial courses, and faculty and student mentorship programs (IES, 2015; Nadelson et al., 2013). Universities also hold administrative workshops and closely monitor student performance (O'Shea, 2015; Penn-Edwards & Donnison, 2011; Trautwein & Bosse, 2017). Therefore, most administrators create programs for first-year university students to experience social integration environments, develop academic self-efficacy, and understand college life, which potentially allows them to undergo transformative learning. Yet too many students still decide to leave school before finishing because of fear, feelings of self-doubt, low academic self-efficacy, or apprehensions about their experience living away from home for the first time (Tinto, 2006).

Approaches to Retention

Retention tends to be a constant focus, and each university chooses how it will address the needs of its first-year undergraduate students. Some universities may use a

deficiency-remediation approach (identify what's wrong with students and fix them) or a strengths-focused approach (identify student propensities, habits, and patterns that produce success and then maximum those behaviors), or a combination of the two. The following sections present research on the most common strategies used in deficit-remediation approaches (DR) and then strengths-focused education (SBE) approaches. The following sections are outlined by addressing deficiency-remediation first since it is most common, and then, strengths-focused approaches.

   Deficit-Remediation Approach. The chosen process of admitting students to higher education institutions influences student diversity. Most institutions have one of two general admission approaches: 1) an open enrollment process or 2) a more discriminate admissions process (Marshak, 1980). Open enrollment institutions admit students with diverse developmental levels, some of whom are not academically ready for higher education. Davis and Palmer's (2010) outline of the history of remediation includes an example of one of Harvard University's former presidents who stated that whatever primary school education did not provide, the universities should give to the student. Yale University, Harvard's counterpart, did not agree to admit underprepared students (Davis & Palmer, 2010). Harvard's perspective influenced some of the remediation frameworks. Yet, over many years, both institutions now have a more discriminate admissions process and minimal, if any, remedial education.

   Still, there is debate regarding the effectiveness of remediation programs in higher education. Some institutions continue to provide opportunities for students to experience remedial education. Harvard University was the first to create a composition course that attended to the academic deficiencies of new students, attempting to align students to the

university's academic expectations. Likewise, some land-grant institutions have developed academic units for students with deficits in math, writing, and reading (Davis & Palmer, 2010). The inclusivity of those institutions opened an opportunity for those students who needed help, and it created a more significant focus on retention, graduation rates, and career outcomes.

However, these early interventions led to a gap-closing, deficiency remediation model of education (Schwitzer, 2016). The fundamental indicators of student success emphasized achieving only specific institutional outcomes. Yet, before this time, higher education's focus was on student character development and becoming an influential member of society (Davis & Palmer, 2010). There is a tendency for higher education cultures to implement programs with goals that simply remediate short-term deficiencies, which are only pertinent for the institution (Schwitzer, 2016). Deficiency remediation has some immediate benefits and has been helpful in short-term outcomes (Faulkner, 2013). Yet, considering the effect, short-term remediation may not genuinely benefit students in becoming influential members of society.

Research on Deficiency Remediation. The debate over how best to implement remediation efforts in higher education is not without controversy, and several scholars have questioned the need, cost, and effectiveness of any remediation attempt. Research in this debate includes the work of Martorell and McFarlin (2011), who looked at a Texas dataset of all students in higher education and analyzed the effects of remediation on college graduation, transfer students, and highest grade completed. They concluded that the effectiveness of remediation is small and statistically insignificant for a wide range of academic outcomes. In related research, Shapiro (2011) conducted a five-year case study of one university's remedial ESL writing program to determine its effectiveness. Shapiro

concluded that students were not benefitting from the program through their needs analysis and that even the institutional identity resisted a program reform. Furthermore, in a study of the Florida community college system, Calcagno and Long (2009) found that remediation had short-term effects by increasing the likelihood of persistence. Yet, regarding degree attainment, remediation did not have long-term results.

Other research has pointed out the ineffectiveness of implementing remediation efforts based on the context. Callahan and Chumney (2009), for instance, compared remedial writing courses at two institutions and concluded that the core matter is about the resources available to the remediated students that affect their experience with remedial education. They further remarked that "unless institutions...are able to allocate adequate resources to their remedial programs, the efficacy of remediation is compromised" (p. 1661). To best summarize the debate over remedial education, Bettinger, Boatman, and Long (2013) argue as follows:

> The effects of remediation, then, are considerably nuanced: remedial courses appear to help or hinder students differently by state, institution, background, and academic preparedness. The mixed findings in earlier research present an interesting puzzle about why remedial and developmental courses have such different effects. Only by first identifying the subgroups of students whom remedial programs appear to be helping or hindering and the delivery methods associated with the largest effects can administrators, practitioners, and policy makers design and implement effective remediation programs more broadly. (p. 99)

Thus, there should be institutional consideration of alternative means of helping students succeed in and through their first year, especially since it is debatable that deficiency remediation interventions work.

Although those traditional deficiency models of intervention have helped students overcome their short-term problems, it assumes that a student's first steps must be analyzed, critiqued, and remediated. "Students are usually prevented from pursuing other areas of study and from pursuing their interests until their deficits have been removed and their problems have been overcome" (Anderson, 2005, p. 181). This perspective does not focus on empowering students to become more aware of their natural talents and apply them. Thus, strengths-focused education (SBE) scholars propose that students can leverage their strengths to address their weaknesses. They recognize that all students will not have proficiency in all things (Lopez & Louis, 2009; Wade, Marks, & Hetzel, 2015).

Strengths-focused Education (SBE) Approach. One of the more recent branches of psychology, positive psychology, has a broad focus on what is right with humanity rather than focusing on what is wrong (Hoy & Tarter, 2011; Macaskill & Denovan, 2013; Schwitzer, 2016). It undergirds the strengths-focused education (SBE) approach by focusing on a student's inherent talents instead of deficiencies. The positive psychology approach is rooted in a shift from the traditional views of psychology, where the common focus is pathology (e.g., studies of alienation, depression, anxiety). It is not to say that the other parts of psychology are not necessary. Positive psychology just seeks to emphasize the positive characteristics of human functioning compared to pathological traits. Therefore, positive psychology shifts the attention to more positive components of human functioning such as

optimism, resiliency, and responsibility (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), which are all critical for student success.

Principles of Strengths-Focused Education. Because SBE is a newer approach, it is essential to define some of the fundamental principles of SBE (Gallup, 2017). This section outlines researchers Lopez and Louis' (2009) five principles of SBE; they are the first to outline the tenets of the SBE model. They intend to conceptualize student talent, help them become more aware of their abilities, and implement programming that influences their success (Lopez & Louis, 2009; Stebleton, Soria, & Albecker, 2012). An SBE approach supports students in developing their identities and personal values more clearly, thus helping them be more focused, more confident, and more optimistic as they aspire to achieve higher goals (Anderson, 2005; Schreiner & Anderson, 2005).

The first principle focuses on measuring student strengths and other indicators related to student success (e.g., hope, well-being, and engagement) (Louis & Lopez, 2009). The CliftonStrengths assessment is the most common tool used to measure student strengths within the SBE framework. The objective is to conceptualize one's natural talents giving the individual the opportunity to develop those natural talents into strengths. Using the assessment to help students indicate their skills provides them a framework to develop their natural talents into strengths.

 Dr. Donald Clifton, an educational psychologist who studied human talent development, developed the CliftonStrengths assessment by answering the question: What would happen if we studied what is right with people? The results give individuals five constructive words to describe themes of talents that they can carry with them in any context (Louis & Lopez, 2009). This consideration of strengths can help people do more of what they

do best. A "strength is the ability to consistently provide near-perfect performance in a specific activity" (Gallup Inc., 2017, para. 1). The use of an assessment to help students indicate their themes of talents provides them a framework to develop those talents into strengths.

The second principle stresses the importance of personalizing the learning experience by discussing a student's personal goals in the context of their natural talents and strengths (Lopez & Louis, 2009). In doing so, educators strive to recognize students' developmental process by highlighting their uniqueness in their qualities and goals and providing strengths-focused feedback towards meaningful academic and personal goals. In other words, educators provide space and input for the students to direct their personal goals and their assigned educational goals in the same direction. This direction can manifest in educators giving students several options to complete their projects that connect closest to their strengths (Lopez & Louis, 2009).

The third principle of SBE is consistent with Wenger's (2000) concept of communities of practice. The emphasis is on networking with others who encourage the students by providing recognition and praise of all successes. Simply, the principle asserts that instead of focusing on one's known weaknesses in isolation, everyone can leverage their weaknesses while working in communities of practice. Wenger reinforces this networking concept with three types of belonging: engagement, imagination, and alignment. Engagement is about the things that community members do together and talk about that help shape experiences that form both group identity and individual identity. When students construct images of themselves and their environments, they must use imagination to adapt themselves, explore opportunities, or to think through their experiences. Lastly, alignment refers to "a

mutual process of coordinating perspectives, interpretations, and actions so they realize higher goals" (Wenger, 2000, p. 228). All three modes of Wenger's conceptualization of communities of practice should develop in combination.

The fourth principle focuses on helping students apply their strengths both inside and outside of the classroom by being a "strengths mentor," especially once the educator has learned of their strengths (Lopez & Louis, 2009). Educators aware of their personal strengths can model for students how they can use their strengths. Practically, an educator can reinforce their strengths and how their particular awareness can help students discern their own strengths development needs. Further, the discovery of strengths challenges educators to create a culture to help students recognize those moments of excellence (i.e., the times when they use their strengths to produce high-quality work or when their strengths are expressed in classroom activities). Such strengths-focused feedback cultivates an environment for students to learn the skill of observing their classmates' use of their strengths and participate in peer-to-peer feedback (Lopez & Louis, 2009).

The fifth principle of SBE focuses on students and educators working together to uncover novel experiences which focus primarily on the students' unique strengths needs (Lopez & Louis, 2009). The implication is for educators and students to partner to identify campus resources and courses that develop strengths. Furthermore, it is essential to find extracurricular activities, internship opportunities, and mentors who encourage students' regular use of their strengths. This process exposes students to new knowledge and skills that could motivate them to use their strengths more effectively (Lopez & Louis, 2009).

Although the principles of SBE, when carried out on SBE campuses, tend to follow the order above, the steps do not need to occur in sequence. (Soria & Stubblefield, 2015a).

However, no matter the order, all support staff, and educators must intentionally approach SBE from a perspective of student development and growth, not deficiency remediation (i.e., not what's wrong with the student, yet what opportunities are present with the student?). All must remember that helping students conceptualize their strengths is a collaborative process, and the student should not be left alone on this journey. The next section presents the empirical research of strengths-focused educational approaches.

Research on Strengths-Focused Education. Some research on SBE education tends to be limited because studies explore the CliftonStrengths assessment in non-representative samples and single academic courses or programs (Louis, 2009). Further, quantitative studies have not included comparative control groups, and the qualitative studies are not generalizable (Cave, 2003; Cantwell, 2006; Estevez, 2005; Louis, 2008, 2011). However, most studies on strengths-focused education have focused on strengths-awareness, strengths self-efficacy, and academic engagement, summarized below.

Much of the SBE model strives to influence student strengths awareness related to important outcomes for first-year undergraduate students (like autonomous learning, sense of belonging, retention, and self-efficacy). For instance, Macaskill and Donovan (2013) hypothesized that making students aware of their character strengths increases self-confidence and better feelings about themselves, cultivating autonomous learning. They found that the character strength of *hope agency*, a motivational belief, suggests that people can achieve goals through hard work, one of the most vital indicators of autonomous learning. Further, Soria and Stubblefield (2015) conducted a study that found that being aware of strengths will facilitate a sense of belonging and retention if controlling for demographic and academic variables and college experiences. Lastly, a study conducted at a

faith-based institution verified the stability of the CliftonStrengths assessment over a one-year period in finding that students' strengths did not change over that time. The principal investigators noted that specific strategic thinking strengths— a specific category of some of the strengths—were correlated with admission test scores.

Several studies on strengths-focused educational practices also identify how students' confidence increases once they are made aware of their strengths (Bowers & Lopez, 2010; Soria & Stubblefield, 2015; Stebleton, Soria, & Albecker, 2012). In the Bowers and Lopez's study, they found three constructs necessary to increase student confidence: A student needed to (a) have continuous social support from family and friends, (b) experience success in academic and extracurricular activities, and (c) receive reinforcement of their strengths through several experiences, thus establishing a more self-efficacious perspective about those experiences. Moreover, student awareness of their strengths can have long-lasting impacts as well. Stebleton, Soria, and Albecker (2012) administered a pre-and post-test survey regarding perceived confidence in one's strengths and found that students who are aware of their strengths may make better decisions about their future careers. They (students) "also benefit by becoming more realistic about their future expectations and are more likely to accurately assess their own abilities within academic and career contexts" (p.5).

Other studies in SBE focus more on academic engagement and find that initiatives using SBE have a positive impact on engagement. In one study, Cantwell (2006) compared her two public speaking courses: One used SBE and the other taught traditionally. The students in the SBE course were more academically engaged in the classroom than the control group. She found that students attended class more often, were on time, conducted fewer distracting side-conversations with peers, contributed more to classroom discussions,

and asked more questions. Cantwell emphasized that her study is consistent with the literature on academic engagement. O'Shea (2015) used a qualitative approach to research first-year women in transition and found more engagement when the environmental shifts were physical and psychological. O'Shea concluded that the university needed to provide a space for student reflection, sense-making of the higher education journey, and continue to grow in their identity. Last, Soria and Stubblefield (2015) studied the most extensive implementation of a strengths initiative in the United States and found that the initiative influenced the university's big goals of increasing engagement, confidence, self-awareness, and retention of first-year undergraduate students.

Self-Efficacy and Strengths-focused Education

Bandura's (1977) seminal work on self-efficacy theory suggests that through a series of mastery experiences, modeling, encouragement, and different effects, one's confidence (efficacy) will increase regarding present and future performances. People will put in more effort when faced with obstacles or negative experiences if their efficacy expectations are high. Moreover, efficacy is personal and not generalized; thereby, contextual factors that may be temporal, cognitive, social, and situational increase or decrease one's efficacy. The SBE model emphasizes taking an individualized perspective for student success, quite like Bandura's self-efficacy theory's personal and non-generalized nature. The complexity of self-efficacy logically implies that complex strategies should be used to assess and increase self-efficacy, not simple ones. This study incorporates faculty coaching as a strategy because of the facilitative, co-creative, open-ended nature of a faculty-student coaching process. Next, I examine the nature of student development in light of the literature on faculty-student relationships.

Faculty-Student Relationships and Retention

A student's university experience, both inside and outside of the classroom, is critically changed when faculty are involved in the retention efforts of the first-year undergraduate student (Tinto, 1996). Mentoring is one strategy for faculty to be involved. "Unplanned natural (faculty) mentoring can be crucial to student learning and development…differentiating it from teaching" (McKinsey, 2016, p. 1). Yet faculty mentoring can be hard to define because the operationalization of mentorship is multifaceted and has many variables (Jacobi, 1991; McKinsey, 2016). Most faculty mentoring research examines structured mentoring programs for specialized populations of students (e.g., those with disabilities, ethnic minorities, community colleges, at-risk) (Bryant, 1992; DeFreitas & Bravo, 2012; Jacobi, 1991; Markle, Wessel, & Desmond, 2017). Thus, the importance of studying a specified type of faculty mentoring (i.e., coaching) in a specific context becomes necessary.

Faculty-student relationships are complex, and the definitions of mentorship are inherently vast (Jacobi, 1991). Often, faculty mentorship may be perceived as an extension of teaching, yet conceptually, teaching and mentoring are different (McKinsey, 2016). Moreover, McKinsey further outlines how undergraduate students have used metaphors to describe their experience with faculty mentors, such as "faculty as a coach" or "academic parent." Therefore, since faculty mentoring is rooted in complex, dynamic, and changing relationships, it can be formal and informal, and it is hard to conceptualize uniformly. This study will use the term "faculty coaching" instead of "faculty mentorship" because of the proposed intervention for this study.

Recently, some universities created academic coaching programs or utilized external coaching firms to address the educational needs of their students (Demast, 2012; Hayes, 2012; Hoover, 2011; Webberman, 2011), yet faculty tend not to be as active in these initiatives. The universities incorporate coaching into their advising units, specialized programs, or recruitment endeavors. The programs are using titles such as "academic coaching" (Bellman et al., 2015; Hayes, 2012), "success coaching" (Hoover, 2011), and "executive-style coaching" (Demast, 2012). For institutions that use external coaching firms such as InsideTrack, it is likely the universities do not have the faculty or staff to create their own programs (Demast, 2012; Farrell, 2007; Hoover, 2011), further opening the need for this type of study with a faculty member as a coach.

The Case for Coaching

Business executives have consistently used coaching to help people grow personally, overcome challenges, and strategize for positive gains in their organizations. Still, it is only in the last decade have academic institutions integrated similar coaching strategies (Damast, 2012). Academic advisors and counselors have traditionally held the role of helping students' curricular issues by taking a more advisor or counselor-led approach towards particular aims (Mangan, 2014). However, the coach creates a more collaborative environment and ideally helps identify the student's strengths. Using a model focused on developing mental toughness in athletes, Gordon (2012, p. 212) compared strengths-focused coaching and psychological training (Table 1.1). The comparison parallels the differences in the deficiency-remediation approaches discussed earlier and the strengths-focused education (SBE) approach.

Table 1.1

Comparison of Strengths-focused Coaching and Traditional Psychological Skills Training

Assumptions	*Strengths-Based Coaching*	*Psychological (Mental) Skills Training*
Coach Philosophy	Strengths Spotting	Problem Identification
Areas of Development and Learning Focus for Coaching	Strengths: Learn from successes	Weaknesses: Learn from Mistakes
Athletes	Resourceful and have experienced success	Require expert assistance in dealing with failures.
Type of Coaching Required	Proactive: Exploit existing strengths	Remedial: Fix existing weaknesses
Learning Process	Coaching: 'asking' of a self-directed (athlete)	Training: 'telling' from other-directed (practitioner)
Source of Expertise and Coach/Athlete Relationship	The Athlete. Collaboration	The Practitioner. Coach-led
Behavioral Goal Type	Self-concordant (compatible, consistent)	External/Introjected

Research on Academic Coaching. Research on academic coaching has focused on specific demographics of students. For instance, hybrid advising-coaching models with ADHD students have been examined because they can aid in evaluating the readiness of the student, establishes feasible goal setting, and providing accountability to this population (D'Alessio and Banerjee, 2016). Besides, a pilot study of students with learning disabilities further discovered that academic coaching helped them cognitively manage the administration (e.g., time management, strategic planning, attention to details) of their lives (Bellman, Burgstahler, & Hinke, 2015). Other critical studies in academic coaching focused on how retention and recruitment of first-generation students and ethnic minorities increased because of the coaching interventions (Allen & Lester, 2012; Hayes, 2012; Hoover, 2011).

As noted, much of the research on academic coaching targets specific populations of students, consistent with this study.

Examples of Universities Who Use Coaching Methods. The University of Dayton and Florida State University are two examples of how universities incorporate a strategic coaching method in their approach to retain the first-year undergraduate student. The University of Dayton partnered with InsideTrack, a student success coaching firm, to hold coaching conversations with students during enrollment and three times per month during their first year (Hoover, 2011). The university was losing students during the summer before their fall enrollment and struggling with their first-year retention. In the wake of the coaching initiative, the university claimed that their first-year undergraduate student retention increased, specifically retaining those students who submitted their initial deposit before their fall enrollment. The coaching conversations helped students understand the enrollment process, enter the university with confidence, and persist through their first year (Hoover, 2011).

Florida State University (2018) chose to establish an in-house coaching program called College Life Coaching, where randomly selected students receive two one-on-one coaching sessions per month for the academic year. They claimed that active program participants were retained longer, had a better overall satisfaction with their college experience, and had higher average GPAs than their counterparts. Several other universities are adopting similar models and a new approach to retention (Frischmann & Moor, 2017; Lancer & Eatough, 2018; Robinson & Gahagan, 2010).

Theoretical Framework: Student Development Theory

A set of student development theories has developed throughout three "waves" since the 1930s, expanding further in the '70s and 80s through today. The 1937 report of The American Council on Education Studies on the Student Personnel Point of View discussed the development and philosophy of student personnel work focusing on the *whole* student (The American Council on Education, 1937). They suggested that the development of the entire student was the *central goal* of higher education (Jones & Stewart, 2016). With the increase of more diverse populations to higher education in the 1970s and 1980s, it became essential to integrate one's social identity as a development factor (Margolda, 2009). As the profession continued to develop, the third wave of theories emerged addressing the power dynamics in identity creation (e.g., context, multiple dimensions of one's life, personal articulation, and understanding of one's identity) (Jones & Stewart, 2016).

Paradigms undergirding the waves of student development theory are positivism (one reality; knowledge is objective), constructivism (multiple realities; knowledge is co-constructed), critical theory (systems of power shape reality), and poststructuralism (people must deconstruct systems of oppression and power that shape reality) (Abes, 2016). Common among these is the notion that the whole student needs development, and each student develops differently. Each paradigm offers a lens to frame one's understanding of how students develop within an educational system. Though the theory continually evolves, it suggests that students develop in many ways depending on their psychosocial, environmental, personal, and social identities and the systems of power that affect them (Jones & Stewart, 2016).

The concept of constructivist developmentalism, which undergirds the lens of much of first and second-wave theorists, sets forth three basic premises regarding understanding and knowledge of self (Jones & Stewart, 2016; Baxter Magolda, King, Perez, & Taylor, 2012). The first premise postulates that community aids in informing one's understanding of self, which is like Louis and Lopez's (2009) third principle of strengths-based education (SBE): networking in a community. The second premise refers to increasing the complexity of one's understanding of self and others; this premise is consistent with Louis and Lopez's principles one, two, and five. The last premise emphasizes that individuals can make sense of their own lives by articulating and applying their knowledge. Louis and Lopez's principles four and five reinforce this third premise. Constructivist developmentalism is the theoretical paradigm within student development theory; it guides and interprets this study. It connects the two critical components at the heart of this study: student development theory and strengths-based education.

Summary of the Problem of Practice

The deficiency-remediation problem-focused models that permeate various elements of society have become a perspective that needs addressing, not only in the general psychology discipline but also in higher education practices. Federal funds welcome faculty to pursue problem-oriented grant funding for their research, political rhetoric focuses on problems, and the influences of general psychological thought have influenced multiple facets of society to see life through the lens of problems and deficiencies. Therefore, a potential solution in higher education to help with minimizing a deficiency-remediation model is to incorporate more strengths-focused retention methods in all institutional elements.

General Study Plan

The purpose of this MMAR study is to explore the outcomes of a strengths-focused faculty coaching intervention on first-year undergraduate student academic self-efficacy at the University of Kentucky. The goal of the reconnaissance phase is to understand the needs of first-year undergraduate students related to their academic confidence by using a concurrent mixed-method design. The quantitative strand assessed the participants' initial strengths awareness and initial strengths self-efficacy data. The qualitative strand collected the participants' perspectives on their academic confidence. The integration of the two strands provided broader meta-inferences on their initial academic confidence; thus, the faculty coaching intervention was designed based on the results of the reconnaissance data.

The evaluation phase assessed the effects of the strengths-focused faculty coaching intervention. A concurrent mixed methods design sought to see if potential changes occurred in the academic confidence of the participants. The evaluation phase quantitative strand incorporated a post-assessment of the participants' strengths awareness and strengths self-efficacy data. The evaluation phase qualitative strand collected the participants' perspective on the effects of different elements of the faculty coaching intervention. The rationale for applying mixed methods in the evaluation phase was to gain more insights into faculty coaching and its potential effects on first-year student academic confidence.

Ethical Considerations

I am bound to professional ethics and the University of Kentucky's administrative regulations. All student data is kept confidential and will not violate Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) regulations, nor will it or did it directly affect student assessment grades in their specific course of study. As a participant-researcher, I created

accountability measures with my colleagues and used technology appropriately to attain fairness for all the research participants. No known harm was done to the students, and they could cease participation at any time, of which two students chose to do so.

Summary of Chapter One

Student diversity and the college or university the student attends influence the multifaceted retention efforts needed. Thus, this chapter emphasized the complexity of deficiency remediation approaches, strengths-focused education approaches, self-efficacy, and coaching. The use of deficiency remediation models to retain students is inconclusive; therefore, opportunities are available for other retention models to be studied. The alternate approach of strengths-focused education as a model could be viable in increasing academic self-efficacy. Self-efficacy theory, student development theories, and strengths-focused education are consistent in their initial focus on the individual student rather than focused on systematic needs first. Lastly, coaching has recently been a viable option incorporated into some institutional retention strategies. It is, therefore, hypothesized that the use of an intentional strengths-focused faculty coaching model would increase the academic confidence of first-year students. The next chapter will describe the research plan to assess the deliberate strengths-focused coaching intervention on the academic confidence of first-year undergraduate students.

Chapter 2: MMAR Methodology, Research Setting, Reconnaissance, Planning, and

Intervention/Acting Phase

Introduction

First-year undergraduate students must often adjust to the college experience's academic and social demands. Too many students decide to leave college due to feelings of self-doubt, low academic confidence, or apprehensions about their experience living away from home for the first time. These experiences could be especially true for students who do not have some sort of a support group (Naong, Zwane, Mogashoa, & Fleischmann, 2009; O'Shea, 2015; Yan & Sendall, 2016). Therefore, universities create first-year experience (FYE) programs to help students make a successful transition to college (Hunter & Murray, 2007). However, for many students who are considered underprepared, programs tend to focus on deficiency-remediation rather than focus on what skills, natural patterns of thought, behavioral and personality characteristics they bring to the university (Anderson, 2005). The common deficiency-remediation philosophy suggests that if the underprepared student does not meet the standard, the university labels the student as not ready for college and "high-risk" or "at-risk" of failure.

University student affairs professionals have implemented many programs to help and retain these underprepared students. One approach is academic coaching, which has become more widely used but has not been well-researched (Capstick et al., 2019). This study uses a mixed-method action research (MMAR) methodology to examine the effects of a strengths-focused faculty coaching intervention designed to increase first-year undergraduate student academic confidence. Students with higher academic confidence (i.e., academic self-

efficacy) tend to be more likely to be retained and succeed towards graduation (Hsieh, Sullivan, & Guerra, 2007).

      This second chapter will outline the MMAR Methodology (Figure 2.1), the research setting, the reconnaissance research questions, and the reconnaissance phase methodology used to answer those questions. Further, the chapter will discuss the planning and intervention/action phases.

Study Design: Reconnaissance to Evaluation Phase

Figure 2.1

Visual Diagram of this Action Research Mixed Methods Study from the Reconnaissance

Phase to the Evaluation Phase.
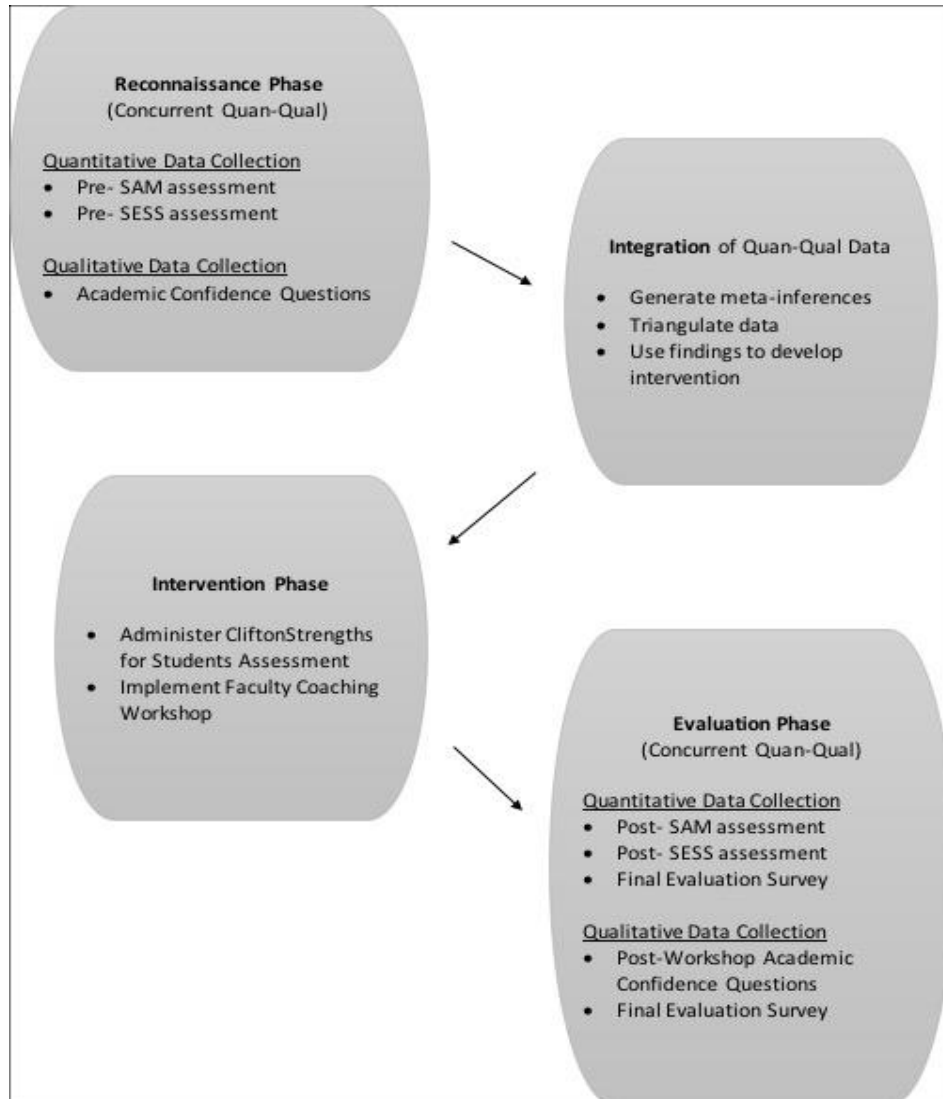
Research Setting

At the University of Kentucky, 14 living-learning programs are communities that "support student success by placing students with similar interests into smaller communities

in particular residence halls. Students receive special programming, interactions with UK faculty and staff, and a supportive community" (UK Campus Housing, n.d., para. 1). One of the award-winning living-learning programs called the Interprofessional Healthcare Residential College (IHRC) is for students passionate about healthcare. Many of the IHRC program participants attend similar courses, have access to co-curricular activities, healthcare lectures and discussions, and the older student peer mentors help support them in their academic journey (UK Campus Housing, n.d.). These students also participate in related courses that satisfy their UK Core requirements (i.e., a general education curriculum) and courses that orient them to academic life (e.g., UK 101).

For many years, I have worked with the IHRC living-learning program and its director by teaching some of the related courses (e.g., CIS 110: Composition and Communication and UK 101: Academic Orientation), conducting strengths development workshops, and worked with some of the program's peer mentors (e.g., they are my co-instructors of the UK 101: Academic Orientation courses). With the director's permission (see Appendix A), I asked if I could use his students for my doctoral research, and he agreed.

The following section will outline the methodology that framed the reconnaissance phase of this mixed methods action research study. The first integrated question frames the whole study, while the other questions are based on the reconnaissance phase of the study.

Reconnaissance Phase

This concurrent mixed methods action research (MMAR) approach examines the effects of a strengths-focused faculty coaching intervention on first-year undergraduate student academic confidence. More specifically, initial quantitative data and qualitative data

were collected and combined to create meta-inferences (as in Figure 2.2 below), which

helped determine the possible areas of influence on student academic confidence.

Figure 2.2

Conceptual Model of Combining Integrating Strategy in Concurrent Quan + Qual MMAR
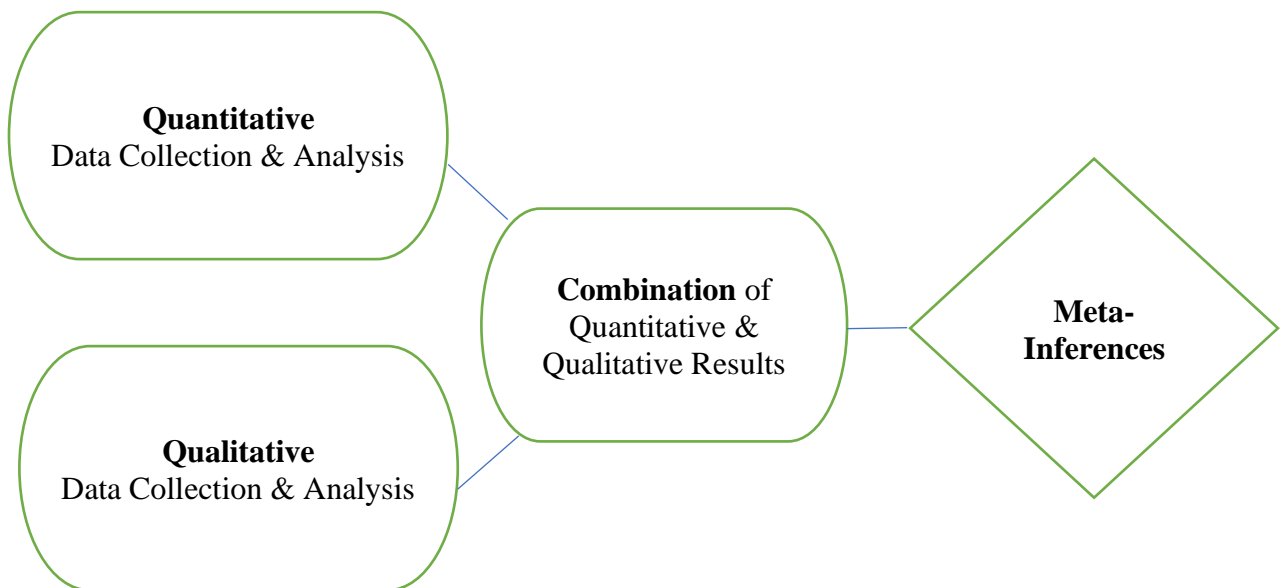
Study Design

Note: This model comes from Ivankova's (2015) work on the Conceptual Model of
Combining Integrating Strategy in Concurrent Quan + Qual MMAR Study Design
(Ivankova, 2015, p.228).

Research Questions

This study examines a strengths-focused faculty coaching intervention (the

independent variable) on first-year undergraduate student academic confidence (the

dependent variable). Thus, the research questions are organized below with the integrated

mixed method action research question first, followed by the questions for the

reconnaissance phase.

The overarching research question for the study was, *What are the effects of a strengths-focused faculty coaching intervention on first-year undergraduate student academic confidence as measured by pre-and post-measures of strengths awareness, strengths self-efficacy, an academic confidence survey, and an evaluation survey?* For the quantitative strand of reconnaissance, research questions were:

1. What is the initial strengths awareness of the participants?
2. What is the initial strengths self-efficacy of the participants?

For the qualitative strand of reconnaissance, the research question was:

1. What contributes to the development of academic confidence for the participants?

Sample

The study employed a convenience sample from the Interprofessional Healthcare Residential College living-learning community (IHRC). I marketed my study to all eligible and interested first-year students who are a part of the IHRC community. For the 2020-2021 cohort of students, the community had 204 students with average ACT scores of 27.5 and an average unweighted GPA of 3.77. 26.6% of the students identified as non-white (Asian: 5.9%; Black: 9.4%; Hispanic: 5.4%; Multi-racial: 4.9%; Non-resident alien: 1.0%; Unknown: 2.5%). 78.8% are female and 21.2% are male (B. O'Farrell, personal communication, July 29, 2020). Ten eligible student participants responded to the marketing of the study, and eight participants (*n*=8) completed the whole study. Each potential participant heard about the study through their Academic Orientation instructors, peer mentors, and video marketing. I asked that each respondent email me about their interest in the study. After their response, I sent each participant an initial welcome email that included the consent form, along with the

initial Strengths Awareness Measure (SAM; Appendix C), the initial Strengths Self-Efficacy Scale (SSES; Appendix D), and the qualitative questions about their perspective on academic confidence.

Strand 1: Quantitative Overview

After granting their formal consent, the participants completed the 10-item initial Strengths Awareness Measure (SAM) and the 16-item Strengths Self-Efficacy Scale (SSES). The SAM is an instrument that measured the participants' agreement with 10-items about their strengths (e.g., "Understanding my strengths helps me to do what I do best," "I want to know the strengths of people in my life"). Participants rated their agreement on a scale of 1 (*strongly disagree)* to 5 (*strongly* agree) (Soria & Stubblefield, 2015a). Schreiner (2004) identified that the Cronbach alpha for the SAM was 0.86. The SSES is a 16-item instrument that measured the participants' confidence in building and applying their strengths. Participants rated their confidence levels on a scale of 1 (*not confident)* to 10 (*very confident)* (Lane & Chapman, 2011). Past examinations of the SSES have shown it to have internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.97 (Zhao et al., 2010). The SAM and SSES scales were the sources of pre-assessment data for the study, and the reconnaissance data was later compared to the post-assessment data. These data also helped inform the meta-inferences needed to create the coaching intervention.

Strand 2: Qualitative Overview

After completing the quantitative strand measures, the participants were asked a series of qualitative questions about their perspective on their academic confidence (See Appendix C). Some example questions were "What helps you build academic confidence?" and "Who helps you build academic confidence?" I coded the qualitative strand data so that

the quantitative and qualitative data combined helped create meta-inferences to develop the faculty-coaching intervention further.

Meta-Inferences and Triangulation of the Data

Combining quantitative and qualitative data allowed me to derive meta-inferences that helped create the intervention. I triangulated the meta-inferences with research about effective coaching and advising practices. For instance, the meta-inferences informed me of potential activities I needed to incorporate into the intervention. Without the inferences, I could have created "feasible" choices to design the intervention, but with the meta-inferences and the knowledge of certain coaching practices, I made better decisions. Furthermore, literature on first-year undergraduate student academic self-efficacy, faculty-student communication literature, and student development theory all aided in the process. Triangulation provided me the security to validate the data across multiple points to develop a potentially effective intervention.

Strand 1: Quantitative Results

The participants first completed the Initial Strengths Awareness Measure (SAM) and the Initial Strengths Self-Efficacy Scale (SSES) using a Likert Scale for both assessments. The SAM judged the participants' agreement (e.g., 1=strongly disagree, 3=neutral, 5=strongly agree) with various elements of how they view, identify, understand, apply, develop their own strengths, and consider others' strengths. The SSES judged the participants' confidence (e.g., 1=low confidence, 5=moderate confidence, 10=high confidence) in how they utilize, apply, believe in, and track their strengths in different situations over different periods.

The two subsections of Strand 1: Quantitative Results will communicate two distinct parts of the data. The first subsection will highlight the lowest mean scores of the SAM (e.g., 3=neutral agreement) and the lowest mean scores for the SSES (e.g., 5=moderate confidence). The scores were used to help create meta-inferences because they were the lowest scores from the measure. The second subsection will highlight the highest scores of both scales. The scores of the second subsection helped create meta-inferences because they were the highest scores from the measure.

Lowest Mean Scores on the Quantitative Scales

Of the ten items asked in the SAM, two items had the lowest mean scores: "Behaviors I used to see as irritating I now view as strengths" and "I have a plan for developing my strengths." Most questioned items (8 out of 10) were agreed or strongly agreed on responses. These lowest scores were used to develop meta-inferences for the intervention by noting that participants did not have a high agreement to having a plan for developing their strengths.

Of the 16 items on the SSES, I chose the five scores that landed at 5.0 or below (i.e., below "moderate confidence"). These scores referred to domains of building, applying, or tracking the use of strengths over time (e.g., "…using your strengths without any struggles," "…determine how to build on your current strengths," or "utilize several strategies for enhancing your strengths."). These scores were used to develop meta-inferences for the intervention by seeing a similar pattern as that of the SAM. The participants did not have high confidence in building, applying, or tracking their strengths over time.

In sum, I interpreted that the lowest mean scores of both measures were potential areas that needed improvement. Thus, I integrated the scores with the qualitative data to help develop meta-inferences for the intervention.

Highest Mean Scores on the Quantitative Scales

For both scales, I interpreted the highest mean scores as potential areas "strongest" for the participants. Two items on the Initial Strengths Awareness Measure (SAM), learning about oneself and learning of the strengths of others, had the highest scores. "I like to learn about myself" had a 4.88 of 5.0 mean score, the highest of all, while the item "I want to know the strengths of the people in my life" had the second-highest mean scores of 4.5 of 5.0. The highest scores helped me develop meta-inferences by assuming the students wanted to learn of themselves and learn about others.

The two areas of highest confidence in the Initial Strengths Self-Efficacy Scale were "using strengths to succeed" and "applying your strengths at school," which had mean scores of 6.75 out of 10 and 6.38 out of 10, respectively. I used these high scores to develop meta-inferences for the intervention by assuming that the highest confidence areas could use additional tools to strengthen or reinforce their confidence.

In sum, the quantitative results suggested that the participants did not have a plan for building, applying, or tracking the use of their strengths over time. The results also indicated that the participants liked to learn of their strengths and others. I perceived the participants were confident in using and applying their strengths to succeed in school. Thus, the intervention needed to provide a plan to help the participants build, apply, and track their strengths over time. Furthermore, they needed to develop these plans together with their peers.

Strand 2: Qualitative Results

The second portion of the concurrent quantitative-qualitative mixed methods design included qualitative questions asking participants different questions about their academic

confidence. Several themes emerged during the coding process when repetitively reviewing the participants' responses, for there were several repeated concepts, synonymous word usage, and similar narratives regarding their experiences. Six questions are what organize this Strand 2: Qualitative Results section. I identified significant themes from each of the six subsections and gave a few examples from the unedited responses of the participants.

Why is Academic Confidence Important?

Four major themes emerged from the question, Why is Academic Confidence Important? The first theme that emerged was that *confidence affects goal orientation*. Goal orientation refers to anything set before the participant to attain (e.g., a task, more schooling, a grade). Statements from the participants identified how academic confidence affects how they view their goals. Participants used strong verbs like "to prosper," "to achieve," and "to excel" in their statements. For example, for participant 1, academic confidence allowed them to "prosper in the academic community," while for participant 2, it "allows a student to achieve their academic goals."

The second theme was that *confidence is foundational*. To suggest that confidence is foundational metaphorically means that participants need confidence before building or doing anything else. Participants identified how academic confidence is a foundation for other activities. Participants used words that referenced something built (i.e., everything made has a foundation). For example, participant 4 stated, "academic confidence is the foundation most people need especially in college." Participant 6 spoke about how academic confidence "is the first step in accomplishing that task."

The third theme was that *confidence has future implications and projections, suggesting that* the future is affected by academic confidence. Whether positive confidence

or negative confidence, it is perceived that students inferred future implications based on one's confidence. For instance, participant 3 commented, "when someone is confident going into a project they often are able to excel because they aren't held back by negativity." Participant 4 reinforced this theme stating that "without strong academic confidence in college and beyond, students can potentially struggle to show their best selves and full potential."

Lastly, the fourth theme was that *confidence and beliefs are interconnected.* Participants' confidence and their belief systems fundamentally influence confidence. A few students gave some stories that reinforced their views on whether they have positive or negative confidence in a task. Participant 7 identified, "if I tell myself I am not doing something right enough times, eventually I truly won't be doing it right anymore. If I am confident, I do not second guess myself as much and I tend to do better." In addition, participant 6 said, "when you believe you can even if you can't at the moment, you have motivation to work at it until you truly can do it…If you believe you can't pass a test, no matter what you do, you lose all sense of purpose…when you believe you can pass a test, you study and prepare to ensure that you do.*"

What gifts, talents, or strengths do you have that make you academically confident?

Three major themes emerged from the question, *What gifts, talents, or strengths do you have that make you academically confident?* The first theme that emerged was that participants used *positive affirmative adjectives to describe their gifts, talents, or strengths.* Participants used some terms like "good," "really good," or "fairly well" to describe their attributes. The implications of this are that participants positively affirm those things they perceive they succeed in doing well. For instance, participant 5 stated, "I think I am fairly

good at asking questions, I'm a good listener, and I'm fairly organized." Additionally, participant 2 commented that "I have the ability to prioritize my work fairly well."

The second emergent theme was that participants *used vague terminology to describe their gifts, talents, or strengths*. Participants used terms that could apply to several people, not specific to them alone. Their vocabulary did not necessarily make them unique, and I perceived that commonly acceptable language is what they knew and used to describe their gifts, talents, or strengths. Further, my perception is that they did not have a more sophisticated language to conceptualize their gifts, talents, or strengths specifically. For instance, participant 3 said, "I'm good at science and tend to be a leader in group projects," while participant 4 made a general list: "driven perfectionist leader work ethic Team player.

Lastly, the third theme was that participants had *a variety of gifts, talents, or strengths* listed, yet a few gifts, talents, or strengths were similar across the participants. The participants could have very different meanings for the words they wrote, which could further increase the complexity of how they view their gifts, talents, or strengths. For example, participant 8 simply said "photographic memory," and participant 6 said, "I'm good at memorizing." Participant 5 stated, "I think I am fairly good at asking questions," while participant 2 stated more specific information about their asking of questions: "I think my best strength is the ability to ask questions *when I need help*."

What helps you to build academic confidence?

Two major themes emerged from the question, *What helps you to build academic confidence?* The first theme to emerge was that *feedback builds academic confidence*. Participants responded that once they received feedback from a teacher or a peer, it built their

confidence. These responses implied that feedback is a critical component in helping one know what they are doing, and it aided in building confidence. For example, participant 1 answered the question "achieving high grades and completing hard problems correctly." Participant 6 said, "Academic confidence is also built when I have confirmation from a teacher or peer."

The second theme was that personal reflection, study, and experiences build academic confidence. Participants identified various thoughts, study moments, and other experiences that help build their academic confidence. The implication of this is that a retrospective attitude, intentional actions, and experiential activities all together help build academic confidence. Regarding personal reflection, participant 5 identified, "I look back at how far I've come as a person and as a student. It makes me hopeful for the future." An example of study moments is when participant 6 stated, "when I give myself enough time to study…When I give myself the proper amount of time to review material and grasp the material, I do significantly better both academically and mentally."

Who helps you to build academic confidence?

Two major themes emerged from the question, "*Who helps you to build academic confidence?*" The first theme to emerge was that the participants *built their confidence by themselves.* Participants one, two, and eight said "Myself" in response to this question identifying somehow their confidence is built by themselves. They said nothing else further about how they built confidence by themselves.

The second theme to emerge was that *others helped build their confidence.* Participants commented how others' encouragement helped build their confidence (e.g.,

teachers, family, and peers). Two examples are from participants 3 and 4, respectively: "friends and instructors who encourage me" and "teachers, peers, and parents."

When do you feel most academically confident?

Two themes emerged from the question, *When do you feel most academically confident?* The first theme to emerge was that students feel most confident *when they have studied or prepared*. Participants offered thoughts that they are most confident when they know the material learned or feel prepared for something. For instance, participant 6 stated, "I feel the most academically confident when I'm prepared…when I've reviewed the material, have everything I need, am in a no-distraction environment, and have had a good night's sleep, I can do anything." Participant 8 remarked briefly, "when I've studied and I'm prepared."

The second theme to emerge was that students feel most confident *when they received a good grade or some positive feedback*. Student participants overwhelmingly identified that getting feedback or reflecting on success is when they feel most confident. Participant 5 frankly stated, "honestly, when I get a good grade," and participant 2 said it similarly, "after a success in the academic area."

Any other comments about how you gain academic confidence?

One central theme emerged from the question, *Any other comments about how you gain academic confidence?* The one theme is that student participants needed to find their uniqueness in their strategy and implement it. A few students commented about their distinctiveness in finding that plan. For instance, participant 1 stated, "I have also learned what type of studying works for me," while participant 4 commented, "by setting myself apart from my peers and focusing on what I did well." Participant 6 added, "when I use my

"no-stress" strategies…I often listen to music, walk around, and…sometimes I'll sing a little song to myself (only if I'm by myself)."

Summary of Strand 2: Qualitative Results

The critical implications of the qualitative reconnaissance data outline that participants need confidence to fulfill their goals, utilize their gifts and talents, align their belief systems, and need feedback. I perceived that the more confidence the participants have, the better they are at accomplishing tasks, believing in themselves, and their gifts, talents, and other abilities.

Meta-Inferences

The following meta-inferences informed the details of the faculty-coaching intervention: 1) Students needed clarity in identifying their natural strengths, 2) Students needed to do the intervention in community with others, 3) Students needed feedback or confirmation of what they do well, and 4) Students needed a plan of how to develop and use their natural strengths.

Students Lack Clarity in Identifying Their Natural Strengths.

The quantitative reconnaissance data showed that the third lowest mean score (out of 10) of the initial Strengths Awareness Measure was "I can name my top five strengths." Similarly, the qualitative data showed a theme that students gave vague terminology for their strengths. The data implied that students might not have confidence in knowing or articulating their natural talents (e.g., strengths), and they needed a means to measure and conceptualize their strengths. Thus, I chose to use the CliftonStrengths for Students assessment because it conceptualizes an individual's natural talents. I had the participants take this assessment as the first part of the intervention.

54

Students May Benefit from an Interactive Intervention.

According to the quantitative reconnaissance data, the highest two mean scores of the initial Strengths Awareness Measure were the items "I like to learn about myself" and "I want to know the strengths of the people in my life." The qualitative data suggested family members, peers, and teachers help students build academic confidence. Thus, I recognized the importance of the intervention being interactive, especially using the strategy of both large and small group discussion and welcome the students to share freely, exchange thoughts, and ask questions about the strengths-development journey.

Students Appreciate Feedback or Confirmation of What They Do Well.

All the lowest mean scores on both the Strengths Awareness Measure and the Strengths Self-Efficacy Scale referred to items that require knowledge of developing, building, growing, using, or tracking their strengths development journey. The qualitative data showed that students needed positive feedback from teachers, peers, and family members, and they needed knowledge acquisition to help them build academic confidence. Practically, one's personality strengths development journey is like a person's physical strengths development journey; an individual would need an assessment, a workout plan, a personal trainer, knowledge, and discipline to implement the training strategy. Thus, as a strengths coach, I knew that I needed to intentionally give public praise, honor, and feedback to the participants when I noticed them operating in their strengths; it is what strengths coaches call "strengths-based feedback." I also knew that students would need to be educated about the journey and need a process of developing their strengths

Students Lack a Plan on How to Develop and Use their Natural Strengths.

All the lowest mean scores on both scales referred to items that required building, planning, growing, using, and tracking their strengths development journey. The qualitative data inferred that students utilized some sort of plan to help them feel academically confident (e.g., when they prepared, when they studied, when they are comfortable with the material, or attain specific achievements). Thus, I made sure to provide each participant with an electronic folder of resources to help them learn and process their strengths. I also made sure that students had an opportunity to ask questions about the overall process, their strengths, and how they applied their strengths in different contexts.

Planning Phase

The meta-inferences and other triangulated reconnaissance data informed the general direction of coaching the ten student participants. The data seemed clear that the participants needed clarity of their strengths. Thus, I gave each student a free code to take the CliftonStrengths for Student Assessment. It also seemed like the students needed an interactive facilitator-to-peer and peer-to-peer intervention that welcomed them to receive strengths-based feedback and confirmation of what they do well. Furthermore, the data revealed that the students needed a plan to develop their strengths over time; therefore, I created a shared folder containing resources to understand and grow their strengths (see examples in Appendices E, F, and G).

The participants and I proceeded to find a suitable time for us to meet over Zoom for the two-hour coaching workshop. The students participated in mini-lectures, small-group breakout rooms, big-group discussions, individual activities, and a question-and-answer session. As mentioned before, I knew it was vital that they receive strengths-based feedback from me (i.e., positive comments before and during our sessions). Therefore, I planned for

each participant to obtain some initial commentary from me about their results (see Appendix C; an example of an email I sent to a participant). The philosophical goal of the intervention was to potentially empower students to discover and identify their natural talents, embrace them, and practically apply them.

Quality Assurance

Researcher bias and positionality are concerns for this study because I am a Gallup-certified strengths coach and I have a particular position on how I approach students and their development. I have a biased perspective on the philosophy of positive psychology and other constructs referring to talent and strengths development. I have attempted to suspend my judgments and opinions of my researched insights about the topic to learn more about the participants' perspectives. Yet, I also recognize that there is an inherent bias in all research. My advisors and committee checked and offered recommendations on my language use, verifying that my research questions were not inherently assumptive.

I used a convenience sample of students in a unit where I teach classes, and three of the eight participants were former students. I attempted to be very careful not to discuss the study during classes or integrate anything about the study into my course curriculum. I focused on the class objectives while in the classroom and focused on the study objectives while conducting the study. I did not disclose that any of my current students were participants in the study. I did not have any conversations with the three students about the study except during the two-hour workshop intervention/acting phase of the study.

The Hawthorne Effect is a risk in social science research; thus, I accounted for this bias in how I communicated to the study participants and how I maintained relationships with my former students. Again, I did not discuss the study publicly in my classes or associated

any classroom correspondence with the study correspondence. I carefully considered how I communicated with my student participants both inside and outside the classroom. I kept necessary rules and boundaries with all of my student interactions. Hopefully, this minimized the Hawthorne Effect on the study results.

Intervention/Acting Phase

As noted in the Planning Phase, the participants and I proceeded to find a time to engage in some strengths-based activities in the form of a two-hour workshop. Since the meta-inferences revealed students needed a plan to develop their strengths, needed feedback, and needed engagement, I included strengths-coaching techniques in the curriculum of the workshop. I gave each participant strengths-based feedback via email after completing the assessment (see Appendix C). The feedback resulted in studying the combination of their strengths and offering some initial commentary on some "hunches" about their normal personality. The intention was to acknowledge what I perceived and learn about the participant through their results. Then, the coaching journey commenced.

As described in the next section and appendices I and J, coaching is about asking questions and partnering with the student to empower them to learn and grow. Thus, I prepared to have conversations centered around naming (i.e., conceptualizing one's strengths), claiming (i.e., owning one's strengths), and aiming (i.e., practically applying one's strengths) their strengths. This Intervention/Action Phase section discusses the general framework for strengths-coaching and the specific workshop schedule for this study. I will be using the terms "intervention" and "acting" interchangeably throughout these sections.

General Strengths-focused Coaching Framework

Strengths-focused coaching centers on having the right conversations related to strength development. Gallup (2017) recommends having four types of conversations: 1) establish the relationship, 2) understand the student's talents/strengths profile, 3) gain appreciation of the talents/strengths, and 4) invest in one's talents and strengths. A simpler version of this process is to build rapport by helping the students *name, claim, and aim* their talents and strengths.

The following outline describes what naming, claiming, and aiming one's strengths looks like in a group coaching session (for an example of an individualized session, see Appendix I).

Rapport Building

To gain empathy and trust, examples of rapport-building questions will be as follows:

- What name do you prefer to be called?

- Tell me a bit about how you came to the University of Kentucky.

- What is easiest about your academic journey at the University of Kentucky?

- What is most challenging about your academic journey at the University of Kentucky?

- Whether it is academic or not, what is the most important issue you currently face?

- To meet your expectations, what are your expectations of coaching?

Everyone is expected to have a different response to these questions; their answers establish the tone, direction, and focus of the conversations.

Naming

By this stage, the participants have taken the CliftonStrengths for Students assessment. The next phase of the conversation connects their results to their normative personality. In other words, the participants' natural talents become more conceptualized by using the names of the Signature Themes. This conversation focuses on how the student responds to three reports they have received: a general report of their talent themes (Appendix E), a specific report of their uniqueness when the talent themes combine (Appendix F), and an action planning guide that informs practical action steps in developing their talents (Appendix G). The type of questions for this conversation is as follows:

- What was your initial impression of the reports you read?

- Have you shared your report(s) with anyone? What was their reaction?

- Was there a specific talent theme that particularly resonated with you?

- Do you think people see these themes of talent in you?

- Have you or anyone else ever misperceived your talent (i.e., with a negative connotation, they identified your talent as something negative)?

- How have your themes of talent helped you succeed in the past?

- What new discoveries did you learn?

- Did any part of the report surprise you?

The goal of the *naming* phase is to help the student gain awareness and make connections between their normative personality and the names of their themes of talents.

Claiming

This third part of the conversation helps students "take ownership" of their talent themes by asking critical questions about how their themes manifest in their lives. The

conversation overlaps with both the *naming* and the aiming stages because they should always claim their talents. In other words, claiming increases one's self-awareness and appreciation of who they are and what they naturally do. The questions for the claiming stage include the following:

- Which talent theme(s) most resonates with you and why?

- For which of your top-five talent themes do you want to be known? Identify at least two talent themes that define who you are and how you workday after day?

- Based on your talent themes, what sorts of activities do you seem to pick up and learn quickly?

- What activities do you automatically know the steps to be taken?

- During what activities have you had moments of subconscious excellence when you thought, "How did I do that?"

- What activities give you a "kick," either while doing them or immediately after finishing them, and you think, "When can I do that again?"

- What do you appreciate about yourself in a new or fresh way because of claiming your talent themes?

As the student claims their talents, the last phase is to practically help the student apply this knowledge towards practical goals, aims, and outcomes.

Aiming

The CliftonStrengths for Students assessment provides a profile of one's talents. With the investment of time by practicing, developing, and continually building one's knowledge of their talents, one can see their talent become a strength that produces near-perfect

performance consistently. For this phase of the coaching sessions, applying practical

"exercises" and asking application-type questions becomes the focus:

- What practical goals could we create over the next few days, weeks, months, and years? How could you apply your talents to fulfill these goals?

- Who are some critical partners that can help you achieve your goals?

- List the top-five most essential tasks in your life right now. What is one talent theme that can help you complete those tasks in a meaningful way?

- How might you use your talent themes to help you tackle your biggest challenges?

- Which of the given action planning steps in your reports can help you achieve your goals more effectively?

- Where do you see the connections between your talents and your desired goals or outcomes?

Intervention/Acting Phase: Workshop Agenda

For the two-hour session, the eight participants and I met over my university-sponsored Zoom room (i.e., online video call) from 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm on a Tuesday. Beforehand, I prepared Google folders for each participant, including their reports (see examples in Appendices F, G, and H), some general strengths resources, and some coaching cards that provide insights about their themes (i.e., some resources I use as a certified coach). I shared the cloud-based folders to their email so that the documents were accessible to them. We used the following plan to guide our workshop (Figure 2.3; see the full schedule in appendix I):

Figure 2.3

Brief Sketch of the Workshop Agenda

Topic 1.0. Welcome and Overview
- Welcome participants
- Facilitator biography, training, credentials, and faculty role at UK
- Overview of the day's activities.

Topic 1.1. Context of the CliftonStrengths
- I answered who, what, why, where, when, and how questions about the CliftonStrengths assessment.

Topic 2.0. Introductions
- Strengths-based introductions
- Introducing self to others

Topic 3.0. Claiming Our Strengths
- Create Groups of 2-3 people. Discuss a favorite signature theme. What was highlighted and why?

Topic 4.0. Claiming my #1 Theme
- In groups, each person took a statement (or two) from their Strengths Insight Guide and gave a brief commentary about why that statement applied in their lives.

Topic 5.0. Applying My Themes
- Identified an academic issue or problem. Created a Strengths-based academic plan based on one's themes to address the issue or problem.

Topic 6.0. Closing Remarks, Questions, and Comments
- Open time for comments or questions regarding the session.

Chapter 3: Evaluation, & Monitoring Phases

Introduction

Systems of constant evaluation and consistent analysis do not empower; they are indicators of a deficiency remediation educational model. Deficiency-remediation activities imply that something is wrong with the student and infers that remediation is required to get ready for university studies (Schreiner & Anderson, 2005). Thus, the problem lies in the perspective and the accompanying methods implemented based on this deficiency-remediation perspective. On the contrary, it is better to focus on how students can thrive by implementing strengths-focused interventions that empower students in what they do well and leverages their strengths to overcome areas of improvement. This strengths-focused perspective does not ignore or justify students' areas of improvement but leverages their strengths to overcome areas of deficiency.

This chapter will provide information regarding the evaluation and monitoring phases. At the end of the chapter, I share the study's implications, recommendations for informed leadership practice, and reflections of lessons learned from conducting action research.

Evaluation Phase

The evaluation phase compared the pre-and post-assessment data after completing the intervention phase. This phase further asked participants about their experience with the different elements of the intervention (i.e., their experiences with the assessment, the facilitator, their peers, and other workshop activities). It also asked participants about what they would change of the intervention. I triangulated all quantitative and qualitative data, and research from the literature to inform the monitoring phase.

Evaluation Phase: Research Questions

Integrated Mixed Methods Action Research Question

1. What are the effects of a strengths-focused faculty coaching intervention on first-year undergraduate student academic confidence as measured by pre-and post-measures of strengths awareness, strengths self-efficacy, an academic confidence survey, and an evaluation survey?

Evaluation Phase Quantitative Research Questions

1. What was the degree of change in the strengths awareness of the participants?

2. What was the degree of change in the strengths self-efficacy of the participants?

3. What impact did various elements of the strengths-focused workshop have on the participants?

Evaluation Phase Qualitative Research Questions

1. What effect did different elements of the workshop have on the participants' academic confidence?

2. What would the participants change about the faculty-led workshop intervention?

Strand 1: Quantitative Overview

After the strengths-focused faculty coaching intervention, I administered the Strengths Awareness Measure (SAM) and the Strengths Self-Efficacy Scale (SSES) to the participants. I then gave a final evaluation survey to see how different workshop elements affected their academic confidence. The five-item final evaluation survey measured the participants' agreements (1=*strongly disagree*, 3=*neutral*, 5=*strongly agree*) on academic confidence (e.g., "Did the workshop increase your academic confidence?", "Would you recommend this workshop to a friend?").

Strand 2: Qualitative Overview

At the end of the workshop intervention, the participants received a final email that included a Qualtrics survey link that had the final version of the SAM and SESS, some qualitative questions about their academic confidence (e.g., How did the workshop activities affect your academic confidence?"; "How did your fellow participants affect your academic confidence?"), and the final evaluation survey. I coded the responses to the evaluation qualitative questions to make sense of their comments to gain insights from the participants' experience. The participants completed the final workshop survey a few days after the workshop intervention ended.

Triangulation of Final Data

I developed meta-inferences by comparing the pre-and post-assessment data, the qualitative evaluation phase responses, and the responses to the final evaluation survey.

Pre-and Post-Quantitative Results

This first results section outlines the quantitative results of the evaluation phase of the study. The evaluation phase provided an opportunity for students to comment on how they perceived the intervention. The students also completed the post-assessment, thus showing comparisons between the mean scores of the pre-and post-assessments. The following results outline the two scales, SAM and SSES, into their themed questions that grouped four concepts: Strengths awareness, strengths understanding, strengths building, and strengths application.

Strengths Awareness Measure (SAM)

This section identifies the pre and post-test results based on the mean scores of the student participants' agreement to the statements of the SAM. The odd-numbered questions

of the SAM (e.g., Q1, Q3, Q5, Q7, & Q9) assessed different types of strengths awareness (e.g., "I can name my top five strengths"; "I know how my strengths impact my relationships."), of which I refer to as the "strengths awareness domain questions." The even-numbered questions of the SAM (e.g., Q2, Q4, Q6, Q8, & Q10) assessed different types of strengths understanding (e.g., "Understanding my strengths helps me do what I do best"; "I can see other people in light of their strengths."), of which I refer to as the "strengths understanding domain questions." The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients for the pre-SAM and the post-SAM were 0.60 and 0.80, respectively. The following subsections will specifically identify the mean score differences between the strengths awareness domain and the strengths understanding domain of the SAM.

Strengths Awareness Domain of the SAM. For the strengths awareness domain, the post-test scores ($M = 4.60$, $SD = .302$) were higher than the pre-test scores ($M = 3.58$, $SD = .420$), $t(7) = -4.37$, p < .01 (two-tailed), indicating participants increased in their overall agreement after the intervention (see Table 3.1).

For question one (Q1), no participants strongly agreed to name their top five strengths, yet after the intervention, all participants strongly agreed that they could name their top five strengths. For Q3, no participants strongly agreed that they knew how their strengths impacted their relationships. After the intervention, five of eight students strongly agreed they knew how their strengths affected their relationships. For Q5, seven of eight participants initially had a neutral response. After the intervention, one of eight students strongly agreed, while the rest had an agreeable response to Q5. For Q7, half of the participants strongly agreed they wanted to know the strengths of the people in their lives. After the intervention, all the participants strongly agreed with this idea. And on Q9, one

participant strongly agreed that they could easily relate what they are learning to who they are as a person. After the intervention, five of eight participants strongly agreed with this statement. Each question showed an increase in agreement after the intervention (see Table 3.1).

Strengths Understanding Domain of the SAM. For the strengths understanding domain, the post-test scores ($M = 4.76$, $SD = .385$) were higher than the pre-test scores ($M = 3.85$, $SD = .396$), $t(7) = -3.16$, p < .05 (two-tailed), indicating participants increased in their overall agreement after the intervention (see Table 3.1).

For the strengths understanding domain, four of the five questions showed an increase in agreement. The one question, Q4 (I like to learn about myself), showed a slight decrease in agreement from pre- to post-test. For Q2, initially one participant strongly agreed that their understanding helped them, yet after the intervention, five of eight students identified that they strongly agreed that their strengths help them do what they do best. For Q4, seven of eight participants initially strongly agreed that they liked to learn about themselves. After the intervention, a slight decrease occurred where only five of eight students identified that they strongly agreed. For Q6, initially, no participants strongly agreed that they knew how to apply their strengths to achieve academic and professional success. After the intervention, half of the students strongly agreed. For Q8, initially, two of the participants strongly agreed that they see other people in light of their strengths. After the intervention, seven of eight participants strongly agreed. For Q10, most participants were initially neutral in their agreement that they have a plan for developing their strengths. After the intervention, four of eight participants strongly agreed. Out of the five strengths understanding questions, four showed an increase in agreement after the intervention, and one showed a slight decrease.

68

Table 3.1

Pre and Post-Test Results for the Initial Strengths Awareness Measure (SAM)

Items	Pre-Test M (SD)	Post-Test M (SD)	t	df	p
Strength Awareness	**3.58 (.42)**	**4.60 (.30)**	**-4.37**	**7**	**.01***
Q1: I can name my top five strengths.	3.38 (.74)	5.00 (.00)			
Q3: I know how my strengths impact my relationships.	3.75 (.71)	4.50 (.76)			
Q5: Behaviors I used to see as irritating I now see as strengths.	2.88 (.35)	3.88 (.64)			
Q7: I want to know the strengths of the people in my life.	4.50 (.54)	5.00 (.00)			
Q9: I can easily relate what I am learning to who I am as a person.	3.38 (1.06)	4.63 (.52)			
Strengths Understanding	**3.85 (.40)**	**4.76 (.41)**	**-3.16**	**7**	**.05****
Q2: Understanding my strengths helps me do what I do best.	4.00 (.54)	4.63 (.52)			
Q4: I like to learn about myself.	4.88 (.35)	4.63 (.52)			
Q6: I know how to apply my strengths to achieve academic and professional success.	3.63 (.74)	4.5 (.54)			
Q8: I can see other people in light of their strengths.	3.88 (.84)	4.88 (.35)			
Q10: I have a plan for developing my strengths.	2.88 (.64)	4.25 (.89)			
Total	**3.71 (.32)**	**4.59 (.33)**			

Scale: 1=*Strongly disagree*, 3=*neutral*, 5=*strongly agree*
Significance levels: * = .01; ** = .05

Strengths Self-Efficacy Scale (SSES)

This section identifies the pre-and post-assessment results based on the mean scores of the student participants' confidence. Specific questions of the SSES (Q1, Q3, Q6, Q7, Q8, Q9, Q14, Q15) assessed the participants' confidence in applying their strengths (e.g., "Confidence in using your strengths at school"; "Confidence in using your strengths in many situations."), of which I refer to as the "strengths application domain." The balance of questions of the SSES (Q2, Q4, Q5, Q10, Q11, Q12, Q13, Q16) assessed the participants'

confidence in building (i.e., developing) their strengths (e.g., "Identify ways to build on existing strengths"; "Confidence in tracking the growth of your strengths over time"), of which I refer to as "strengths building domain." The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients for the pre-SSES and the post-SSES were 0.97 and 0.92, respectively. The following subsections will specifically identify the mean score differences between the strengths application domain and the strengths building domain of the SSES.

Strengths Application Domain of the SSES. For the strengths application domain, the post-test scores ($M = 8.50$, $SD = .913$) were higher than the pre-test scores ($M = 5.97$, $SD = 1.98$), $t(7) = -4.616$, p $< .01$ (two-tailed), indicating participants increased in their confidence after the intervention (see Table 3.5).

For each of the strengths application domain, most participants reported an increase in their confidence in each question after the intervention (see Table 3.6). For Q1 and Q7, two participants in each of those areas remained the same in their confidence before and after the intervention. For Q3 and Q6, all participants increased in their confidence. For Q8 & Q9, one participant in each of those areas remained the same in confidence. For Q14, one participant remained the same in confidence, and another participant decreased in confidence after the intervention. Finally, one participant in Q15 decreased in confidence after the intervention.

Strengths Building Domain of the SSES. For each of the strengths-building questions, the overall mean scores showed an increase in the participants' confidence in each question after the intervention (see Table 3.7). Most participants increased their confidence after the intervention. The post-test scores ($M = 8.06$, $SD = 1.04$) were higher than the pre-test scores ($M = 5.09$, $SD = 1.75$), $t(7) = -6.013$, p $< .01$ (two-tailed).

While mean confidence levels increased in these strengths building domain (see Table 3.8), some participants reported equal or slightly lower confidence. For Q2, two participants remained the same in their confidence after the intervention. For Q4 & Q10, one participant for each item decreased in their confidence. For Q5, Q11, & Q12, one participant for each item remained the same in their confidence.

Table 3.2

Pre and Post-Test Results for Strengths Self-Efficacy Scale (SSES; N = 8)

Items	Pre-Test M (SD)	Post-Test M (SD)	t	df	p
Strength Application	**5.97 (1.98)**	**8.50 (.913)**	**-4.62**	**7**	**.002***
Q1: Use your strengths at school?	6.25 (2.12)	8.38 (1.19)			
Q3: Use your strengths without any struggles?	4.50 (2.39)	7.63 (1.77)			
Q6: Accomplish a lot by using your strengths?	5.75 (2.32)	9.00 (1.07)			
Q7: Apply your strengths at school?	6.38 (2.33)	8.38 (1.19)			
Q8: Use your strengths in many situations?	6.13 (1.96)	8.88 (.99)			
Q9: Use your strengths to succeed?	6.75 (2.44)	8.63 (1.19)			
Q14: Use your strengths at any time?	5.88 (2.64)	8.38 (.92)			
Q15: Use your strengths to help you achieve your goals in life?	6.13 (1.96)	8.75 (1.28)			
Strengths Building	**5.09 (1.75)**	**8.06 (1.04)**	**-6.01**	**7**	**.016****
Q2: Identify ways to build on existing strengths?	5.00 (2.00)	7.50 (1.07)			
Q4: Track the growth of your strengths overtime?	4.25 (2.61)	7.25 (1.28)			
Q5: Find ways to apply your strengths in the things you do every day?	5.75 (1.83)	8.50 (1.20)			
Q10: Determine how to build on your current strengths?	4.13 (1.89)	7.88 (1.46)			
Q11: Utilize several strategies for enhancing your strengths?	4.13 (1.96)	7.50 (1.85)			
Q12: Identify a strength that you need to use to accomplish a task?	6.13 (2.70)	8.38 (1.85)			
Q13: Find ways to use your strengths at school every day?	5.63 (2.20)	8.50 (1.51)			
Q16: Practice your strengths in areas where you excel?	5.75 (2.44)	9.00 (.76)			
Total	**5.53 (.183)**	**8.28 (.90)**			

Scale of 1 = low confidence, 5 = moderate confidence, 10 = high confidence
Significant levels * = .01; ** = .05

Final Survey Quantitative Results

I asked five additional questions on a final evaluation survey to get more information

about the participants' perception of the intervention. The participants had a high agreement

with each of the questions asked on the survey (i.e., all responses were above a 4.38 mean

score on a 5-point scale; see Table 3.9 below). The highest agreement (4.88 mean score) was regarding the item "Workshop increased self-awareness of strengths." The lowest agreement (4.38 mean score) were two items: "I have more confidence because of the things learned from the workshop" and "I would regularly attend a workshop like this to continue development of self-awareness of my strengths."

Table 3.3

Participant Agreement in the Final Evaluation of the Intervention

	Workshop increased academic confidence?	Workshop increased self-awareness of strengths?	More confidence because of the things learned from the workshop	Would regularly attend a workshop like this to continue development of self-awareness of strengths	Recommend workshop to a friend?
P1	4	5	4	5	5
P2	5	5	5	3	5
P3	4	5	4	5	5
P4	4	5	4	4	5
P5	4	4	4	4	4
P6	5	5	5	5	5
P7	5	5	4	5	5
P8	5	5	5	4	4
Mean Scores	4.50	4.88	4.38	4.38	4.75

Scale: 1=*Strongly disagree*, 3=*neutral*, 5=*strongly agree*

Qualitative Results

For this section, I analyzed the qualitative data using a priori coding from Lopez and Louis' (2009) five principles of strengths-based education. A priori codes are codes "from another researcher or key concepts in a theoretical construct" (Stuckley, 2015, p. 8). The

participants' qualitative responses aligned well with each strengths-based educational principle.

Remembering and Honoring the Principles of Strengths-Focused Education

As stated in Chapter 1, Lopez and Louis (2009) identified a five-part framework for implementing a strengths-focused educational model. They outlined that an educational leader should first assess the students' strengths and talents (i.e., recognize the student's normative personality and habits) to assist students more personally in their development. Secondly, a leader should provide students with an individualized academic experience according to the student's area of strengths. Third, students need a community of like-minded counterparts who will encourage and reinforce their strengths development process by supporting their efforts (e.g., mentorship, networking, student-to-student partnerships). Fourth, students need a deliberate application of their strengths inside and outside the classroom. Lastly, leaders and students need to intentionally seek new experiences and purposely create a strengths growth plan.

The principles are used as a framework to create initiatives that could potentially create a strengths-focused academic culture. Thus, the following section provides the results of the qualitative portion of the evaluation phase of the study with a focus on the participants' perceptions of how the strengths-based coaching intervention affected them.

Principle One: Start with Assessing the Strengths of Each Student. I asked the participants how the CliftonStrengths assessment tool affected their academic confidence. I hypothesized their initial knowledge of their personalized strengths gave them a starting place, but the CliftonStrengths assessment did provide a common language to help both the

student and me understand their normative personality; it became a great tool. For instance, Participant 2 said,

> I feel that I now have a better ability to apply my strengths to my academic work. Having a list of my top 5 strengths right in front of me seems to give me a better understanding of when and how to use them.

Participant 3 included, "It [referring to the assessment results] showed me what I'm good at and allowed me to see how it could use it in school." Participant 4 spoke with almost a sigh of relief:

> Having strengths assigned to me based on my results was helpful for me. I dislike having to determine what my strengths are and having them given allowed for me to make the connections and relate the skills to my life directly. Knowing that the strengths I assign myself are similar to that of the assessment help bring clarity for me on how I function in school and life.

Since I assessed the students first, I better individualized the learning experience during the intervention phase. The following principle identified the importance of individualizing the learning experience.

Principle Two: Individualize the Learning Experience. Students were hopeful that their experience with the intervention and their knowledge of their strengths were unique and personal. This knowledge empowered them to seek personal experiences and ways to navigate their academic experience. For example, Participant 7, speaking about me as the facilitator, shared, "He was very encouraging and helped us understand where we can individually succeed." Participant 6 hinted at how I saw them as special,

I now have much more confidence in my personality overall. I've never really been

able to look at myself objectively and identify what makes me special. I believe the

facilitator showed me that I am special in my own way and that I can use those

specialties in my academic career to not only succeed but to motivate myself to want

to succeed.

Therefore, the students showed their recognition of how individualization is an essential

aspect of their journey to boost their academic confidence.

Principle Three: Develop and Reinforce Strengths in Community with Others.

Completing the intervention with other participants helped students see the value of doing

strengths development activities together, especially when there are some similarities in their

identified strengths. For example, Participant 1 saw the benefit of working with others:

It was interesting to see how others saw their strengths and where those overlapped

with another it allowed a new perspective to be shown on that strength. It helped to

understand that there are different meanings of the strength and therefore more ways

to increase academic confidence.

Participant 2 used their peers as a benchmark:

Seeing how other people are similar and different from me as far as strengths are

concerned has also boosted my academic confidence because I see where I fair better

and worse than others and know what I need to build on to succeed further.

Strengths development within a community can help students be encouraged by seeing others

working out their strengths.

Principle Four: Deliberately Apply Strengths Inside and Outside of the

Classroom. Applying one's natural talents to an appropriate means can help solidify the

understanding of talent, and its regular usage can transition that talent into a strength. A few examples included Participant 1 speaking of how the interaction with their strengths increased learning, "The activities allowed us to interact with our strengths and learn more about them and how they affect us." Participant 2 mentioned the empowerment received to succeed:

> In talking to other students about their strengths and being able to share how I apply my own strengths, I gained some more perspective on ways to operate in the academic setting. Each activity had me paired with a new peer, so I heard a lot about other people have similar and different strengths. I feel that with talking out my own strengths I am more equipped for the academic setting.

Principle Five: Develop a Growth Plan to Develop One's Strengths. The participants identified that they have a plan for growth in developing their strengths and understand themselves better. The goal of this fifth principle is "to help students consider their own responsibility in deliberately, attentively developing their strengths through practice and engagement in novel experiences" (Lopez & Louis, 2009, p. 5). Examples included Participant 4, who recognized that this is a long journey:

> The workshop as a whole was an amazing experience that has opened the door to self-growth in all areas including academic confidence. After the workshop I feel I am more confident in myself in relation to academic confidence, but I know there is still a long road ahead of this that will allow me to use skills to better my confidence."

Further, Participant 2 understood the value of the session,

> The facilitator explained at the end of the session that some strengths interact with each other and create different strengths within themselves, and went into a little

depth, which made me realize that some of my strengths play off of each other and if used correctly, can greatly benefit me academically.

Qualitative Results of Final Evaluation Survey

Regarding the qualitative portion of the final evaluation survey, I asked the participants to evaluate the intervention. Three significant patterns emerged. The first theme was to *conduct the sessions face-to-face.* For instance, participant 2 identified:

The only thing I would change is something that really is not controllable. I think the workshop would be even. more helpful and beneficial if it was in person…I think that being face to face could only make those conversations better.

Participant 7, with perceived emphasis, shared, "In person! But I know COVID makes that difficult/impossible."

The second theme that emerged was to *increase the interaction time between the participants.* For instance, participant 1 stated, "I wish we had more time to connect with others, just to talk more about how our strengths helped us and how they can relate with one another."

Finally, the third theme that emerged was to *make the group(s) smaller.* Thoughts from the participants helped me think about what to do next time. I will consider doing most activities with a maximum of three people in a group, although I did do some activities with two and three people. For example, Participant 4 said, "I would possibly make the group smaller so that the entire time you can focus with the same people, while still doing the activities." Participant 6 said, "I'm not sure if it would be possible or even effective but if you could cut down the groups by half so that it's a bit more intimate." The final evaluation survey helped me think about what type of environment I would create for the next time.

Monitoring Phase

This study included eight student participants affiliated with a specific living-learning community at the University of Kentucky. Their evaluation of the intervention informs some future action steps. First, it is crucial to apply this intervention in other contexts to see its effectiveness in a face-to-face environment and a smaller group context. Secondly, this group either agreed or strongly agreed that this workshop and its activities increased their overall academic confidence; therefore, there is potential for other students to benefit from the session. Thus, monitoring how the second implementation of this study applies is essential, particularly in the context of a different population that is face-to-face (as opposed to video-chat) and with smaller group moments (e.g., groups of 3-4 students interacting for more extended periods).

Furthermore, I recognize that I did not welcome the stakeholders to help craft the intervention after the reconnaissance phase. It would be helpful and exciting to gather insights from all stakeholders (e.g., faculty, staff) in the reconnaissance and planning phases to help further develop an effective intervention. This step would further help eliminate some of my potential biases.

Recommendations

Inherently, the educational process may intend for students to learn new skills and techniques to help them progress in their development of academic insight. Yet, the methods by which it happens can invoke a lack of confidence because of its demands. The demands sometimes require students to constantly complete assignments by means different from their natural strengths, doing things outside of their areas of strength, and reporting their work in ways that may be unnatural to their personality. The formal American educational process

79

leans toward a deficiency-remediation model of educating students rather than a strengths-based model, implying that students come with deficiencies (i.e., problems). The process infers that issues need to be addressed instead of starting with the perspective of natural talents can be leveraged and strengthened. Thus, some recommendations of how a strengths-focused model could help enhance academic confidence are needed. The following recommendations remember and honor the principles of strengths-based education.

Create Strengths-Focused Interventions

During the reconnaissance phase of the study, students provided vague responses to the question about what gifts, talents, or strengths they have that make them academically confident. They said things like "good at figuring out problems" or other things like "leader" or "good listener" or "good at memorizing." While these are descriptors of good traits or values, they are not specific to a conceptualized natural talent (e.g., able to process and archive large amounts of data or prefer working in small groups with familiar people). In other words, many people are leaders, yet they lead with different natural talents and strengths. Many people figure out various problems or listen well, yet they do it in unique ways according to one's unique personality. Thus, not having a conceptualize specific knowledge or training in assessing what uniquely makes one a leader, or a listener, or a memorizer, can keep a person satisfied with identifying their skillset in vague and abstract terms.

The strengths-focused intervention helped individuals conceptualize and recognize what makes them unique and specific in their talent profile, helping them develop specific plans to grow those talents into strengths. For instance, if one were to liken this talent development journey to the experience of a person who hires a personal trainer to help them

lose weight, one of the first steps of the journey is to do a personal assessment of that individual's body composition (e.g., body fat composition, weight, cholesterol levels, metabolism rate testing). These metrics first help the personal trainer get an idea of the *specifics* of their client's body so the trainer can create specific and unique activities to help the client progress and reach their goals. Such is the aim in strengths-based coaching. By avoiding the use of vague terms or non-assessed information (hinderances to charting progress), real progress is made.

The corporate world continues to incorporate personal coaching, professional development workshops, and mentorship opportunities for their leaders and employees. Some organizations have created an organizational culture around the concept of personal growth and development. This same concept could be emulated in higher education, especially if the academy is the training ground for students to become future business professionals. If the logic is correct that the purpose of higher education is to prepare students, a straightforward implication from this study is to create environments for students to develop and grow without the demands of grades or projects. Such environments could give them the freedom to "exercise" what they have learned about themselves from a workshop or training and apply it to their academic activities, potentially increasing their performance.

Create Environments for Small-Group Connections about Talents and Strengths

Participants commented on how they wish the study was face-to-face (compared to Zoom-enabled because of CoVID-19 restrictions) and how the workshops should have less participants (or how they enjoyed the smaller groupings). This implies students enjoy opportunities to express and receive insights from fellow schoolmates in smaller settings.

These smaller group events could reinforce what an individual student is learning about themselves and provide a "think-tank" for students to explore their journey as higher education students. As one student participant said: "I wish we had more time to connect with others, just to talk more about how our strengths helped us and how they can relate with one another." A two-hour interactive intervention was just not enough for these students.

Create Fun and Engaging Personal Development Activities

Conducting this type of research during a global pandemic did not allow for large-group interactive social events that tend to be perceived as fun and engaging. Therefore, my strategies were adjusted to accommodate for the mandated physical distancing. Using Zoom meant that natural face-to-face elements had to be recreated videoconference, leading me to use methods like group discussions, break-out rooms, short lectures, screen share options, break times, and private reflective moments. I perceived success in this area because one participant 6 said it best:

> Usually, I have trouble focusing in Zoom meetings. 50 minutes (the duration of my typical class) is sometimes really difficult for me. However, I didn't have that problem at all during the workshop. I felt engaged the entire time and I genuinely enjoyed the experience.

The diversity of activities influenced the students to stay engaged and to continue participating in the two-hour workshop.

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Implications

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Many first-year student initiatives focus on remediating student deficiencies to help them succeed according to higher education's demands (e.g., tutoring, remedial courses, other student support services). Yet, these initiatives may never focus on helping students

leverage their unique gifts, talents, or strengths to accomplish the required academic expectations, leaving some not able to survive university life (i.e., dropout). Much research has identified how faculty have a significant impact on students. This study affirms this through the incorporation of a faculty-led strengths development model for first-year undergraduate students.

The three crucial implications of this study are that, firstly, students claimed that most intervention elements increased their academic confidence, implying that it is vital to create workshops like this study. Secondly, the students desire meaningful small-group connections talking around their talents and strengths, for I perceived that they want to learn more about who they are and what makes them unique. Lastly, I perceive that students enjoyed strengths-focused activities that focus on who they are and their personal development; they seemed empowered.

Implications Considering Student Development Theory (SDT)

Considering SDT, administrators should reinforce strengths-based education in higher education institutions to empower students' long-term development. This study was framed with a concept that undergird SDT, constructivist developmentalism. Figure 3.1 gives a visual representation of how strengths-focused education and constructivist developmentalism coincide to create implications and strategies. Community (-ies) must surround first-year undergraduate students to increase their academic confidence. These communities must include faculty, peers, and mentors willing to help the students develop. Also, assessments that help students learn of their natural talents, strengths, and normative personality help increase one's cognitive complexity. Assessments allow for a more personalized experience and give the students practical skills to leverage what is natural to

them to accomplish specific goals. Last, once a student conceptualizes and learns how to

apply self-identifying concepts they receive, a student with greater levels of academic

confidence seemingly is the outcome.

Figure 3.1

Visual Representation of the Relationship of Constructivist Developmentalism and Strengths-

Based Education
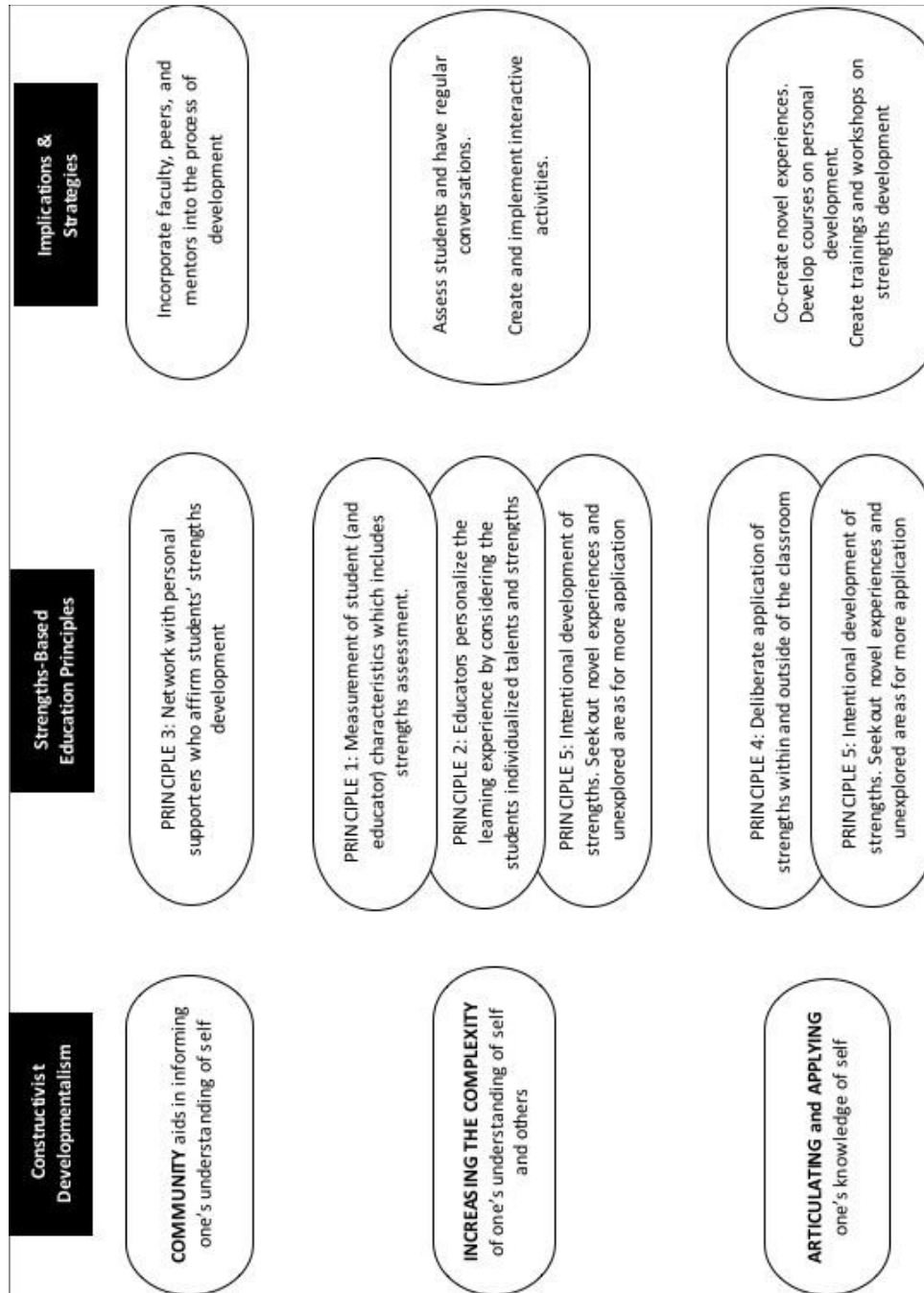
Reflections

Through action-research, I found out that I could research my leadership practice without having to pursue some novel topic; this was helpful and freeing. I do not necessarily desire to be a researcher in higher education. Yet, I do desire to be a practitioner-scholar, building and creating academic endeavors whose improvement can be bolstered by action research. This is the reason I chose to pursue a Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership Studies instead of a Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Leadership Studies.

Further, since I am certified by the Gallup Research Organization as a strengths coach and a faculty lecturer in higher education, I felt it was vital for me to conduct research that merges the two major activities of my life: coaching and teaching. The action-research process challenged me to take years of conversations and experiences with my students, colleagues, and clients, understand their problems and experiences and create potential solutions to help them succeed. This dissertation conceptualizes about a decade of those conversations, failures, struggles, observations, and trials. As I finalize this process, I hope to have a concept I could export to others to help them see organizational changes in their places of influence.

Lessons Learned

I have learned a lot about organizational change and its necessity in higher education. The higher education academy is not perfect. Those of us who work for and influence the academy must deal with the significant issues of society because it can be expected of us to lead in the creation of knowledge (i.e., epistemology). Who will create the new initiatives? Who will lead the society with new insights regarding societal issues and problems? Who will empower the next generation to continue with undertakings too big for one generation?

86

These are all questions I ponder when considering organizational change because of the weightiness of the responsibility and the importance of how the higher education academy influences society. Thus, organizational change must create shifts in the academy relevant to the current culture and empower others to impact their communities.

Moreover, leading organizational change requires recognizing the multi-faceted deficiencies and problems in the organization and society that need fixing and learning how to influence changes to correct those deficiencies and problems. I learned through this study that I intend to address a mindset prevalent in the higher education academy: a deficiency-remediation model of education. As Anderson (2005) notes:

> I was very much influenced by what I refer to as the deficit-remediation educational model, which has been predominant in education for decades. Programs and services based on the model are dedicated to "fixing" the student by first diagnosing student needs, problems, ignorance, concerns, defects, and deficits. Those who use the deficit-remediation model must design classes, workshops, programs, and services to help students improve in areas for which they are under-prepared. Based on the diagnosis, participation in remedial programs and services is often required. Students are usually prevented from pursuing other areas of study and from pursuing their interests until their deficits have been removed and their "problems" have been overcome. (p. 181).

As such, students are not "college material" until they reach an expected standard or remediate their deficiencies. That focus can be a load of pressure on students who do not inherently have the natural skills that the higher education academy would expect. What would happen if this mindset shifted, and the higher education academy took a strengths-

focused approach and saw their students empowered by implementing this positive psychology approach? If this happened, I would foresee students empowered to want to go to class, empowered in their learning, empowered to engage their communities of support, and well-trained in their unique skills, talents, and strengths.

This action-research project taught me a formal way to understand the research surrounding a topic, consider the different mixed methods strategies, and learn techniques on how to evaluate data. Unfortunately, my first time learning how to find, read, and use empirical research was when I started researching my dissertation topic. Before this time, I did not understand, know, or read empirical studies; I read more secondary research and popular media articles from journalists. Regarding the consideration of different mixed-methods strategies, I appreciate and honor Ivankova's (2015) work to help me navigate the process; it was so helpful. For instance, distinguishing between a concurrent qualitative-quantitative strategy or a sequential quantitative-qualitative were essential skills to consider the best way to proceed when designing a study. Finally, I appreciated the growth in learning how to evaluate both the quantitative and qualitative data I gathered, especially the concepts of meta-inferences and triangulation. Mixed methods action research has fundamentally marked and propelled my professional career.

Now that I am at the completion of my work, I recognize that my work applies best to smaller sets of students (i.e., possibly ten or less), needs interactivity (i.e., students must engage with the facilitator and their peers), and requires resources (i.e., each assessment code costs $19.99). A number of the large-scale strengths-based interventions I have read about was predominately quantitative and did not include much about faculty-student interactions. My study has a faculty-student component and incorporates both quantitative and qualitative

measures. Furthermore, I recognize that this generation of student learners want to express themselves and interact with the faculty member and their peers. Thus, a lecture-heavy or content heavy curriculum is not a good strategy. Allowing for the students to engage one-another and the faculty facilitator will potentially maximum the engagement of the students. Lastly, I realize that an intervention like this study would require significant resources. The faculty facilitator would need to be trained in the SBE model along with receive training in using the CliftonStrengths tool. In addition, it would cost $19.99 to assess each student participant. I look forward to hearing about how this work may benefit other institutions looking to increase the academic confidence of their first-year undergraduate students using a strengths-based faculty coaching intervention.

Appendices

APPENDIX A: Letter of Permission from Director of IHRC

University of Kentucky
College of Health Sciences
Office of Student Affairs
111 Wethington Building
Lexington, KY 40536
P: 859-218-6582

May 20, 2020

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to state that I support Conrad Davies research project analyzing the impact of a two-hour Strengths workshop intervention on students' self-awareness and self-efficacy. It's my understanding that he will be running a pre/post design on undergraduates. As the director of the Interprofessional Healthcare Residential College (IHRC), I have given him permission to recruit participants for the study from IHRC LLP pending IRB approval.

Conrad currently serves as an instructor for the IHRC. However, there are plenty of IHRC students who will be in sections of our connected coursework for which he is not the instructor. I believe these students in particular would provide a wonderful participant pool for his recruitment efforts and believe participation in the study would ultimately benefit the students themselves.

Please don't hesitate to let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Brendan O'Farrell, PhD
Director
IHRC (Interprofessional Healthcare Residential College)
The University of Kentucky
brendan.ofarrell@uky.edu

APPENDIX B: IRB Approved Participant Invitation Letter

Dear Potential Research Participant:

My name is Conrad Davies, the Principal Investigator (PI) of a research study on the effects of a faculty-led strengths coaching workshop on first-year undergraduate student academic confidence.

You are invited to take part in my study if you are 18 years old or older, and you are a first-year undergraduate student at the University of Kentucky. I thank you for your interest in this study.

First of all, your instructors will not know if you take part in this study, thus your participation will not affect your grades or your academic standing.

You may or may not get personal benefit from taking part in this research study, yet your responses might help us understand more about first year undergraduate student confidence building. Some research volunteers experience satisfaction from knowing they have contributed to research that may possibly benefit others in the future.

You will take an online initial survey/questionnaire (about 10 minutes to complete). You will then receive one free code via email to one of the world's most popular talent assessments called CliftonStrengths for Students ($20 value). After completing the CliftonStrengths for Students online assessment (about 30-45 minutes), you will participate in an online two-hour faculty-led strengths development and awareness workshop using Zoom software. The Zoom link will be sent after the completion of the assessment. Finally, you will complete a final online survey/questionnaire along with an evaluation survey (about 10 minutes total).

There are no known risks to participating in this study.

Your responses to the surveys will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law. When we write about the study you will not be identified. Identifiable information such as your name or UK ID will be removed from the information collected in this study. After removal, the information may be used for future research or shared with other researchers without your additional informed consent.

We estimate participation from about 25 students, so your answers are important to us. Of course, you have a choice about whether or not to complete the survey/questionnaire, and if you do participate, you are free to skip any questions or discontinue at any time.

Please be aware, while we make every effort to safeguard your data once received from the online survey company, given the nature of online surveys, as with anything involving the Internet, we can never guarantee the confidentiality of the data while still on the survey company's servers, or while en route to either them or us. It is also possible the raw data collected for research purposes will be used for marketing or reporting purposes by the survey/data gathering company after the research is concluded, depending on the company's Terms of Service and Privacy policies. During the group workshop, there is no way to guarantee confidentiality because I cannot prevent other workshop attendees from sharing information outside of the workshop.

If you have questions about the study, please feel free to ask; my contact information is given below. If you have complaints, suggestions, or questions about your rights as a research volunteer, contact the staff in the University of Kentucky Office of Research Integrity at 859-257-9428 or toll-free at 1-866-400-9428.

Thank you in advance for your assistance with this important project. To ensure your responses/opinions will be included, please complete your survey/questionnaire within one week of receipt of this letter.

Sincerely,

Conrad A. Davies, Doctoral Candidate
*College of Education @ T*he University of Kentucky

Appendix C: An Example of Email Response to a Participant Who Completed the

Assessment

Hi, [Participant Name]!

Thanks for completing the assessment.

You have just started a phenomenal journey!

Based on my initial glance at your signature themes, I sense that you may not like conflict and probably like to listen to all sides of a story or an argument or a situation. I bet you are quite knowledgeable about people and their lives.

As I prepare to work with you, I get this sense you may like history, especially people's history (e.g., their background, experiences, worldview). I also sense that you are deeply intuitive or just know different things about people. It makes me think that you can meet someone and "read" them quite well.

I just keep getting this sense that you are really, really, really "people smart". I believe you are book and academically smart, but my thoughts really lean towards you being really smart with people. You probably know people well, can articulate what's happening with them, and can intuitively understand them.

These are just some thoughts before I work with you on Tuesday.

I look forward to working with you (7:00pm, Tuesday, September 29, 2020 over Zoom).

Please be sure to mark your calendar, read through the reports beforehand, and let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

See you soon!!

Conrad A. Davies, Sr.
Sent from my iPad

Office: (859) 218-3410
Cell: (615) 739-4699
Email: Conrad.Davies@uky.edu

Initial Demographic Questions

● University of Kentucky Identification Number (UK ID)

Initial Strengths Awareness Measure

Think about how you are feeling right now as you answer each question below. Please rate your agreement with each of the items by using a 1 to 5 scale, with 1 indicating "strongly disagree" and 5 indicating "strongly agree."

	SD				SA
1. I can name my top five strengths.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Understanding my strengths helps me do what I do best.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I know how my strengths impact my relationships.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I like to learn about myself.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Behaviors I used to see as irritating I now see as strengths.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I can see other people in light of their strengths.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I know how to apply my strengths to achieve academic success.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I want to know the strengths of the people in my life.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I can easily relate what I am learning to who I am as a person.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I have a plan for developing my strengths.	1	2	3	4	5

Initial Strengths Self-Efficacy Scale

Please respond to each of the following items thoughtfully. There are no right or wrong answers. Use the 10-point scale below to rate each of the statements as it applies to you.

0= Not at all Confident   5=Moderately Confident   10=Extremely Confident

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

How confident are you in your ability to...?

1. _____ use your strengths at school?
2. _____ identify ways to build on existing strengths?
3. _____ use your strengths without any struggles?
4. _____ track the growth of your strengths overtime?
5. _____ find ways to apply your strengths in the things you do every day?
6. _____ accomplish a lot by using your strengths?

7. _____ apply your strengths at school?
8. _____ use your strengths in many situations?
9. _____ use your strengths to succeed?
10. _____ determine how to build on your current strengths?
11. _____ utilize several strategies for enhancing your strengths?
12. _____ identify a strength that you need to use to accomplish a task?
13. _____ find ways to use your strengths at school every day?
14. _____ use your strengths at any time?
15. _____ use your strengths to help you achieve your goals in life?
16. _____ practice your strengths in areas where you excel?

Qualitative Questions

For the questions below, the term "academic confidence" is viewed as the extent of a student's belief, expectation, or trust in their own ability to perform an academic task in order to attain an academic goal (Sander & Sanders, 2005; Sander & Sanders, 2006).

Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability.

1. What gifts, talents, or strengths do you have that make you academically confident?
2. What helps you to build academic confidence?
3. Who helps you to build academic confidence?
4. When do you feel most academically confident?
5. Why is academic confidence important?
6. Any other comments about how you gain academic confidence?

References:

Sander, P., & Sanders, L. (2005). Giving presentation: the impact on students' perception. *Psychological Learning and Technology, 11*(1), 25-41.

Sander, P., & Sanders, L. (2006). Understanding academic confidence. *Psychology Teaching Review, 12*(1), 29-42.

Appendix E: Final Strengths Awareness Measure (SAM), Final Strengths Self-Efficacy

Scale (SSES), and Evaluation Qualitative Questions

Final Demographic Questions

- University of Kentucky Identification Number (UK ID)

Final Strengths Awareness Measure

Think about how you are feeling right now as you answer each question below. Please rate your agreement with each of the items by using a 1 to 5 scale, with 1 indicating "strongly disagree" and 5 indicating "strongly agree."

	SD SA
1. I can name my top five strengths.	1 2 3 4 5
2. Understanding my strengths helps me do what I do best.	1 2 3 4 5
3. I know how my strengths impact my relationships.	1 2 3 4 5
4. I like to learn about myself.	1 2 3 4 5
5. Behaviors I used to see as irritating I now see as strengths.	1 2 3 4 5
6. I can see other people in light of their strengths.	1 2 3 4 5
7. I know how to apply my strengths to achieve academic success.	1 2 3 4 5
8. I want to know the strengths of the people in my life.	1 2 3 4 5
9. I can easily relate what I am learning to who I am as a person.	1 2 3 4 5
10. I have a plan for developing my strengths.	1 2 3 4 5

Final Strengths Self-Efficacy Scale

Please respond to each of the following items thoughtfully. There are no right or wrong answers. Use the 10-point scale below to rate each of the statements as it applies to you.

0= Not at all Confident   5=Moderately Confident   10=Extremely Confident

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

How confident are you in your ability to...?

1. _____ use your strengths at school?
2. _____ identify ways to build on existing strengths?
3. _____ use your strengths without any struggles?
4. _____ track the growth of your strengths overtime?
5. _____ find ways to apply your strengths in the things you do every day?
6. _____ accomplish a lot by using your strengths?

7. _____ apply your strengths at school?
8. _____ use your strengths in many situations?
9. _____ use your strengths to succeed?
10. _____ determine how to build on your current strengths?
11. _____ utilize several strategies for enhancing your strengths?
12. _____ identify a strength that you need to use to accomplish a task?
13. _____ find ways to use your strengths at school every day?
14. _____ use your strengths at any time?
15. _____ use your strengths to help you achieve your goals in life?
16. _____ practice your strengths in areas where you excel?

Final Evaluation Questions

To the best of your ability, please evaluate the faculty-led strengths-focused workshop intervention.

For the questions below, the term "academic confidence" is viewed as the extent of a student's belief, expectation, or trust in their own ability to perform an academic task in order to attain an academic goal (Sander & Sanders, 2005; Sander & Sanders, 2006).

Evaluate the two-hour workshop session by reflecting on the following statements. Please rate your agreement with each of the items by using a 1 to 5 scale, with 1 indicating "strongly disagree" and 5 indicating "strongly agree."

Quantitative Questions:

		SD	SA
1.	The workshop increased my academic confidence.	1 2 3 4 5	
2.	The workshop increased the self-awareness of my strengths	1 2 3 4 5	
3.	I have more confidence because of the things learned from the workshop.	1 2 3 4 5	
4.	I would regularly attend a workshop like this to continue the development of self-awareness of my strengths.	1 2 3 4 5	
5.	I would recommend this workshop to a friend	1 2 3 4 5	

Qualitative Question:
What would you change about the workshop intervention?

For the next section, comment on different elements of the workshop and how it may have affected your academic confidence. Answer to the best of your ability.

1. The results of the CliftonStrengths for Students assessment?
2. The faculty facilitator?
3. The fellow workshop participants?

4. The workshop activities?
5. Any other elements of the workshop?
6. Any other comments about your academic confidence?

References:

Sander, P., & Sanders, L. (2005). Giving presentation: the impact on students' perception. *Psychological Learning and Technology, 11*(1), 25-41.

Sander, P., & Sanders, L. (2006). Understanding academic confidence. *Psychology Teaching Review, 12*(1), 29-42.

GALLUP   **CliftonStrengths**

Conrad Davies

SURVEY COMPLETION DATE: 06-15-2015

Many years of research conducted by The Gallup Organization suggest that the most effective people are those who understand their strengths and behaviors. These people are best able to develop strategies to meet and exceed the demands of their daily lives, their careers, and their families.

A review of the knowledge and skills you have acquired can provide a basic sense of your abilities, but an awareness and understanding of your natural talents will provide true insight into the core reasons behind your consistent successes.

Your Signature Themes report presents your five most dominant themes of talent, in the rank order revealed by your responses to StrengthsFinder. Of the 34 themes measured, these are your "top five."

Your Signature Themes are very important in maximizing the talents that lead to your successes. By focusing on your Signature Themes, separately and in combination, you can identify your talents, build them into strengths, and enjoy personal and career success through consistent, near-perfect performance.

Input

You are inquisitive. You collect things. You might collect information—words, facts, books, and quotations—or you might collect tangible objects such as butterflies, baseball cards, porcelain dolls, or sepia photographs. Whatever you collect, you collect it because it interests you. And yours is the kind of mind that finds so many things interesting. The world is exciting precisely because of its infinite variety and complexity. If you read a great deal, it is not necessarily to refine your theories but, rather, to add more information to your archives. If you like to travel, it is because each new location offers novel artifacts and facts. These can be acquired and then stored away. Why are they worth storing? At the time of storing it is often hard to say exactly when or why you might need them, but who knows when they might become useful? With all those possible uses in mind, you really don't feel comfortable throwing anything away. So you keep acquiring and compiling and filing stuff away. It's interesting. It keeps your mind fresh. And perhaps one day some of it will prove valuable.

GALLUP®   CliftonStrengths®

Conrad Davies

Strengths Insight Report

SURVEY COMPLETION DATE: 06-15-2015

Input

SHARED THEME DESCRIPTION

People exceptionally talented in the Input theme have a need to collect and archive. They may accumulate information, ideas, artifacts or even relationships.

YOUR PERSONALIZED STRENGTHS INSIGHTS
What makes you stand out?

Chances are good that you probably help your teammates understand the pieces, parts, or steps of elaborate procedures or systems. You are likely to outline how all the human or material resources are scheduled for distribution. Driven by your talents, you long to know more so you remain on the cutting edge of your field or areas of interest. Your inventive mind usually generates more possibilities than you can handle or fund. Nonetheless, you are committed to acquiring knowledge and/or skills. You study everything involved in a situation and conceive entirely new ways of seeing or doing things. What you already know prompts you to ask questions and delve even deeper into a subject or problem. Instinctively, you feel rather good about life when people answer your questions and keep you well informed about topics that affect you personally or professionally. You prefer to be bombarded with facts, data, or explanations. Receiving only bits and pieces of information is likely to

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Section II: Application

Input

IDEAS FOR ACTION:

Look for jobs in which you are charged with acquiring new information each day, such as teaching, research, or journalism.

Devise a system to store and easily locate information. This can be as simple as a file for all the articles you have clipped or as sophisticated as a computer database.

Partner with someone with dominant Focus or Discipline talents. This person will help you stay on track when your inquisitiveness leads you down intriguing but distracting avenues.

Your mind is open and absorbent. You naturally soak up information in the same way that a sponge soaks up water. But just as the primary purpose of the sponge is not to permanently contain what it absorbs, neither should your mind simply store information. Input without output can lead to stagnation. As you gather and absorb information, be aware of the individuals and groups that can most benefit from your knowledge, and be intentional about sharing with them.

You might naturally be an exceptional repository of facts, data, and ideas. If that's the case, don't be afraid to position yourself as an expert. By simply following your Input talents, you could become known as the authority in your field.

Remember that you must be more than just a collector of information. At some point, you'll need to leverage this knowledge and turn it into action. Make a point of identifying the facts and data that would be most valuable to others, and use this information to their advantage.

Identify your areas of specialization, and actively seek more information about them.

Schedule time to read books and articles that stimulate you.

Deliberately increase your vocabulary. Collect new words, and learn the meaning of each of them.

Identify situations in which you can share the information you have collected with other people. Also make sure to let your friends and colleagues know that you enjoy answering their questions.

APPENDIX I: General CliftonStrengths Coaching Process

A student would take approximately 30-45 minutes to complete the 177-item

CliftonStrengths for Students (CSS) assessment. The assessment generates immediate results

by giving the student their top-five Signature themes out of the total 34 themes in three

distinct reports: Signature Themes report, Strengths Insight Guide, and an Action Planning

Guide. The Signature Themes report is a generalized description of their top-five themes of

talent (example in Appendix E). The Strengths Insight Guide shows how the combinations of

the themes create their unique personality (example in Appendix F). Lastly, the Action

Planning Guide offers 10 specific action steps for each theme (50 total action steps) to help

develop the theme into a strength (example in Appendix G). These three reports help to

invoke conversation during the faculty coaching intervention sessions.

A student experiences a 45-minute to 1-hour individualized strengths-focused faculty

coaching sessions using a framework of naming, claiming, and aiming their talents towards

academic gains. The naming of talents helps the students identify their normative personality;

the CliftonStrengths assessment results gives in-depth descriptions of the talents and uses the

term "Signature Themes of Talent." Claiming is a process of allowing the student to engage

the theme descriptions by exploring, appreciating, processing, and making connections with

their personal experiences. Lastly, aiming is intended to empower the student to grow,

develop, apply, plan and invest in their natural talents. The next subsection outlines an

example of how an intentional coaching session might be conducted.

Example of a coaching session. I had a former student who received CSS

assessment results of Learner, Responsibility, Relator, Harmony, and Empathy. I gathered

insights from my coaching resources to understand that the student likely had a strong desire to learn, improve, and process relevant information; she may need access to new information that interests her (Learner). She also was likely to take psychological ownership of any commitment she makes and will typically remain faithful until the completion of those commitments (Responsibility). With a deep desire to build stronger relationships with those people she already knows, it may take her longer to build new relationships, for some of her natural desire is to be known by those closest to her and to deeply know those closest to her (Relator). The student may also not like conflict and may work quite well in group settings with mutual agreements; any significant hostility in a group setting may trigger avoidance or a strong desire to find unity in the group (Harmony). Lastly, she may have a breadth of feelings and emotions that affect her daily life: either her own feelings or those of others. This student simply may have a high emotional intelligence (Empathy). Those initial insights of her normative personality guide the coaching conversation, provide a common understanding between the student and I, and allow for mindful discussions of practical strategies related to her academic success.

Example of Student Assessment Results

Naming. The initial insights simply gave a framework of the student before our first conversation, and then when we first met, I started the conversation with some rapport building in order to establish trust. After about 10-15 minutes, I transitioned our conversation to the "naming" stage by asking questions about the student's response to the reports. I asked about which statements she highlighted, circled, and commented on, seeking stories of her life to apply to the concepts of the themes. Since I have studied and understood the different themes of talent, I wanted to listen for the student's unique expression of the talent themes.

This phase simply conceptualized the talents and uncovered, reminded, and emphasized what the student has done well for most of her life. We began to transition into the claiming phase of the conversation.

Claiming. For the claiming stage, one strategy I use is to focus on one theme at a time to isolate the talent theme, yet regularly reminding the student that our talent expressions are unique and are dynamically powered alongside other talents. For instance, when I focused on her Relator theme, some general questions were "Who are some of the most important people in your life?" "Why are they important to you?" and "How do they motivate you or support you?" Her responses gave me a context to her support group: the individuals who were of the most powerful influencers for her. This is consistent with Lopez and Louis' (2009) third principle of SBE relating to how strengths develop within a community of support. For this student, her community of support was small, and those relationships had been built over many years.

Aiming. We discussed each of her themes, and then transitioned to aiming phase of practically applying her themes individually and collectively to important personal and academic goals. This phase reminded the student about her past and present successes in using her talents, for the phase reinforced, challenged, and enhanced her self-concept and built her confidence (self-efficacy). The objectives of the aiming phase are consistent with Asghar's (2010) study on using peer-coaching with first-year undergraduate students and its effect on self-efficacy:

> Students with high self-efficacy tend to do better than those with low self-efficacy in academic attainment, perseverance and intellectual ability. This suggests that there is

a need to structure activities to build self-efficacy and that formative

assessment…helps students believe in themselves and their capabilities. (p. 414)

The way I view the aiming stage, based on Asghar's comments, is to celebrate what is right

with the student and encourage their past and present successes instead of focusing on what

they have failed at doing. I examine their weaknesses and failures in light of their natural

talents, attempting to rephrase their perspective about the things they do not do well. Aiming,

therefore, helps the student to consider the strengths-focused possibilities by her using and

developing her natural talents.

Aiming requires helping the student develop practical strategies to help her think

through a process or a system to manage good and bad habits. For example, since the student

has a high Responsibility talent, the student may have a tendency to over-commit because

she tends to say "Yes" if asked to complete something. Based on the student's history and

current status, one practical strategy was to create a prioritized list of immediate and long-

term goals. If new tasks were asked of her to complete that were inconsistent with her goals,

she had the right to say "No", yet if they were consistent with her goals, she can say "Yes".

The intention was to empower her to "No" to certain people, duties, and circumstances.

The three phases of the coaching process are intended to systematically help students

think through their natural talents conceptually, continue to grow in the awareness of

themselves, and practically apply those talents to functional academic gains. The coaching

process is subjective because of the unique differences in each student, for Leibbrandt (2013)

identified the probability of 1 in 275,000 for two people to share the same top-five in *any*

order. However, for two people to have the same top-five in the *same* order, Leibbrandt

continued saying that the probability increases to 1 in 33 million. Therefore, the uniqueness

104

of using the CliftonStrengths for Students tool helps a coach to understand the unique nuances of students, learn of those nuances, and specifically help them develop and grow their natural talents.

Agenda for the Two-Hour Intervention

Workshop, Fall 2020				
TIME	**TOPIC**	**ACTIVITIES**	**METHOD**	**MATERIALS & SUPPLIES**
10	1.0 Welcome (Ethos) & Overview	Welcome participants	Lecture	
		Facilitator biography (Establish ethos). Training, credentials, faculty role at UK		
		Overview of today's activities. Highlight the categories of activities		PowerPoint
		Ground Rules		PowerPoint
		Housekeeping		PowerPoint
10				
TIME	**TOPIC**	**ACTIVITIES**	**METHOD**	**MATERIALS & SUPPLIES**
10	1.1 Who is Donald Clifton?	The mind behind the creation of the assessment.	Lecturette	PowerPoint
	What are CliftonStrengths?	The measurement of the assessment.	Lecturette	PowerPoint, Short Description of Themes
	Why CliftonStrengths?	The purpose of the assessment	Lecturette	PowerPoint
	Where do we get the CliftonStrengths?	Gallup Research Organization	Lecturette	PowerPoint
	When do we use CliftonStrengths?	Everyday	Lecturette	PowerPoint

TIME	TOPIC	ACTIVITIES	METHOD	MATERIALS & SUPPLIES
	How do we use them?	With appropriate knowledge and the appropriate time investment, they develop into strengths.	Lecturette	PowerPoint
10				
TIME	**TOPIC**	**ACTIVITIES**	**METHOD**	**MATERIALS & SUPPLIES**
5	2.0 Strengths-based Introductions	What is an introduction? Why a Strengths-Based Intro?	Discussion	
		Demonstrate a Strengths-Based Intro	Demonstration	
5		Create a Strengths-Based Intro	Personal reflection	
10	2.1 Introduce Self to Others	"Strengths Speed Dating"	Activity	
		Each participant finds three people to introduce themselves to...		
20				
TIME	**TOPIC**	**ACTIVITIES**	**METHOD**	**MATERIALS & SUPPLIES**
5	3.0 Claiming Our Strengths	Instructions: Claiming Our Strengths	Lecturette	Signature Theme Report
5		Read & Highlight Important phrases	Self-Reflection	Signature Theme Report
10		Create Groups of 2-3 people. Share a favorite signature theme, what was highlighted, and why	Discussion: 3 minutes per person for 3-member groups; 4 minutes for 2-member groups	Signature Theme Report
20				

5	BREAK TIME	BREAK TIME		TIMER
TIME	**TOPIC**	**ACTIVITIES**	**METHOD**	**MATERIALS & SUPPLIES**
5	4.0 Claiming My #1	Instructions: Claiming My #1	Lecturette	Strengths Insight Guide
5		Read & Highlight Important Phrases for #1 Theme	Self-Reflection	Strengths Insight Guide
10		In groups, each person will take a statement (or two) from their Strengths Insight Guide and give a brief commentary about why that statement applies in their lives.	Discussion	Strengths Insight Guide
20				
TIME	**TOPIC**	**ACTIVITIES**	**METHOD**	**MATERIALS & SUPPLIES**
5	5.0 Applying My Themes	Instructions: Applying My Themes	Lecturette	All
		Identify an academic issue or problem you have	Self-Reflection	
20		Create a Strengths-based academic plan based on one's themes to address the issue or problem.	Self-Reflection	Reports, notepads, writing utensil
25				
TIME	**TOPIC**	**ACTIVITIES**	**METHOD**	**MATERIALS & SUPPLIES**
10	6.0 Closing Remarks, Questions, Comments	Open comments, questions or comments about the session	Discussion	
10				

120	**Total Time**			

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