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**HOW SCHOOL COUNSELORS PROMOTE GROWTH MINDSET
IN THEIR PRACTICE:
FIVE VIEWS OF AGENCY IN THE MOTIVATION
OF ELEMENTARY STUDENTS**

By

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

(in Education)

The Graduate School

The University of Maine

May 2022

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By Sheryl G. Baker

Dissertation Co-Advisors: Dr. Jim Artesani and Dr. Susan Bennett-Armistead

An Abstract of the Dissertation Presented
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
(in Education)
May 2022

The construct of growth mindset has become an increasing focus of educators as they seek ways to promote goal attainment among students. The growth mindset framework suggests that attributes such as high performance, skill development, and ability can be developed through motivation, sustained effort, and grit. Allowing for the possibility of continuing academic and personal growth, a positive mindset stresses the agency of perseverance and redirection in the face of challenge. Such an approach stands in contrast to a fixed or stagnant view of individual ability. Promoting a perspective of resilience and progress through growth mindset strategies is viewed as a potentially useful tool that educators who serve in a supportive role can provide through their own agency and role definition.

The role of school counselors in this process reflects the nature of their supportive work with students. The agency of school counselors in promoting forward-moving direction and ultimate success through growth mindset approaches calls for examination. This qualitative

exploratory research gathered data through two successive interviews each with five school counselors from northern New England regarding the targeted work they conduct with students for the purpose of promoting academic success. The study focused on the degree to which these elementary school counselors understand and utilize growth mindset orientation as a means of promoting the learning behaviors that further growth and achievement.

The findings of this research identified a shared set of foundational elements that all participants establish to promote growth mindset. These elements reflect professional agency on the part of the school counseling participants, including engagement, relationship-building, meeting social-emotional challenges, and responsiveness. Those elements, in turn, facilitate the growth mindset practices of elementary-level students, with a focus on the agency of a strength-based focus, grit, resilience, and mindfulness. By examining the work of school counselors in a supportive role with young learners, while acknowledging the challenges they face, this multiple case study illuminates the impact of their professional agency on student growth at the elementary level.

DEDICATION

Dedicated to all the professionals who work to improve the lives of children, including the school counselor participants who spoke openly and passionately about their professional commitment in this research study.

Dedicated to those children who are learning and growing with the encouragement of these educators, children who will grow to develop their talents and make their mark on this everchanging world, among whom are the children near and dear to my heart - Amelie, Sira, Owen, Maia, Henrietta, Julia, Eva, Eli, and Fiona.

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I am indebted to my dissertation committee for the guidance I have received in conducting this research. Jim, Susan, Sue, Annette, and Vanessa have offered their many talents in passing along their knowledge and skill pertaining to educational imperatives. From broad aspects of consideration regarding the impact of widespread educational approaches to more detailed points to consider, these educators have generously presented a wealth of information and expertise. Furthermore, they have provided ongoing encouragement and support throughout the learning process that this research experience has created.

I would also like to express my appreciation to the participants in this research. They willingly agreed to participate in the study without any apparent reservations, providing transparency and an in-depth overview of their responsive role in their respective schools. Their commitment to the students under their charge was inspiring.

Both the members of the dissertation committee and the participants who were interviewed represent the wide array of educators with whom I have worked who have dedicated their professional lives to the optimal growth and learning potential of their students.

Finally, I would like to thank my family – my dear children, Melissa, Michael, Jonathan, and Emily; their dear spouses, Darren, Sheya, Erin, and Alex; and my ever-questioning husband, Jim - for their continuing support throughout this dynamic research experience. They each have encouraged me greatly in our shared belief, handed down through generations, in lifelong learning, exploration, and inquiry.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

An underlying thesis of any educational framework is the progression of acquired knowledge, skill development, and successive learning outcomes. Educational theory and practice have long assessed optimal ways to achieve learning objectives. The continuing development of rigorous academic standards reflects a focus that is expansive, suggesting the potential of all students to gain skills and knowledge, independent of the intrinsic traits they possess. Encouraging a mindset that allows for far-ranging potential through effort, perseverance, strength-development, and drive is a strategy that challenges finite projected outcomes based on assigned attributes.

A burgeoning area of study, that which touts growth mindset approaches, sets the stage for adaptive academic motivation and achievement. A term introduced by Carol Dweck (1999, 2002), this framework allows for continuing growth of capability from a current referent point of achievement onward. “Growth mindset” stands in contrast to the concept of “fixed mindset,” which limits learning gains to a predetermined measure of potential. As a result, the growing body of research focusing on growth mindset has informed the ongoing discussion of learning potential and goal attainment for every individual. The growth mindset model is consistent with the motivational work that educators promote.

Statement of the Problem

As a school counselor, I recognize the broad-based support that school counseling colleagues provide to students from the start of their schooling onward. While the school counselor’s role is often viewed as being ancillary to learning in the classroom, it is nevertheless

integral to the overall well-being of students who face academic tasks in the school setting. School counseling efforts, focusing on the whole child, incorporate a constructivist view of the child's understanding of his or her ability to meet academic, social, and personal challenges. The encouragement of perseverance, grit, and continued effort would seem to be a foundational theme of this supportive work with young scholars in the school setting.

Despite this seeming match between the growth mindset model and the defined role of the school counselor, there is little in the body of growth mindset research that looks closely at the school counselor's engagement in promoting a growth orientation. This lack of extensive research in growth mindset development as part of the school counselor's motivational work with students is notable. There has been meager reference to the formal training and implementation of growth mindset strategies in the professional development of school counselors in educational literature as well.

There has also been a lack of a more generalized growth mindset focus that is not related to specific subject matter. Certain academic areas have been extensively researched (Martin, 2015), however growth mindset as a learning approach presented by the school counselor has not been rigorously studied, despite growing familiarity with the growth mindset construct as an intrinsic motivator among educators (Ng, 2018). In particular, there is an absence of growth mindset research pertaining to elementary-level students. The omission of school counselors in growth mindset research begs further study.

Additionally, this study sought to determine to what extent school counselors believe they are adequately prepared to impart growth mindset techniques to students. How professional conversations and training related to growth mindset inform practice is examined. Recognizing

the current use of growth mindset within the school counselor role while identifying the need for further professional direction is integral to this research.

Purpose of the Study

This qualitative study attempts to shed light on the school counselor's influence in setting the stage for growth mindset factors that in turn have bearing on learning success. Its purpose is to better understand the current role of school counselors in promoting the concept of growth among students at the elementary level.

While extensive motivational work among educators in various teaching positions has been researched and documented (Martin, 2015; Sisk, Burgoyne, Sun, Butler, and Macnamara, 2018), the specialized role of the school counselor in supporting a growth-oriented impetus for student learning calls for more focused research. School counselors' assigned value regarding the impact of the growth mindset construct, their utilization of growth mindset approaches, and their perceived preparedness for including growth mindset in their practice are explored. By adding this professional dimension, this research contributes to the store of existing data regarding growth mindset strategies, thereby strengthening the understanding of collaborative prevention and intervention responses to the academic and social-emotional challenges that students face.

Research Questions

The overarching inquiry being explored in this research study is whether school counselors servicing students statewide in northern New England believe it is important to utilize growth mindset precepts in their teaching or coaching of strategies for school success. The way by which growth mindset is incorporated into the school counselors' work with elementary-level students is examined. Foundational prerequisites geared to promote growth

among students form the backdrop of this research. Outcomes that are encouraged among students are also considered. In this way, both the school counselor's actions and the behaviors of the students they serve form a two-pronged display of growth mindset components.

The extent of school counselor involvement in growth mindset orientation as a cognitive tool, leading to grit and resiliency as action-oriented outcomes, is the primary focus of this study. Grit, perseverance, resilience, positive reframing, and other related responses, are referred to in this document as a means of setting forward-moving goals in a realistic way, recognizing social and cultural constraints whenever possible. Existing roadblocks to growth, requiring compassionate and supportive responses, are acknowledged in this process (Gorski, 2013; Golden, 2017; Datu, 2021).

If strengthening growth mindset is a potential element of academic success for students, as recent research suggests (Dweck, 2010; Martin, 2015), it would seem to be important to assess school counselors' perceptions, practice, and preparedness regarding the growth mindset model. Evolving conceptual understanding and practice, resulting from the individual school counselor's practice, is at the heart of this study. Research inquiry aimed at gaining an understanding of the school counselor's role includes a complex look at the reliance on growth mindset motivators, thereby exploring the inclusion of growth mindset in school counselors' professional ideation and application. The ways by which school counselor agency promotes agency among elementary-level students was a particular focus of this research.

Through a rigorous interview process that included an initial in-depth interview and a subsequent interview, data was gathered that allowed the sample of school counselors to elaborate upon their utilization of growth mindset orientation in their work. School counselors' espousal of growth mindset as a motivating force was an essential aspect of this research

framework. How school counselors incorporate their understanding of growth mindset influences in their work comprises another component of this research. School counselors' self-report of their professional development experience and perceived systemic support in the area of growth mindset was studied. Through these avenues of inquiry, the school counselors' role in the overall adoption of growth mindset tools that support learning (Grant and Dweck 2003; Dweck, 2007) and promote grit (Duckworth et al., 2007) are explored. The broad purpose of such research is to answer the need for an informed assessment of the school resources that exist to meet motivational challenges (Seligman et al., 2005) in education.

The three-pronged inquiry that frames this research includes the following:

- An exploration of school counselors' professional view of the importance of including growth mindset strategies in their work with elementary-level students
- An exploration of the ways by which growth mindset is a component of school counselors' work with elementary-level students
- An exploration of the range and type of professional opportunities that school counselors have experienced in the area of growth mindset

The overarching research questions that inform this study are: 1) What value or importance do school counselors place on growth mindset strategies in their work with students as they prioritize focus areas in their supportive role? 2) How are growth mindset strategies integrated into the school counselor's role, with an impact on student learning behaviors? 3) Do school counselors believe that they are equipped to set the stage for growth mindset as an effective motivating tool in the pursuit of student success? By exploring each participant's views of her experience as a school counselor in an in-depth manner, these research questions will be addressed within the sample being studied. Further defining the school

counselors' role holds great promise in this area of intervention. Looking closely at the level of growth mindset practice and training will contribute to the understanding of whether such training influences growth mindset practice.

Significance of the Study

The implications for school counselors in the areas of intervention and prevention are potentially far-reaching. School counselors provide services along all tiers of the prevention and intervention spectrum (Burns et al., 2012; Hawken et al, 2008, Riffel, 2011). They implement prevention and primary-tier classroom intervention techniques that help to develop social skills and personal goal-setting. They also intervene when students require more intensive support, either in second-tier interventions often involving small groups or in individualized tertiary interventions (Riffel, 2011).

From an intervention standpoint, the impact of school counselors regarding the growth mindset orientation continues to hold promise. The student-counselor relationship provides the opportunity to explore the attitudinal and behavioral elements that support a growth model. The school counselor role also allows for collaborative processing and support with other educators, with the aim of benefitting student success. Research that will shed light on the role of school counselors in promoting growth mindset among students would seem to hold promise in understanding learning support and intervention opportunities.

On a larger scale, exploring the impact of school-based professional development in this one area of learning potential can assist in the assessment of training opportunities. The multiple case study format provides insights to be considered by those in the position of developing informative courses for educators. Reflecting upon the varying levels and forms of growth mindset training provides a lens through which to assign value to the importance of

promoting the growth mindset framework. Gaining knowledge regarding the establishment of practices that show promise for student success is promising.

Definition of Terms

Dweck (2006) defined “growth mindset” as a concept “based on the belief that your basic qualities are things you can cultivate through your efforts, your strategies, and help from others.” She continued by saying, “Although people may differ in every which way – in their initial talents and aptitudes, interests or temperaments – everyone can change and grow through application and experience.” (Dweck, 2016, p.7)

To illustrate the contrast between growth mindset and its opposing state, fixed mindset, Dweck composed four specific questions posed to research participants and students alike. Given the fluidity of these opposing perspectives, Dweck (2006) assigned a five-point Likert scale to the level of mindset. Supporting a fixed mindset are the statements, “You are a certain kind of person, and there is not much that can be done to really change that” and “You can do things differently, but the important parts of who you are can’t really be changed.” Supporting a growth mindset are the statements, “No matter what kind of person you are, you can always change substantially” and “You can always change basic things about the kind of person you are.” Related questions constructed by Dweck pertain to the impact of intelligence upon learning (Dweck, 2006).

The terms found in growth mindset research to describe the learning potential outlined by Dweck (2002, 2006) suggest an “incremental” and “expandable” approach to learning (Schmidt, Shumow, and Kackar-Cam, 2016), akin to a constructionist perspective. The desire to become engaged in learning, to practice skills, and to persevere with grit, determination, and resilience in the face of challenge, are all traits associated with growth mindset. Those exhibited

attitudes and behaviors stand in contrast to the student who adheres to a rigid, entity-based concept of his or her ability to succeed. This study will further operationalize the growth mindset construct as understood by school counselors supporting the learning outcomes of young students.

There are terms that have been identified as being related to the framework of growth mindset. Included among these are the concepts of perseverance, grit, drive, resilience, and a positive orientation toward success. (Tough, 2012). Datu (2021) referred to grit as being viewed as the outcome of “passion and perseverance” but notes that grit manifests in differing ways. Each of the growth mindset component terms describe an aspect of the process that encourages continued effort in goal attainment and learning progress.

For the purpose of this study, growth mindset and each of its components pertain to the acquired perceptions of students’ awareness of their own potential for growth. The lens through which this research is conducted involves the influencing impact of school counselors. Specifically, this research explores how the concept of growth mindset is transferred from the school counseling practitioner to the students she services. By setting the stage for the conceptual understanding of growth mindset and the resulting development of learning skills that support student success, growth mindset becomes part of the school counseling process.

Limitations

A potential limitation of this particular study is that the data gathered pertains to school counselors from a particular geographic location in the United States. There is little racial diversity in the state from which the participants were selected and, while socioeconomic variability exists, that too presents a state-based profile. The school counselor participants therefore may share similar experiences that may not be found in other locations.

It is important to note that national standards have worked to unify school counseling practices. The relatively recent emergence of the growth mindset framework has yet to be fully incorporated into school counselor guidelines that would promote consistency, although the American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2021) has established growth mindset standards.

Additionally, within the confines of a qualitative study, defining the parameters of a professional development scope can be challenging. There are various modes of formal professional development, with supplementary activities and training exercises. There are also various forms of personalized training through the gathering of professional resources. The resulting motif of professional development opportunities, as they pertain to the growth mindset construct, form a continuum of possibilities, rather than a dichotomous set of choices.

Despite these concerns, as a supplement to existing research regarding motivation and adaptive responses, an evaluation of counselors' growth mindset work helps to construct a broader understanding of the role that counselors play in promoting academic growth. Such research informs the development and implementation of professional programming, with the potential of boosting school counselors' efficacy in their collaborative role impacting students.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Introduction

In approaching a study of growth mindset focus among school counselors, there were several avenues of investigation to pursue. The theoretical underpinnings of growth work, including motivation, cognition, and learning strategies needed to be examined. The current trends among educators to promote those behaviors that lead to student successful were also essential areas to research. Finally, the comprehensive role of the school counselor was an important aspect of the literature review. An exhaustive URSUS search of literature regarding growth mindset, as well as literature pertaining to the education-based dialogues accompanying its emergence, revealed the increasing consideration of growth mindset in educational settings.

Theories and Conceptual Frameworks

Growth mindset as an educational focus has roots in various theoretical underpinnings, reflecting research pertaining to motivation, learning engagement, and attitudinal impetus. The origin of the growth mindset model can be traced to the work of Bempechat, London, and Dweck (1991) in their exploration of self-perceptions among children in regard to intellectual capacity. The growth framework is closely aligned with Bandura's model of perceived self-efficacy, which in turn stems from the aspect of agency identified in social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2001).

Among the theories associated with growth approaches to the learning process are value-added frameworks, academic trajectory efforts, growth motivation, growth goals, and other aspects of attribution theory (Forsterling, 1985, 2001). Through self-theories that reflect implicit meaning assigned to individual motivation (Dweck, 1999), researchers have examined those

factors that serve as motivators toward achievement and those factors that serve as deterrents to the attainment of goals (Blackwell, Trzesniewski, and Dweck, 2007; Crick and Goldspink, 2014).

As an offshoot of expanding motivation theory (Martin, 2014), proponents of adaptive growth mindset have stressed that intelligence is not a fixed entity but rather an ongoing process process that specific traits, such as effort, perseverance, and the pursuit of goals can strengthen (Martin, 2008; Tempelaar, Rienties, Giesbers, and Gijsselaers, 2015). This fluidity allows for a sense of control and the possibility of change for the individual, as Fishman (2014) presented in his theory-based research. Intertwined in this motivational impetus is the learned optimism that Seligman, Steen, Park, and Petersen (2005) highlighted in their intervention research.

Dweck (2010) reviewed the manner by which the development of identities and belief systems about oneself are created in order to better understand their place in the educational process. These implicit theories focus on the emergence of intellectual assessment in the face of personal attributes and experience. Strategies and responses to individual perception were critical in this analysis of motivation and goal-setting. Recognition of psychological response patterns that students undergo is also important in this study (Dweck, 2015), with self-awareness of those responses heightening an understanding of the gears that drive progress.

Linked to the process of striving for positive growth and change are responses that are steeped in cognitive theories. The development of cognitive-behavior theory, as a way for individuals to focus on the thoughts behind their action, is akin to the awareness that growth mindset strategies promote. Through the cognition of one's thought patterns, individuals can choose certain behaviors that will best support their desired outcomes. Cognitive mindfulness and other reflective constructs lend support to this approach (Herbert, Gaudiamo, and Forman,

2013; MacGill, 2018). Self theories place the individual's perception in the process of identifying assets (Dweck, 1999).

Related Constructs

In viewing growth and change as a naturalistic processes, Dweck (2015) has underscored the growth capabilities of all individuals, given the appropriate mindset. Yeager and Dweck (2012) noted, in their study of secondary school students, that those individuals who believed that their personality attributes were malleable exhibited behaviors that were conducive to academic and social well-being. By emphasizing the power of openness to change to promote further learning, as a contrast to the fixed or stable outlook that resists change, Yeager and Dweck (2012) advocated an approach that encourages working toward ongoing growth, accentuating the benefits of outcomes perceived as failures if they are used as learning tools.

Attributes that reflect such malleability were identified in the meta-analysis provided by Burnette, O'Boyle, VanEpps, Pollack, and Finkel (2013). Their work suggested the far-ranging ramifications of embracing a growth model, with a construct that allows for positive interventions and the attainment of continuously emerging goals. The importance of self-regulation is one major finding of their study for educators to note in their practice. After analyzing 113 samples of participants, Burnette et al. (2013) suggested that the malleability of an incremental or malleable approach to success, or rather the avoidance of failure, promotes goal attainment. They concluded that the dynamics of this relationship is nuanced and in need of further exploration.

Martin (2015) pointed to the role of personal best goal-setting as being essential in imposing the stamp of growth and malleability on implicit theories of intelligence. He has joined Dweck (2015) in emphasizing that it is not enough to allow for the strengthening of

learning capabilities through effort but rather the emphasis on growth strategies is integral to the learning process itself (Dweck, 2015; Martin, 2015). In this way, growth allows for possibilities that challenge more traditional implicit views of intelligence and capabilities. The thrust of this analysis points to the construct of malleability as an impetus for specific action. Martin's own research with high school students indicated that growth goals can overcome entity goals in a reciprocal relationship if cognitive change takes place. Cognition underscores the dynamic nature of the growth mindset approach.

Like Martin (2015), Liem, Ginns, Martin, Stone, and Herrett (2012) provided evidence that personal best goals allow for clarification of the growth which needs to be undertaken so that progress can take place. Attitudes, relationships, and a sense of satisfaction were some of the outcomes of personal best goal-setting among the high school students within their study. The implications pertaining to motivation and continued growth for the high school participants were underscored in this research. Mastery orientation, rather than helplessness, was evident in this meta-analysis. Those findings match the evidence provided by Duckworth, Petersen, Matthews, and Kelly (2007) of the motivating power of specific action taken to promote goal achievement. As Burnette et al. (2012) conclude, "mindsets matters" (p. 680).

Grant and Dweck's (2003) review of process-oriented motivation versus ability-based impetus among college-level students highlighted the effectiveness of learning goals when confronting challenges. The dichotomy of performance or ego-involved goals and learning compared to mastery or task goals points to the continued engagement that process responses promote, as opposed to withdrawal from the learning activity. The data that Grant and Dweck gathered also indicated that when challenging conditions were experienced, ability-based goals led to a state of helplessness, defeat, and loss of self-worth. Goals allowing for continued

learning and growth, in contrast, led to a display of perseverance and a drive to overcome deficiencies. Intrinsic motivation of engaging in learning and meeting challenges were inherent in those who embraced learning process goals.

Understanding the ways by which individuals perceive their own intelligence, effort and ability to achieve was a focus of the research of Tempelaar et al., (2015). While effort was directly related to motivation and goal-setting, implicit theories of intelligence were only indirectly associated with motivation to attain goals and meet challenges in their sample of Dutch business students. Such findings suggest that by allowing for the possibility of growth and change, unencumbered by preconceived notions of static potential, progress can be made.

Elliot, Murayam, Kobeisy, and Lichtenfield (2015) pointed to the need to further define goal-setting, looking at future-oriented goals, rather than goals based on a response to past efforts motivated by the avoidance of failure. These are self-based goals focusing on achievement. Improvement with an eye toward mastery led to more sustained achievement when contrasted with performance or competency-based goals in their study, based on the specific task at hand.

The research of Jowkar, Kojuri, Kohoulat, and Hayat (2014) pointed to the impact of resilience on goal-setting, as individuals find ways to meet challenges and move forward despite obstacles. Higher performance and attempts to achieve mastery were viewed among students who had developed resilience through the support of peers and adults in their lives. Family and community assets were critical in this pattern of goal attainment.

Yeager and Dweck (2012) emphasized the resiliency-building aspect of growth mindset and adaptability, with resilience serving as a strong component of the prevention and intervention model (Baker and Ryan, 2014). The concept of resilience has suggested the ability to overcome

adverse conditions in order to attain desired outcomes (Nguyen, 2012). There has been ongoing evidence that the resilience inherent in growth mindset strategies is not genetically-based but rather the manifestation of purposeful thought and action (Yeager and Dweck, 2012). Developing coping mechanisms in the face of stressors has been viewed as an integral aspect of resilience (Schroder, Yalch, Dawood, Callahan, Donnellan, and Moser, 2017).

Resilience has been linked to coping strategies and an aspect of mindfulness that can be developed (Jennings, Snowberg, Coccia and Greenberg, 2011). Tang, Upadyaya, and Salmela-Aro (2021) have referred to grit as one of the components of resilience. Ergasng (2019) has noted the increase in the utilization of mindfulness techniques, noting that mindfulness not only takes place in education but is part of the educational process itself. Khan (2018) reported that behaviors related to both mindfulness and grit appear to have bearing on student success in math and science pursuits.

Ng (2018) furthered the emphasis on the intrinsic nature of growth mindset perspectives in her link to the neurological aspects of motivation. While noting that extensive research in the neuroscience of intrinsic motivation is lacking, she has presented a sound argument for pursuing the biological response to the intentions that underlie various motivating behaviors. She noted, “Since growth mindset is a belief system that favors hard work and performance monitoring, a learner’s subjective belief in determining the outcome may modulate activity of the striatum, in response to cognitive feedback Neuroscientific evidence may provide insight into the learning and motivational processes that could be helpful for teachers and practitioners in improving the learning and teaching practices...” (Ng, 2018, p.8).

Schroder, Fisher, Lin, Lo, Danovitch, and Moser (2017), in their work with young children, noted that a more malleable growth-minded approach allows students to neurologically

attend to errors, thereby creating a pathway to accuracy and success. This work focusing on correcting mistakes was conducted with early learners, raising the question among the researchers as to whether such a significant finding continues as students develop along the life span. Learning strategies acquired at an early age might have a long-term impact if they become internalized into a lifelong response pattern. Such a focus matches conceptual to theories growth and development.

The development of personality traits and the theory encompassing their presentation was tested by Schleider and Weisz (2018) in their growth mindset research. A one-time, computer-supported, single 30-minute session delivery of growth mindset training that emphasized the potential for positive growth was administered. Changes in participants view of internal factors related to emotional and behavioral responses were then analyzed in their study, with small but identifiable results related to depression and anxiety. Those students who experienced growth mindset interventions were reported, by their parents, to have significantly decreased depression and an increased sense of control over their sense of well-being. These findings have implications for all educators, including school counselors who work closely with the expression of personality and the psychological state.

The extent to which an individual identifies the stability or malleability of their life conditions, in accordance with attribution theory, has bearing on their social perceptions and ultimate actions, according to Molden and Dweck (2006). This social psychological perspective addresses the relationship between cognition and behavior. In this way, cognitive training has bearing on behavioral outcomes and the display of grit (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews and Kelly, 2007; Tough, 2012; Hochanadel and Finamore, 2015). The manifestation of grit allows

students to take dedicated action toward long-range goals. Stokas (2015) suggests that grit and its related drive runs deep, with social implications.

The impact of grit over time has gained increasing focus in recent research (Chang, 2014; Garofalo, 2016), with findings that suggest the value of further study. Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly (2007) linked the presence of grit to the pursuit of coping strategies and the attainment of goals. The impetus of grit has been viewed as a character trait to be strengthened through teaching and support among some educators (Pappano, 2013), despite some hesitancy by those researchers who factor in the disadvantages of marginalized and trauma-affected individuals (Gorski, 2016).

Wesnousky, Oettingen, and Gollwitzer (2015) noted that among participants within several different samples of their study, those who assigned positive attribution to a previously negative trait, thereby perceiving a “silver lining” in their behaviors, were better able to act in accordance with that positive attribute (p.15). Servincer and Oettingen (2013) differentiated between goals that are viewed as being attainable and those that are discarded because they seem out of reach. Their research suggests that realistic perceptions of potential strengths helped children attain success, with a focus on positive, strength-based outcomes.

Schmidt et al. (2017) focused upon the distinction between promoting academic engagement and thwarting the lessening of learning approaches in their work with middle level students, noting the positive impact of interventions among the ninth graders they studied. The variables of interest and effort in contrast with skill development and goal orientation were studied in this research. Seventh graders did not exhibit the increased interest and sense of control as their ninth-grade counterparts did, indicating the need to include age and grade level as a variable in continuing studies.

Toland and Boyle (2008), outlined ways to redirect children's thinking patterns in order to enhance achievement. Their work falls under the conceptual framework of "attribution retraining," a concept that has been reflected in the attributional theory of motivation for decades. In Toland and Boyle's research, both parents and participants noted a heightened sense of motivation and success orientation resulting from the process of retraining, although achievement outcomes were mixed. Teachers were less likely to observe such changes in this study. The researchers stressed that adding cognitive behavioral techniques and awareness to the development of academic skills is a promising intervention tool. The link between thought and action has been defined as mindset that has been transferred into action by students. The relationship between cognition and behavior has continued to underlie this conceptual framework, with learner agency and performance being an outcome of this focus.

The individual's perception of personal attributes and potential do have bearing on behaviors that lead to growth and skill development. Hiemstra and Yperen (2015) emphasized the power of a strength-based orientation, noting that positive perceptions influence the self-regulation that in turn promotes success. Clark (2020) stressed the impact of a strength-based, positive, and trusting orientation. This focus on learning can have lifelong implications, noted Hiemstra and Yperen, as students learn the behaviors that will serve them well throughout their learning experiences and career development.

Factors that promote or inhibit further learning have been identified as having critical bearing upon student success. Those considerations have included the individual's belief that he or she possesses the necessary tools to achieve ongoing learning outcomes. Further influences are students' attitudes regarding their capacity to attain goals and their willingness to persevere in developing behaviors that help to make such goal attainment a reality (Servincer and

Goettingen, 2013). Grit, determination, perseverance, goal-setting, and an underlying belief in one's potential are motivating forces that have been included in this conceptual framework (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, and Kelly, 2007). Movement toward success is set in motion by the active presentation of these constructs.

Growth Mindset Strategies in Education

Certain researchers have cautioned educators against placing the hope that growth mindset is panacea for all academic challenges. Dweck (2015), herself, expressed this caution, pointing out that application of the growth mindset application is fluid, allowing for continuing strategy development along the fixed-growth continuum. She joins her colleagues in separating the real changes that can occur through the internalization of growth mindset from the “myths” that have emerged about growth mindset (Dweck, Hoskins, Nye, Warren, Mason-Apps, Devonshire, et al., 2018). Yeager and Walton (2011) emphasized that the social-psychological outcomes that are not always easy to detect. The relationship-building and responsiveness that aspect of the interventions that encourage growth mindset can present a laborious process, with growth outcomes call for take significant time and effort (Zhong, 2019). Social factors weigh heavily in that process (Gorski, 2016).

More recently, a study containing two meta-analyses was conducted that questioned the full impact of growth mindset techniques in promoting academic achievement (Sisk, Burgoyne, Sun, Butler, and Macnamara, 2018). The results established a limited link between growth mindset techniques and academic achievement among students of varying ages, with younger student displaying a stronger response to a growth mindset approach. One subset of students who were more likely to respond to growth mindset thinking were those struggling students who were more at risk for academic hurdles, including those who were less advantaged. This finding

suggests that it is important to look at the impact of growth mindset orientation on students from different experiences. Studying different populations, along with the interventionists and support personnel who work with struggling students, seems promising in the quest to better define the growth mindset impact.

As the call for further research in the area of growth mindset as it pertains to educators and their students reverberates, the impact of the growth mindset approach has expanded in recognition and reference since it was first expounded through Dweck's (2002, 2007) work. Spitzer and Aronson (2015) emphasized its importance in closing the socioeconomic gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students, as well as other cultural discrepancies. They maintained that social identity, which includes stereotype threat and belongingness when students have difficulty placing themselves on the aspirational rungs of the educational ladder, has an impact on student motivation. They proposed that one strategy that might counter this deleterious force is the presence of growth mindset.

A notable portion of the broadening research on growth mindset effects has looked at subject-specific findings. Truax (2018) noted the impact of growth mindset language and focus among her students engaged in the writing process, thereby allowing for an antidote to a strict adherence to standardized testing and other more finite assessment procedures. Viewing mistakes as part of the learning process was incorporated into the measurement of her study.

Other subject-specific studies have been conducted in order to highlight the influence of growth mindset. Bostwick, Collie, Martin, and Durksen (2017) have provided evidence between mathematic advancement and growth-oriented goals. Andersen and Nielsen (2016) underscored the impact of growth mindset orientation on the attainment of reading skills. Classroom-based growth strategies abound.

Growth mindset application has involved a systemic approach, requiring buy-in from all stakeholders within an organization (Scott et al., 2008). In schools, the conceptual understanding of all educators whose beliefs and action impact each student is conducive to students' benefiting from the growth approach in the most optimal way (Dweck, 2015). An orientation that allows for progress and positive change based on personal strengths rather than pre-ordained characteristics serves as a buffer for those disadvantaged students who embrace its motivating influence, offsetting some of the deleterious effects of poverty, as reported in the research of Paunesku, Walton, Romero, Smith, Yeager, and Dweck (2015). Growth mindset thereby lends itself to an equitable provision of educational techniques that service the learning potential of all students. Its applicability across a broad spectrum of learning challenges has been espoused by proponents of universal education.

With an increase in a progress-oriented growth approach within educational research, Rattan, Savani, Chugh, and Dweck (2015) urged that such a focus become an integral aspect of educational policy. As an impetus based on individual assets that can be fostered and strengthened, the growth mindset approach can be applied to every learner. In addition to fostering motivational goal-development and school success, Rattan et al. (2015) argued that allowing for growth possibilities across all diverse groups becomes a great equalizer in the attempt to provide effective interventions for all students. Claro, Paunesku, and Dweck (2016) went on to emphasize the role of positive growth orientation in mitigating the effects of poverty, disadvantage, and other challenging conditions.

Recent research has focused on the role of specific academic personnel in the promotion of growth mindset orientation (Yettick, Lloyd, Harwin, Riemer, and Swanson, 2018; Boylan, Barblett, and Knaus, (2018), including the specific growth-oriented language that they use in

their classroom interaction (Rau, 2016). In particular, the attitudes of classroom teachers in encouraging agency among students for the purpose of enhancing learning has been explored, although such research has not extended to the role of the supportive counselors within the educational system. Boylan et al. (2018) found that classroom educators' belief systems espouse the importance of growth mindset influences upon young Australian students in kindergarten through second grade while seeking ways to implement such a focus. They noted that while it is clear that forward-thinking mindset does promote a sense of agency in children, there is little formal or consistent training in providing a conceptual framework of growth mindset upon which educators can draw their knowledge.

Dweck (2015) has continued to emphasize the importance of growth mindset by publishing commentaries directed at educators at many levels. Her focus has shifted to include more than simple effort, as strategic action and the seeking of support have become part of the growth mindset paradigm she has constructed. Yettick (2014) promoted the role of the educator, of which the school counselor is akin, in constructing that motivational support.

The School Counselors' Role

An exploration of the impact of growth mindset among young children has garnered increased attention in the recent research that has included the educators' role. Fraser (2018) presented data that suggests that a long-term systematic reinforcement of growth mindset strategies needs to be implemented in order for the growth orientation to be internalized in young children. Haimovitz and Dweck (2017) reinforced the idea that children need to be taught by adults to learn from their challenges and develop awareness of their ability to grow and change.

School counselors have continued to work in close collaboration with administrators and educational professionals in the school setting. Much of their focus has been to address issues that are identified within the classroom, particularly and Schumann, 2008). School counselors have also had the means to work with students outside the classroom environment, thereby providing confidentiality and an atmosphere of interpersonal trust. Team-based benefits are encouraged in this dynamic process (Fitton, 2012).

Those school counselors who work with children in their formative years of schooling have helped to promote the attitudes, practice, and emotion management that foster learning (Frey, 2003). Motivation and goal-setting have been an integral part of the collaborative support provided to students within the school setting. Developing not only the behavioral techniques to tackle learning challenges but also the mental stamina and skill sets to become an engaged learner encompass this process. School counselors work hand in hand with classroom teachers and interventionists to help students tackle their learning tasks in an optimal way. In this way, school counselors have a potentially vital supportive role in the overall learning process.

School counselors have provided services along all tiers of intervention. They have implemented prevention and primary-tier intervention through classroom techniques that help to develop social skills and personal goal-setting. They have also intervened when students seem to require more intensive support, either in second-tier interventions often involving small groups or tertiary interventions and individualized communication (Hawken et al.,2008; Riffel, 2011; Burns, Riley-Tillman, and VanDerHeyden, 2012). Addressing specific obstacles to growth is part of this overall supportive intervention response.

Through their work, school counselors have incorporated the promotion of meaningful relationships that in turn can promote effective outcomes. Schiffin (2014) noted an association

between attachment with related positive affect and the conceptual underpinnings of positive psychology, a relatively recent area of inquiry. From an intervention standpoint, the impact of school counselors on this process continues to hold promise.

There is a recent study that addresses the impact of growth mindset orientation and the promotion of grit within the school counseling framework. Larberg and Sherlin (2021) noted in their study of school counselors associated with the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) that those professionals who espoused the growth mindset model and exhibited grit were more likely to address the challenges of working with students in their specialized role. In this way the characteristics of the school counselor has bearing on service provision efficacy.

While there has been a broadening range of efforts directed at understanding the role of mindset influences within the classroom (Garofalo, 2016), often targeted at specific academic subject areas, the literature pertaining to the collaborative role of the counselor in this area of study is still lacking in full scope. Growth mindset classroom practice may pertain to Tier One guidance lessons but do not extend to the more directed interventions seen in Tier Two or Three.

The role-based gap pertaining to school counselors in current research on growth mindset techniques points to the need for exploring the school counselor's role in relation to growth approaches, well beyond the static focus on proficiency itself. This research attempts to broaden awareness of the school counselor's promotion of growth mindset beyond the specifics of subject-based motivational work. This study also attempts to broaden the understanding of growth mindset involvement in earlier years of schooling, complementing the bulk of current literature focusing on adolescents in later grades, college students, and adults.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A qualitative study, involving the motivation, consideration, and ultimate action of school counseling professionals within a natural school setting, lends itself to descriptive data pertaining to the elements that comprise the school counselor's role. Data that can help to define the school counselor's role is the foundation of this study, creating a portrait of what is important to the school counselor's role in motivating young elementary level students.

The design of this study, exploratory in nature, incorporates multiple case study data collection and analysis. As successive interviews with current school counseling professionals regarding their practice and preparation were conducted, this research is qualitative in nature, with an emphasis on the case study approach to further conceptual understanding of how the growth mindset framework and its related motivational focus can be put into practice. The program of support offered by each participant to students, not the individual herself, constitutes each separate case that is included in this study. The "bounded" unit of analysis is the work of the school counselor (Merriam and Tisdell, p.38).

The designation of case study, highlighted by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), and Creswell and Poth (2018), relates to the view of each school counselor's experience of practice in this study. Through a detailed account of the initiatives each counselor promotes, along with the philosophical underpinnings of those actions, the listener gains an understanding of the school counselor's role. The participants' perception of their students' responses are also described in detail.

Additionally, there is a strong narrative component to this case study process. The participants speak with passion about the work that they do. Their knowledge of student responses flows from the words they use to describe their unique role. Such narration is another design element in Creswell's overview of qualitative research inquiry.

Despite this focus on the school counselors' services, the voice of each interview comes from the school counselor themselves. In that way, the data stems from each school counselors' lens. The responses touch upon the school counselor's professional experience prior to school counseling, training, length of employment, school location, and school setting. The data resulting from this qualitative exploration is aimed at helping the educational community develop further understanding of how growth mindset concepts are valued, utilized, and learned among school counselor participants. Descriptions of related factors, such as the grade level of students, location and community characteristics, counselor background, and whole school-based growth mindset training, will be looked at closely in coding the interview responses for the purpose of clarifying the response profile. The relative degree of training within the school or district setting is of particular interest. Finally, the counselors' philosophical view of encouraging students resounds throughout each interview.

In reviewing the data, I have looked at descriptive and reflective data to determine the degree to which growth mindset strategies exist as an integral aspect of the participant's work. While the data is subjective to the participant, it has been analyzed in a manner as free from bias as possible. Appropriate rigor was assigned to the interpretive process that qualitative data uniquely provides (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

In stressing that I have sought objectivity, it must be noted that there is a certain "axiological assumption" that informs qualitative research (Creswell and Poth, 2018,

p.21). In regard to this study, the assumption has been to champion a position that maximizes growth and learning among developing individuals, an option, as an educator, to which I am drawn. Other assumptions noted by Creswell and Poth (2018), such as those of epistemology and ontology, will be respected in this research, creating an intricate look at the reality of the school counselor's role.

Research Questions

The overarching questions of this study lend themselves to specific inquiries regarding perspective, practice, and preparedness that were presented to the research participants.

Informing the qualitative interview questions were several items included in a national study of over 600 teachers in grades K-12 that was conducted by Education Week Research Center (Yettick, Lloyd, Harwin, Riemer, and Swanson, 2016). This sizable study provided a more thorough set of questions than previous growth mindset research, as it sought to define the inclusion of growth mindset emphasis among teachers while refraining from targeting school counselors.

A series of open-ended questions composed two semi-structured interviews, approximately 45 minutes in length, that were conducted with the selected sample of participants. The unfolding of the interviews included aspects of Seidman's (2013) approach to interviewing, including a synopsis of experience, an elaboration of experience, and a meaning-based reflection of that experience. The open-ended questions that formed the framework of this interview-based research set the stage for personalized responses constructed by the participant. Self-reporting allowed for reflection and insight. Participants were encouraged to elaborate at length upon their perspectives regarding the training and implementation of growth mindset strategies.

During the interview process, specific questions stemming from overarching inquiry areas pertaining to school counselor perceptions, school counselor practice, and school counselor training or preparation in the growth mindset arena were presented. The questions were presented in a semi-structured manner, with follow-up questions added during the course of the interview if a tangential thread seemed relevant to the potential findings of the study. Participants were given the opportunity to share other ideas they might be processing regarding growth mindset during the interview process. In crafting the questions, it was anticipated that participants would report a continuum of growth mindset focus, rather than a dichotomous division among them.

The full range of detailed inquiry through structured interview questions are listed in Appendix C in this document. The initial baseline questions that were presented in the first interview include the following:

1. What is your experience as a school counselor?
2. What are your thoughts, views, and philosophy of motivating students to face learning challenges and move toward learning success?
3. How do you motivate and encourage your students?

The baseline questions of the second interview were comprised of the following:

1. What is the place of growth mindset or other growth strategies in your role as a school counselor?
2. What is the place of motivational strategies in the direction of your school and school district?
3. How prepared do you feel you are to use specific growth strategies?

It is important to note that the specific established questions were presented with

regard to the flow of the interview process. While formalized questions in the interview design were created, it was my objective that the conversation with each participant would unfold in a natural and organic way, in order to accommodate unexpected findings and garner relevant data (Maxwell, 2013). Composed questions and follow-up questioning provided the opportunity for each participant to elaborate on professional engagement.

Questions in the second interview expanded upon findings of the first interview and focused upon school counselor training, collaboration, and efficacy. Participants were consistently given the opportunity to reflect upon their growth mindset practices and the influence of growth mindset training. School counselor participants focused upon what they were searching for in their practice and professional development. Changes in perception as a result of our first dialogue and the passage of time between interviews were also explored.

Within the interview format, participating school counselors were asked to share detailed information regarding their beliefs and action taken within their professional role. Each school counselor participant's perspectives on student motivation, the implementation of growth mindset techniques within the school counselor's practice, and the growth mindset training that the school counselor has received was explored through this in-depth interview procedure. Open-ended questions formed the framework of this interview-based research. Self-reporting allowed for individualized reflection and insight. While there may be a risk of unsettled thought, there was also the possibility that the interview would allow for a sense of efficacy and achievement in regard to the impact of the school counselor's work with students. Every effort was undertaken to insure an atmosphere of openness, trust, and confidentiality throughout each interview.

Setting

Each interview was conducted via the technological capabilities of recorded audio-video meetings on the Zoom platform, in part because of looming pandemic constraints. Participants were first contacted at their school site but were given the option of recording interviews from their public school or their private home. The researcher was situated in a public school setting during the interviews. Participant convenience was considered in all matters, with interviews scheduled at times that fit into participants' schedules. All conversations were recorded with the assurance that the responses would be kept confidential.

Participants

This qualitative exploratory study gathered data through narrative interview responses conducted over a two-month period of time. The targeted convenience sample for this study was composed of school counselors who provide services in the state of Maine. The projected sample of five school counselors in the elementary setting in Maine was selected randomly with the caveat that an effort was made to draw from different geographic areas within the state of Maine, at a distance of at least fifty miles from each other. Each participant subsequent to the first random selection was checked for this distance requirement. For this reason, the sample followed a purposeful sampling procedure, achieving a partial degree of randomization but not a full degree of randomization. The stated end goal of this research was to have complete interview responses from 3-5 participants, which would allow for some comparison among the participants in this multiple case study research.

The grade level of school counselors being included in the data analysis was set as a range from those servicing students in kindergarten through grade six. Demographic data regarding the school population being served, the school locale, and the number of years the

school counselor has worked in her role were gathered in the initial interview. Professional experience prior to school counseling was explored.

Within the interview format, participating school counselors were asked to share detailed information regarding their beliefs and action taken within their professional role. Each school counselor participant's perspectives on student motivation, the implementation of growth mindset techniques within the school counselor's practice, and the growth mindset training that the school counselor has received were explored through this in-depth interview procedure. A subsequent interview was conducted within two months of the first interview to provide an opportunity for participant clarification and follow-up. A phenomenological portrait of the counselor's utilization of growth mindset elements was drawn from the data gathered over the course of two interviews.

Throughout this process, all ethical standards were followed. Institutional Review Board approval was granted through the appropriate university research development procedure. Participant confidentiality was maintained, with pseudonyms replacing the actual names of the school counselors – and one dog - in the study. No identifying descriptors were used in the narratives depicting the work of each participant.

The findings were incorporated into the overall case description of each school counselor participant. Added details gathered regarding preparation and practice served to promote understanding and interpretation of the data provided by the participants. The participants were open and transparent in relating the wide breadth of their work. They responded to the trustworthiness developed within the interview framework by speaking passionately about their responsibilities and their commitment to their work. Those insights and commentary provided a narrative of each counselor's professional engagement as reported in their voice.

The Pilot Study

For the purpose of clarity and validity, a pilot of the interview questions was provided to a sampling of school counselors prior to the full research study being implemented. Responses to the pilot interviews were examined according to rigid professional research standards, similar to codification of the actual study responses, with the implementation of thematic analysis.

The pilot study was conducted with school counselors from a local Maine school district. The constructed questions were presented to these two school counselors, checking for clarity and understanding and exploring aspects of validity and reliability. The responses provided indicated that the pilot study participants were able to relate their experience promoting growth mindset practices and perspectives, as the questions queried. The pilot study responses helped to suggest validity of the questions in the dialogue that followed, ensuring that they reflected the area of study being explored. The pilot study participants' similarity of response to the general study participants indicated a degree of reliability.

Procedure and Data Collection

Leading up to the overarching focus presented by this research was a comprehensive URSUS review of existing literature pertaining to growth mindset initiatives in schools. The resource review was steeped in early theoretical underpinnings and historical changes that reflected movement in the educational realm. With the work of Dweck (2002) as a foundation, growing trends in educational training and focus were observed. From this knowledge base, research questions were developed. Throughout the research process, a review of most current research continued.

In beginning the research procedure, informed consent information was provided by means of a detailed document to all potential participants in this convenience sample. (See Appendix A.) Participants were informed of the purpose and nature of the study and the benefits of participation. Participants were assured that their identity would remain confidential and that there was minimal risk inherent in responding to the questioning that forms the main component of the study. The time given to the interview procedure and possible thought processes that result were listed as the only risks to consider. Participants were informed that they could opt out of participation at any point in time, with no penalty.

A series of two full interviews were conducted with each participant, with the second interview following within one to two months of the first interview, in order to provide an opportunity for participant reflection and clarification. The length of time for each interview was 45-60 minutes. It is important to note that heightened growth mindset reflection on the part of school counselors by the time of the second follow-up interview may have resulted from the focus of the first interview. Through this continuing exploration, a phenomenological portrait of the counselor's utilization of growth mindset elements was drawn from the data gathered. The compilation of responses from two interviews with each of the five participants encouraged a valid representation of participants' observations, focused insights into their practice, and a meaning-based reflection of their experience.

I must note that the collection of the data took place during a global pandemic, with procedures and social patterns taking on new dimensions in comparison to previous research time periods. In terms of methodology, interviews were conducted on a Zoom communication platform by necessity. The statements made throughout the research procedures included certain pandemic-related references.

Data Analysis

Appropriate analytical tools were utilized upon gathering responses to the data that was obtained. Details related to the school setting added a multi-dimensional overview to this analysis. While categories such as rural/urban, small/large population, and grade level of school, as well as length of school counseling experience, were imposed on the research findings, individual identity was not revealed. Complexity of districtwide growth mindset training was identified but those districts are not revealed by name.

The school counselor participants' interviews were transcribed in their entirety. This transcription process was completed electronically via the Zoom platform. The ongoing conversations over two separate time frameworks with each participant were recorded and retained for analysis. Any quotations taken from the data were recorded as presented in the transcription.

The transcripts were reviewed carefully in a thorough manner, with varying notations made in regard to the perspectives and information being presented. Statements that seemed to reflect similar areas of consideration were highlighted differentially. Only after the each entire transcript was examined were rudimentary areas of focus created in response to the analysis.

Statements that pertained to the encouragement of students were culled from the initial transcripts and then reviewed more carefully. Various approaches to growth mindset practice were highlighted, with similarities among the responses strengthening the shared view of counselors within the parameters of their individualized setting and experience. This selection allowed the focus to remain on the expressed purpose of the research study.

This preliminary organization of the insights gained through the interviews led to the categorization of the data. Specific constructs were coded and, with repetition, identified as

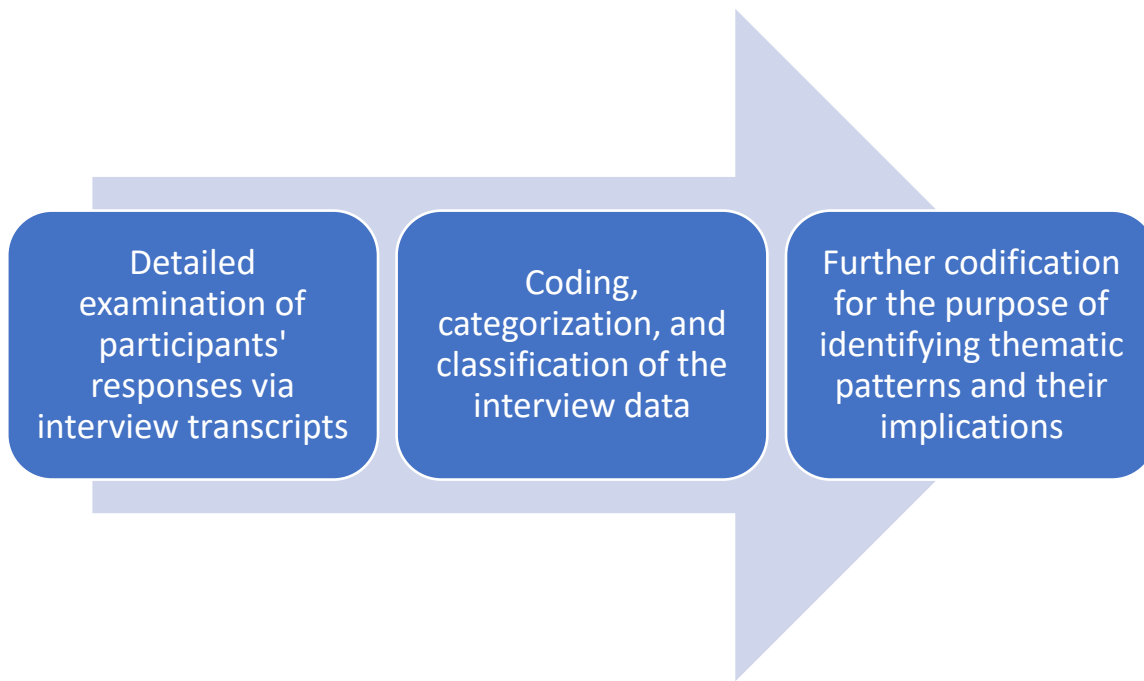
patterns, in accordance the qualitative framework constructed by Saldana (2016). Categories were highlighted and studied carefully to create the framework that emerged from the data analysis.

The headings that formed the emerging framework followed a logical thought process that separated the preliminary building blocks of the growth mindset process from the cognitive and behavioral responses the participants expressed their commitment. There was a sequential order to the unfolding of these categories (Saldana, 2019.)

Careful analysis of the responses made by five different school counselor participants through two separate interviews provided much coded data that invited further scrutiny. The findings were analyzed through abductive analysis, studying the impact of the situational environment on the inquiries being made. The data that was gathered and codified help to strengthen the constructs upon which the growth mindset framework is built.

In summary, key words and phrases that reappeared in the transcripts were identified. The responses were coded and categorized into the conceptual framework of the overarching research questions. As observed data was analyzed, it was processed in a thorough and rigorous manner. Academic tools were utilized to provide unbiased findings and extrapolated patterns. Emergent concepts and ideas were tracked and classified, followed by the construction of observable themes. Subcategories related to agency were included in this analysis. The similarities among the responses strengthened the shared view of school counselors within the parameters of their individualized setting and experience.

Figure 3.1



The Coding Process

Chapter Four provides an overview of the participants' subjective view of the impact of the participants/ work, through detailed narratives. Chapter Five provides a closer look into the patterns of similarity and shared thematic focus displayed exhibited by the participants in their school setting. Conclusions, interpretations, and implications stemming from the research process were considered once data was collected and reviewed and represented in the final chapter of this study, Chapter Six.

A graph was created to illustrate the relationship between the participants' responses for the purpose of noting similarities and inductive themes. Each participant was listed on the graph, along with the thematic areas of focus suggested by the coding. The graph created a representation of the research findings. A visual of the research process was also created.

It is important to stress that extrapolation from the specific cases included in this study cannot be made with the intent of forming a generalized statement about school counselors' practices. While limiting in one respect, that awareness gives the detailed account a more powerful presence, allowing the researcher to illustrate the data in a compelling narrative form. To that purpose, the cases that compose this research will be illustrated in their complexity in a separately added chapter containing narratives, thereby illustrating the intricacies of the role of certain school counselors in the growth mindset discussion

Overview of the Research Process

This study followed the qualitative research procedure that included the development of questions, a pilot study, conducted interviews of the general study, transcription, identification of repeated concepts, defining of response categories, coding of statements, highlighting of select quotations, formation of a two-tiered model of agency, classification of each model, sub-categorization, summary and overview of findings, an interpretation of the findings, conclusions drawn, and implications for school counselors' motivational work with students.

The case study process inspired by qualitative research provides a means to better understand a particular human experience. In the research outlined herein, the experience to be examined is that of promoting growth among young developing students. While the focus of this research is targeted and individualized, with no direct impact of interpretation upon a larger stage, the potential understanding to be gained by this research can broaden one's base of knowledge in an important area of educational focus, that which touts the motivational efficacy of growth mindset.

CHAPTER 4

NARRATIVE OF CASE STUDIES

Introduction

A multiple case study design, involving the motivation, consideration, and ultimate action of educational professionals within a natural school setting, lends itself to a descriptive overview of the elements that comprise the school counselor's role. In this regard, it would seem to be of marked benefit to researchers and those related to the school counseling field to convey the thoughts, feelings and actions related to student growth that are experienced by school counselors in the setting in which they craft their services.

For that purpose, the following narrative portrayal of each research participant's immersion in the growth mindset process is being provided for the reader of this study. This composite portrait of the research findings comprises its own chapter in this research publication. The narratives are intended to paint a picture of the participants' targeted work in a way that can be understood in human terms, helping to gain a sense of the many factors the school counselor considers as students are encouraged and supported in their learning.

This research revealed the breadth of motivational work that school counselors conduct with their students. Each school counselor who was interviewed expressed a commitment to helping students move forward to reach ongoing success. There was agreement regarding the need to support challenges, to accentuate strengths and positive orientation, and to applaud gains while continuing to strive for progress. Underlying this orientation was the recognition that connections and relationships allow for greater growth and meaningful interaction, which in turn impacts decisive action.

Furthermore, there were similarities in dedication, in compassion and understanding, in creative thought and action, in problem-solving solutions, and in informal assessment of their own efficacy. Those traits, while not researched specifically in this study, became apparent in the open communication all the participants displayed in their response to the interview questions. These professional assets are further described in the research findings.

While noting these similarities, it became clear during the interviews that each counselor puts her own style, strengths, and creativity into her work. The means by which goals were promoted by each school counselor were varied, pointing to the ability to customize the school counselor's work in a way that has a relevant impact on students. The school counselors were quick to express appreciation that the school counselor's role allows for this variability, while maintaining universal targets touted within the field of school counseling.

Each school counselor's unique role definition reflected their own training, expertise in counseling models, and previous work history. The composition of their school populations also came into play, with variations in school size and grade level, targeted schoolwide goals, needs that surface in the geographic region, and placement on the urban-rural continuum. Their individual stories reveal the challenges of each participant as they attempt to meet the needs of the children they service as school counselors. These factors were highlighted as each participant described their growth mindset motivational work with elementary-level school children, thereby contributing to a broader tapestry of school counselor services.

It is important to note that extrapolation from the specific cases included in this study cannot be made with the intent of forming a generalized statement about school counselors' practices. While limiting in one respect, that awareness gives the detailed account a more powerful presence, allowing the researcher to illustrate the data in a compelling narrative

form. To that purpose, the cases that compose this research are illustrated in their current complexity in this separate chapter, thereby exhibiting the intricacies of the role of specific school counselors in northern New England in their pursuit of growth mindset

Nora - “My passion is really with children.”

Nora’s counseling work started as a staff member of a regional mental health facility, where she has conducted in-depth services with troubled adolescents for many years, continuing to do so on a limited basis at present. She was introduced to school counseling through this agency and when a full-time school counseling position became available, she joined the school staff. She is currently taking courses to move from conditional licensing to full licensure, although her clinical experience has provided a broad base of knowledge and skills.

Nora is now applying her well-honed counseling skills to her students in kindergarten through fifth grade. She works in a relatively urban environment, with a diverse student population that represents various nationalities. She describes the many aspects of her work with students as being very rewarding, despite the presence of continual demands.

Nora’s work in her school is documented as part of an academic advisory plan. Data related to student achievement and attendance is gathered and reviewed. Nora notes that she has her own goals and initiatives as she promotes student goals through relevant plans.

Nora shares that she has a “toolbox” that she uses to reach students and create meaningful interaction with them for the purpose of developing skills. Her experience with cognitive behavioral strategies and motivational interviewing are part of her repertoire of techniques. Nora utilizes “tricks of engagement” in her work with children on several different levels. In the classroom with small children, she uses fictional characters to explain the many services she provides. Her curriculum also involves presentations that spark students’ interest, such as trivia

games to measure student learning and interactive lessons to strengthen learning. Her goal is to connect with each child in a way to which they respond. She acknowledges that each school counselor brings her own skill set to the school counseling role.

Goal-setting is part of Nora's growth movement with students. "Where would you like to be at the end of the year?" is a question she often asks her students. After setting a goal, Nora asks students how they can go about meeting that goal. Incentives are used to promote behaviors that support learning, such as attendance and engagement. Nora works on individualized plans with students, setting up achievable outcomes that motivate students to succeed. For some, a homework club helps to attain these goals.

Nora notes that many students "go right to the negative, especially what is negative or uncomfortable about their living environment" when assessing their current state. When that happens, Nora asks students "What can you change, what can you do right now?" She might add, "You can't change your brother's behavior, you can't change your mother's behavior." Pointing out what can be accomplished within the school setting is empowering, Nora adds. She stresses that the focus on empowerment reframes the negativity, leading to positive action.

Much of Nora's work is with students in groups. They are identified as sharing similar problems or issues. She discusses positive mindset and affirmations, strengthening self-esteem and self-image. Games, artistic expression, and creative projects inspire students, notes Nora, as they work together to move forward. These games and activities promote engagement, social skill development, and traits such as compassion, empathy, and fairness. Nora utilizes hands-on strategies, such as a color monster. She focuses on "how to regulate your emotions and how to move forward.... You get frustrated, but what do we do with that, it's okay to be frustrated."

In groups, Nora asks students to help, support and mentor each other if they have knowledge or awareness to impart, sometimes role-playing or videotaping their skill development. She also calls for empathy on the part of each student toward others, an element she sometimes sees as lacking in students' communication with each other. She asks students to notice how their behavior affects others and how, in turn, that behavior affects their own learning outcomes. For instance, she has asked students, "How is your behavior affecting the rest of these kids in class when you're throwing a chair?"

One particular project Nora utilizes is the creation of a personal book reflecting strengths and goals. Students celebrate their reflections in this book, reinforcing positive affirmations and the identification of talents and interests. They can fold the book for privacy and enlarge it for display. Students seem to value this self-exploratory project that is aimed at strengthening students' self-image.

Throughout these strategies, Nora continues to stress the importance of grit and perseverance. She remembers one student in particular. "I worked with him on understanding, if everything is easy, you're not learning, you're not growing, your mind is not growing, your body is not growing, you're just kind of stuck there, you have things that are going to be hard, that's how you learn."

An encouraging experience for students that Nora views as a real asset is the presence of her service dog, Stella. This service dog is used in the autism and self-contained rooms as well as among students in the general education program. For instance, one student who repeatedly bolted from the classroom was drawn to Stella's room, where he processed his motivation. He was asked to "come with a note, so people won't worry." A safe and helpful plan ensued. The presence of a calm, attentive, and responsive dog is a real motivator for students, notes Nora.

Stella's presence encourages students to engage in behaviors that will allow them to visit the school counseling room. Nora tells them, "You have to settle down because you've got to learn and don't be distracted and you know if you want to keep coming ... you have to stay settled." Students with social and behavioral difficulties often develop calming behaviors and self-regulation in order to be able to meet with Nora and Stella. Nora helps to motivate students by saying, "If you keep doing everything you should, I bet you can see Stella. We can put it in your plan."

Self-regulation is an important focus for Nora, in working with individuals, small groups, and classes. Settling one's body so that learning can take place is a repeated message that she gives to students. Breathing and relaxation techniques, tools of a cognitive-behavioral approach that Nora utilizes, helps students reframe their outlook toward a positive outcome.

Nora often runs groups in the morning that incorporate deep breathing, guided imagery, yoga, dance, and movement exercises. The activities are calming and allow students to return to their work in class. She incorporates guided imagery and breathing exercises in the classroom during class lessons as well.

Creating a different environment and paying extra attention are sometimes what it takes for students to reframe their negativity, stresses Nora. Using these strategies has helped students grow and learn. Nora tries multiple strategies with her students, trying to show them what she terms "a different way."

Providing for mindfulness and self-regulation, engaging students in the task at hand, and showing a genuine interest in their well-being are all part of Nora's practice. She helps students identify when they are starting to experience feelings that may interfere with their

learning, noting that sometimes students just need a little more “warm and fuzzy” to get back on track in their academic focus. With that base of connection, Nora incorporates a store of motivational approaches to promote learning and skill-building among her students.

Lindsay – “Kids need to know that people care about them.”

Lindsay was a third-grade teacher before training in clinical and school counseling. Her grade level experience has changed over time. Her recent experience has been working with early learners and also fourth and fifth grade students. She works with the entire population in those grades, which includes students with higher needs in resource and self-contained rooms.

Before becoming a school counselor, Lindsay was a foster parent and did trainings for adults on trauma for people who are interested in becoming foster parents as she continued to engage in clinical counseling. She continues to work with a regional agency helping children within a limited time framework, using her skills as a licensed clinical professional counselor in the school setting and beyond.

In working with families, Lindsay recognized the need for helping children who are affected by various challenging home conditions. She notes, “I got discouraged, because I knew the issue wasn’t really with the child, it was more of a family situation.” That awareness is one reason that she chose to work directly with students within the school setting.

The urban area in which she works is divided, with the area her schools are located in being recognized as a strong service area for individuals who struggle with addiction. Such individuals previously traveled to the city to receive services but now she finds families moving into the area to be close to substance use services. A more transient population has resulted from this pattern, with people seeking services and then moving away. Lindsay explained the situation in her work community as follows:

So people started moving here, because you can't take a bus for two hours and hold down a job and make the other improvements in your life that you're trying to do, so instead, we have a lot of families who moved here to be closer to the methadone clinics and I think that has played a big factor, you know we have a lot of kids that have had a real rough start to life.

The children of these students whose parents struggle with substance issues and received drug treatment services speak matter-of-factly about methadone and suboxone regimens. "There is a higher level of need than we had when I started, with kids who are just not in real stable situations. The result is "more anxiety, a clinical level of anxiety, rather than something that they can work through with a few tools." There have been demographic changes over time and the poverty level has increased, notes Lindsay, adding "Early trauma has an impact, even if things are going better now."

Lindsay points to the role of resiliency, noting that many children either never learned resiliency skills or lost them as they have undergone different life experiences. With methadone clinics and homeless shelters within her district, she points out that quite a few of her students are dealing with adult-sized problems in at home. Lindsay describes with compassion that a student might come to school and say, "Oh, my gosh, I'm sorry I'm late, my dad had to go get his dose, 'the devil's dose,' and I had to go to the clinic with him." Such experiences are such an integrated part of many students' lives that Lindsay described as follows, "It's like, you know, like they drove to a local store and got a coffee latte." This reality calls upon the supportive and constructive approaches found within the growth mindset process.

Lindsay engages in just such a focus in her ongoing work with her students. She might ask what students can say to themselves through self-talk when things are hard, encouraging them to focus on the fact that the task is difficult, rather than “I’m stupid.” When students start to “shut down,” Lindsay asks them to use the supportive words they would use with a friend who might be struggling in a process of building themselves up. This often involves cued sticky notes or other tools. In this way, Lindsay uses a social framework to encourage her students to consider their mindset in regard to growth and the strengthening of their drive. She frequently asks her students, “If you heard your friends say that to another friend what would you do,” adding, “you need to take care of yourself like that.”

Lindsay works with a number of children on a “check in and check out” basis. She promotes goal-setting, asking specifically what each student’s goal is for the day, such as staying organized, keeping a positive attitude, completing assignments, or trying to accomplish a task even when it is difficult. The goals, often small, manageable, and attainable, are written down for reference as students take steps to move forward. The goal-setting replaces student behaviors that reflect a stance of “giving up” or “beating themselves up,” notes Lindsay.

Lindsay adds, “I find that, especially with the kids that are a little bit more oppositional and have that lack of passion for school, giving them a lot of control and power so that it’s their plan that we’re working on... seems to go over a lot better than saying here’s your behavior plan right now, this is what we’re going to do.... I think they have a little more buy-in.” She continues, “By me not giving them a behavior plan and instead having them say, ‘so I struggle, what could help me and what control do I have to try to make my day better and be more successful,’ is a focus that can lead to their real success in their day.”

In a similar manner, students monitor their own progress and outcomes, often applying a program that highlights “zones of regulation” (Kuypers, 2011), promoting emotion identification. Such self-awareness helps students choose the specific strategies that would be useful in a given situation.

Lindsay’s growth mindset repertoire includes teaching resilience, helping students who seem to have “given up.” She does that in classes with growth mindset and social emotional learning curriculum. Class work allows her to check in with her students and see how they’re doing, identifying troubled affect and other changes. Face to face contact helps her to recognize if there is a student who is struggling with an emotion that interferes with learning.

This growth mindset focus is also a part of Lindsay’s work with social groups and individuals. She stresses that the changes in behavior that result from work in groups or with individual students are an indication that they want to improve their outcomes and they value the school counseling relationship. Through the work conducted in this relationship, students feel supported as they question “where do I struggle and what could help me and what control do I have to make my day better and be more successful?”

Lindsay finds it helpful to work with teachers and other staff in a collaborative way to tackle issues that students present. She notes that the support of all educators in helping struggling students is critical and notes that her role as a school counselor allows her to project her belief in students’ ability to overcome obstacles. Her message to them is that they can develop “all the skills in the world” which they can access with the school counselor’s help.

Having worked with young children for many years, Lindsay is making a change to the middle school level, where she will once again meet with students she helped as young

elementary students. She believes that existing comfort level will be particularly helpful with students who exhibit at-risk behaviors.

In true growth mindset fashion, Lindsay points out that “I’m ready for a change.” She knows that there will be a learning curve associated with this change but reflects within herself, “Do I want it easy or do I want to grow?” Growth is the option she has chosen for her own professional development.

Malory - “There’s never a moment that I wake up and think I don’t want to go to school.”

After fifteen years of serving as an early primary teacher, Malory decided she wanted to focus on strengthening student success through school counseling. She was ready for a change. She was looking to focus on social and emotional issues that buoy academics without worrying about specific academic targets. Applying the growth mindset framework to her own career trajectory, she decided to undergo a professional shift, embracing change.

Malory expanded her professional schooling to include school counseling services by attaining conditional certification as a school counselor while finishing her master’s degree in school counseling. The five-year conditional certification allowed her to move into a spot that was left vacant by a retiree. She immediately experienced a passion for her work as a school counselor, noting that it allows for “all the best things about teaching,” adding “I’m going to do this until I can’t work anymore.”

Malory now spends her time between two schools as a school counselor with students in grades kindergarten two days a week and fourth and fifth grade three days a week. Some of her older students she taught previously in kindergarten and are excited to see her in her new role. Having grown up in a neighboring town, Malory is quite familiar with the population of students who attend her schools.

Noting that her schools are situated close to homeless shelters, Malory stressed, “We have more of a transient population that travels to get those services and then their kids obviously come to our schools.... They’re not in a great place, in a homeless shelter, and they don’t always end up staying the whole year.” In addition to students who reside in a homeless shelter, several of her students have a parent who is incarcerated.

Reflecting upon the population she serves, Malory notes, “Well, I think they have more tough circumstances going on at home as a generalization, you know, so they need more wraparound care.” She adds that some families disclose their struggles and ask for help but others refrain from doing so. Malory also notes that having been in her current district for many years, she has seen an increase in trauma and difficult situations. Supportive resources such as “food cupboards” and “clothing closets” are staples of her community.

Malory finds her work very motivational. At the heart of her focus is the building of relationships. “I think, for me, this first year, I really see the importance of just relationship-building,” she noted. “If you don’t have that, then you’re not going to get anything, just a smile when you see them in the morning, just a smile, ‘hey how are you doing,’ use their name, let them know “she knows who I am.””

Malory knows that she is reaching her students because of their response to her. They notice her smile behind a mask. Statements from students reveal the impact the school counselor has made, although Malory notes that data to verify that impact is limited. Not all students are forthcoming; she refers to one student with whom she was not sure she had made a connection. On the last day of school, that student came up to Malory and noted how much she was going to miss the school counselor’s presence in her life over school break. “I’m like, oh my, I didn’t get the sense that she and I had formed that kind of bond, so that was really reassuring.”

Malory relates the story of a student who was consistently tardy. In fact, some days he wouldn't come to school. Malory states, "So we had an attendance meeting early on and then that person was my buddy.... I would check in with him every day.... I would make sure I go up and say, 'hey how's it going, you want to come talk, you want to come have breakfast with me' and gradually, little by little, the tardiness started to kind of fade away." The added attention played a noticeable part in encouraging this student to engage in her schooling."

From there, higher level skill development and learning goals can be encouraged. Malory follows the advice of one of her professors in her own current academic program, saying, "Collaborate and advocate for the kids and try to peel back the layers of what's going on here." This approach sometimes involves taking on a different angle or perspective, like just to be a thinker." Malory attempts to follow this guidance.

When meeting with students, Malory explains, "If you're thinking this, how can we shift it to this, giving some coping strategies to kind of shift that mindset." "You know just readjusting the mind you know, their mindset, of course." Regarding differences in capabilities, Malory notes that some students struggle, "well maybe they're having a hard time expressing themselves or maybe they're really not understanding the language that you're using or you know there's usually other factors." Malory does not think it is innate potential that is a determining factor.

Group work helps Malory reach students. Strong relationships are built within groups, she notes, with the opportunity of letting students take the lead. In groups, students seem to open up and be receptive to reflecting upon the effort they need to put forth to make changes. It is easier to know more about their struggles through group interaction, Malory stresses.

Social and emotional curriculum components help students in the classroom, adds Malory. Students are able to identify their feelings and thereby create an appropriate response. This approach helps them to attend to their tasks at hand, notes Malory. Often Malory will respond to teacher requests to hold certain discussions with students about social or emotional issues that seem to thwart academic progress. She notes that younger children respond well to social emotional learning programs and often speak freely about their emotions. They are usually quick to recover from negative thinking. Older students, added Malory, often carry “more baggage” and can be very quiet and reserved, notes Malory. It is partly for that reason that Malory often administers interest surveys and other tools to help those older students examine their responses and express themselves.

Throughout this work, Malory promotes self-regulation, perseverance, continued effort, practice, encouragement through challenges, and positive self-talk that cautions against students saying that they can’t do something. “You never quit, if you can’t do it, you don’t say ‘I can’t do this,’ you say ‘I can’t do this yet.’” She stresses that this mindset is “huge” in every grade. She adds that she is “trying to get her students to open up, trying to get them to feel it’s more like skills and strategies in that sense.” She rhetorically poses the question, “Is it growth mindset for behavior or social skills or academics or is everything interrelated?” The latter option seems to be the clear answer to Malory.

Judy - “Kids need to feel good about what they’re doing.”

Judy has used her experience in social work at residential sites and her work in the behavioral science of psychology in her twenty-one years of work as a school counselor at both the middle school previously and currently at the elementary level. She has also used the knowledge she gained as a protective social worker and a camp counselor during her college

years. Those early experiences fed into her interest in becoming a school counselor, looking at active ways to access student reflection and drive.

Judy moved from a middle school level school counseling position two years ago because of system changes and began her work with elementary level students in kindergarten through fourth grade. Although she was used to the middle school level, she found that she loves the openness of students at the elementary level and their receptivity to school counseling topics, eager to express their feelings, along with the increased time that she can be available to her current students.

Her students primarily come from household incomes that struggle economically, with the majority of students being eligible for free lunch given income guidelines. Poverty and drug issues abound. Judy notes that there is little distinction among students in the school setting, however, stating that “anxiety seems to be on the increase, whether you’re rich or poor.” Her school is located in a rural area that feeds a local paper mill. “I think maybe in some schools the kids are called out for not having things but I really don’t think that’s the case here, because it’s just their way of life,” Judy noted, adding, “Kids need to be able to just be kids and not have to worry about the things the adults have to worry about.”

Judy is involved in a “check in and check out” procedure in her school, coordinating with teachers and providing incentives for positive work. She makes sure that she is present for students each morning. While Judy’s “check in check out” system sometimes uses tangible rewards to motivate students, she also relies on strategies that touch upon internal resources. Helping students to choose behaviors that will serve them well is a foundation of her work with students.

In addition to checking in with students and gauging their goal-setting, another of her more meaningful experiences is holding lunch groups with students. During that time, connections are made among students and between her as the school counselor and students. Those students engage in games and challenges to boost their mindset of being able to accept challenges and finds ways around obstacles. Judy has seen students squeeze themselves around her big conference table so as to be part of these lunch groups. Sharing a meal helps them to build relationships and develop a more positive mindset, which often allows students to face their academic challenges in a more favorable light.

Students are invited to these social development lunch groups based on their need and their responsiveness to support. The students who participate seem pleased to be selected to receive this additional attention. Judy notes that when she goes into a classroom to pick up a student, “like a half dozen others will ask, ‘Will you take me?’” Some even use their incentive-based “bucks” to buy lunchtime with Judy as the school counselor. The chance for extra attention is a real motivator, notes Judy. “My turn, my turn,” they often call out as names are drawn at random from a pool of students who are observed making good choices. I would draw names and it’s quiet and they listen for their name and keep their fingers crossed,” she described.

This past year Judy asked teachers to send their “neediest” students to the lunch group. She was seeking students who most need added support. Knowing that almost all students want to participate in this social-emotional boost, selection is based on presenting issues.

Judy remembers one student with behavioral challenges who worked hard at regulating his behaviors. As an added motivator, he was allowed to select the peers who would accompany him to a group meeting. This gave him a sense of control in being able to invite students to

accompany him and raised his status in the eyes of his classmates. The resulting elevated mindset led the way to improved learning responses as well.

The power of social support is striking, notes Judy. Even students who appear “standoffish” at the start gain trust and involvement upon inclusion in a supportive social situation. She adds that one-on-one and group meetings are quieter than the classroom, allowing for cognitive processing and involvement in challenging activities. “It relaxes students and they’re more open,” notes Judy. She stresses that one needs a variety of strategies to reach students, as what one student responds to, another may not.

When Judy hears students say “I can’t do this; I’m not smart; I’m dumb; I hate myself,” she moves from the negative to something that the student can accomplish or do well, thereby focusing on the positive. Judy notes that it is important to comment on the little achievements of children of all innate abilities. “Do that as a habit, commenting on the effort that they put into things rather than ‘you’re so smart.’” Judy added that she would say to students, “‘I could see you working really hard at that,’ and you could just see the light bulb go off.”

Reframing the negative works for both social and academic situations, notes Judy, two areas that are interconnected in regard to a student’s self-view. She remembers a student who bemoaned the fact that she only had three friends. Judy said to her, “What, you have three friends,” highlighting the positive in that reality. “I try to show them a different way,” she notes.

Judy continuously reframes the spiraling of negativity into a strength-based perspective. Judy acknowledges that sometimes students are hard to motivate. “I think there’s a lot of things going on at home or maybe even with school or some mental health issues that’s going on with them.” One strategy is to find something that the students can do well or work on excelling at so that they can feel successful. Focusing on what students can do and what they have and not what

they are struggling with is initially helpful, accentuating a positive vantage point. Sometimes that means trying to get to the heart of the matter. For instance, if a student reports that “all my pets die” Judy might learn that such a sad event occurred many years ago and the student is concerned about a current pet that she loves. It is emotional heaviness like this that interferes with student growth, notes Judy. She tries to promote self-reflection and broaden students’ perceptions of their situations.

Judy believes that in some cases “there are probably some underlying mental health issues that pre-adolescents face. She notes “I’m thinking of two students who come in and at first everything is right but then... everything is not right with the world and so, you know, we just kind of broke down each sentence” to identify what is going well.

Judy spoke about the influence that school counselors have in impacting the trajectory of students’ lives. She noted that there is little control over home conditions or poverty. “We have a lot of kids that come in and out and I don’t have control over that, but just to connect quickly with the kids that do come in, I think that what I do have power over is the connection, that’s really important”.

Whether checking in with students, meeting with small groups, or providing SEL in the classroom, Judy notes, “You’re teaching students how to find their voice, speak up for what they see is the right thing, or you know, what they believe in.”

Kelly – “Take care of their hearts first.”

Kelly saw her move to school counseling as a natural step beyond her work in residential treatment center. After a period of time as a clinical coordinator and a career counselor, she knew that she wanted to work directly with young children in their developmental journeys.

Much of Kelly's previous work with youth involved wilderness experiences with them. During those wilderness activities, Kelly has taken students who couldn't succeed in the public school or in their home and tackled living in the woods in group settings, with no electricity.

Everything was taken away so they only had themselves and the group to rely on...We had to build a place to sleep and we had to build a fire, we had to cook our food and we had to do all that stuff and they found out, 'oh, I don't need technology, I don't need the internet, I don't need the makeup or the cool clothes, or whatever, I just need my will power, my friends, and we can get this stuff done.

Kelly applies the observations she gained from her previous experience in residential and wilderness settings to her work with elementary students in pre-K through grade five. A number of her students have experienced domestic violence or homelessness. She notes that they benefit noticeably from the challenges she presents to them, building upon each successive success. They display a great sense of pride when difficult tasks are accomplished.

Kelly stresses that the school environment provides a safe and consistent place for students to learn and grow. She states that she sees "great potential in every student."Familiar with challenging conditions as she previously helped her clients overcome obstacles, Kelly has taken a similar approach to helping students face hurdles in the school setting. Kelly's adventure training came in particularly handy during the Covid-19 crisis. As students were not able to gather closely in groups indoors because of pandemic restrictions, Kelly began to take her students outdoors to explore both nature and their own capabilities. Even the challenging Covid period had its positives, with attention given to students and new relationships being made. Behaviors seemed more focused and collaborative, notes Kelly.

Kelly sees the outdoors as a natural opportunity to explore during stressful and unprecedented times. “I think Covid helped us to push ourselves out of the traditional classroom, for sure,” she stresses, noting that nature has provided “some of the most powerful experiences that happened to me working with clients.”

“A lot of growth mindset took place in the woods this past year,” states Kelly. She set up an obstacle courses or a challenge that could not be easily conquered. Students would attempt to overcome the challenge, not often seeing upon the first attempt or even subsequent trials. Questions then follow, such as, “Is it okay not to succeed on the first try?” “How can the problem be approached differently?” “What can you say during those times?” “What are your options?” “How can you seek help?”

Kelly works with students to process the answers to these questions. She acknowledges to them that it is natural not to know the answers immediately. Rather, through discussion and self-reflection, as well as peer support, clarity can occur. Kelly notes that this way of addressing challenges is part of the overall learning process.

Kelly stresses that through growth mindset activities, trust in others becomes important. She notes, “If we have to be able to cross an obstacle, how can we be supportive and understanding that everyone’s different, maybe this is hard for one person today; it might be hard for someone else at a different time or a different obstacle.”

While Kelly acknowledges that students are all unique and that certain physiological conditions may have bearing on success, she states that each student has the ability within themselves to move toward growth and achievement. Kelly stresses that the students’ belief in his or her ability to “learn and grow” is the impetus for ensuing effort and grit. The sense that

we're always learning" that she provides in her work with students as they face challenges facilitates this growth. Perseverance is critical in this process, Kelly adds.

Continuing without giving up is presented as a critical element, Kelly emphasizes. She often asks her students to ask themselves, "What happens when I keep falling off, what should I do, should I just give up? ...I put that question to them, and then stress, no, no, 'keep on trying.'" Instead of looking at mistakes and challenges negatively, they become exciting experiences.

Group support is part of this encouraging picture. "What do we say to our friends?" "I can do it; you can do it. What would our friends say to us?" As differences among individuals are acknowledged, group support is viewed by Kelly as being helpful in encouraging a student to face challenges and persevere to gain goals. The groups that she works with band together to welcome challenges and solve problems, bringing forth an encouraging growth mindset. Learning from mistakes and celebrating those outcomes is part of this process, with students often wanting to repeat the experience.

Kelly remembers one particularly shy older student who had previously remained aloof. After outdoor challenges, he stated that he loved guidance and loved being outdoors. The hands-on interactive approach worked well for him and many others.

Small successes of any kind are recognized. Even supporting a classmate or praising a student for any type of buy-in promotes a growth mindset, notes Kelly. Consistent pieces of encouragement are offered, with comments such as, "I can see that you're really working on that," Kelly, as a caring adult, promotes a sense of confidence and pride.

Although not relying solely on the outdoors, as the Covid experience encouraged, Kelly will continue to incorporate challenges into post-Covid lessons. Small groups are particularly conducive to a range of challenges, often pulling in the quieter students, notes Kelly. She hopes

to continue to offer challenges and the confrontation of obstacles in engaging ways in her continuing work with students. She continually asks, “How can I help you be the best that you can be?” She notes that this is consistent with the intervention framework.

Kelly utilizes the unique method of embracing and undertaking challenges to imbue grit, perseverance, and a sense of continual learning in her students. The gains can be generalized to all areas of students’ lives, she notes. Kelly ascribes to the practice of continuous messaging. She states, “Those messages become more ingrained at an early age with more opportunities to approach challenges in different ways.”

Kelly illustrates this point by pointing out “If a child is having difficulty getting up on a swing or pumping to move the swing, they remember the way they problem-solved and met challenges before. They brainstorm and build upon their confidence in themselves. Sometimes the kids will push wood chips underneath the swing as a team and they’ll say, ‘if we can all work together, we can do it.’”

While noting that it is important to address emotional issues and making sure that the basic needs of students who are undergoing difficult challenges in their lives are met, Kelly does believe that the confidence that comes with overcoming obstacles is transferrable to academic goal-setting. She emphasizes that students are able to transfer the growth mindset to other challenges, including academic, social, and ultimately life challenges.

In Summary

Each school counselor interviewed in this study exhibited a commitment to helping young students to whom they dedicate their professional work efforts strengthen their growth mindset skills. They provided their own methods of accessing a student’s sense of learning, growing, and developing the strategies to overcome life challenges, be they academic, social, or

personal. The methods were germane to the school counselor's own strengths, knowledge, and experience, yet the purposeful delivery of services on the part of all the participants were similarly targeted toward student success and a sense of overall well-being.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this research is to explore the framework within which school counselors in five disparate regions of Maine incorporate growth mindset and other motivational strategies in their work with young children. The questions look at the school counselors' counseling orientation, practice, and training experience.

The overarching questions of this study, as cited in Chapter 1, are:

- 1) What value or importance do school counselors place on growth mindset strategies in their work with students as they prioritize focus areas in their supportive role?
- 2) How are growth mindset strategies integrated into the school counselor's role?
- 3) Do school counselors believe that they are equipped to utilize growth mindset as an effective motivating tool in the pursuit of student success?

The participants' responses were transcribed, reviewed, and coded for pertinent data. Details and reflections pertaining to the participants' personalized work with students was culled from the interviews. Those responses were then reviewed assiduously for the purpose of ascertaining both differences and similarities among the services they provide to their students.

Overview

The descriptive data obtained from this study contrast the professional experiences among the five school counselor participants. The respondents came from varying work histories, along with differences in the timing and content of their professional training. Their length of service varied from relatively new to long-term. All five participants had experienced career redirection prior to their role as school counselors, with past work experiences being associated with the helping professions.

The populations these participants serve ranged from small rural communities to larger cities. Each of those locations had distinct populations with a host of presenting issues, including mobility, homelessness, substance abuse, incarceration, and other social concerns. The grades levels that they serviced differed slightly, although they all ranged from kindergarten through grade five. The size of the student body within the school of each participant was between 250 and 400 students.

TABLE 5.1

	Judy	Kelly	Lindsay	Malory	Nora
Gender – Female, Male, Non-binary	Female	Female	Female	Female	Female
Location in State	Western	Eastern	Central	Northern	Southern
Type of Community- Urban, Rural, Combination	Rural	Combination	Urban	Rural	Urban
Presenting traits of the population	Low- income/ Substance issues	Domestic violence/ Homelessness	Addiction Services/ Homelessness		Diverse Multi- national Population
Previous Experience	Behavioral Science/ Social Work	Clinical Coordinator/ Residential settings	Elementary- level teacher/ Clinical counselor	Primary- level Classroom Teacher	Clinical Mental Health Counselor

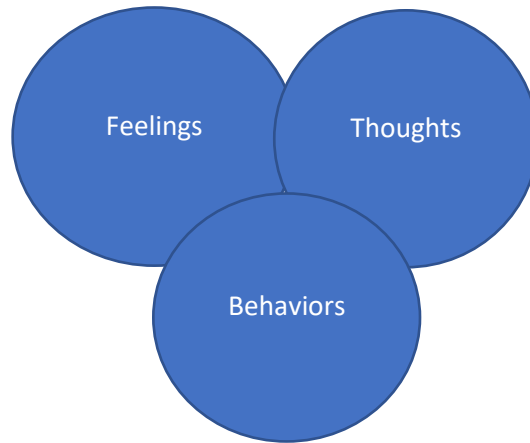
The Demographic and Experiential Composition of the Participants

Differences were observed in their programming style and the methods of interaction with students, as described in the narratives provided by the participants. The school counselors have applied their creativity and prioritization to determine the ways by which they have delivered services to their students. Each seemed to have a particular “draw” by which they connected with students and procured their responsiveness and engagement. Their descriptive data revealed marked differentiation in their role performance, although a combination of individual, group, and classroom counseling was common among all five participants.

While each of the participants focused on affective, cognitive, and behavioral responses in their work, the reliance upon those outcomes differed from time to time in the self-reports of each school counselor who was interviewed. For instance, at times the school counselor spent their time with students delving into the feelings of students and the impact of those feelings on their learning behaviors. At other times, school counselors worked on changing students’ perceptions of their own value in a group setting. At further times it was a change in behavior that was taught, encouraging actions that would promote growth and productive responses.

This sifted approach accurately reflects the role definition of the school counselor, who is charged with addressing affective, cognitive, and behavioral displays that impact optimal learning. The participants noted the interrelationship between these targeted areas, as how a student is feeling often impacts thought processes and actions. Conversely, the success which a student experiences as a result of a behavioral change often impacts how that student feels or thinks about his or her self-worth and potential. At times, it is the initial thought process that triggers emotional and behavioral responses. In the interviews conducted, each of the participants expressed an awareness of this intricately interconnected process.

FIGURE 5.1



The Interfacing of Affective, Cognitive, and Behavioral Responses

It appears that while programming and methods of delivering growth mindset constructs differ, the messaging that school counselors attempt to present in the area of growth mindset is similar. This messaging reflects a shared core value related to ongoing growth potential within each student. In short, they have come to similar conclusions in the establishment of their initiatives with students, despite differences in the delivery of those services.

It was clear through the interview process that all school counselors had knowledge of growth mindset, along with the components that compose its construct as a process. None of the school counselors had been trained specifically in a growth mindset curriculum or had received a specific directive to teach growth mindset skills. Rather, the ways by which they gained an awareness of the importance of incorporating growth mindset into their work with students was organic, through a host of resources. This knowledge that school counselors have regarding growth mindset approaches includes workshop presentations, curriculum content, texts, bulletin board supplies, and conversations with teachers and other educators.

The participants' emphasis on the assets that can be developed through grit, effort, and perseverance, as a counterpoint to those attributes that are experienced through the environment or granted at birth, was consistent among the study participants. The goals of encouraging success among students and guiding them along the way were similar, even when their ways of carrying out that goal direction differed in terms of method and strategy.

As a result, there was no set overriding "growth mindset curriculum" that was presented by the school counselors. Growth mindset conceptualization was promoted through various activities and lessons, often coinciding with other initiatives. The resulting framework of growth mindset focus reveals many similarities among the participants' work, with individual ways of going about highlighting those constructs.

The Conceptual Framework

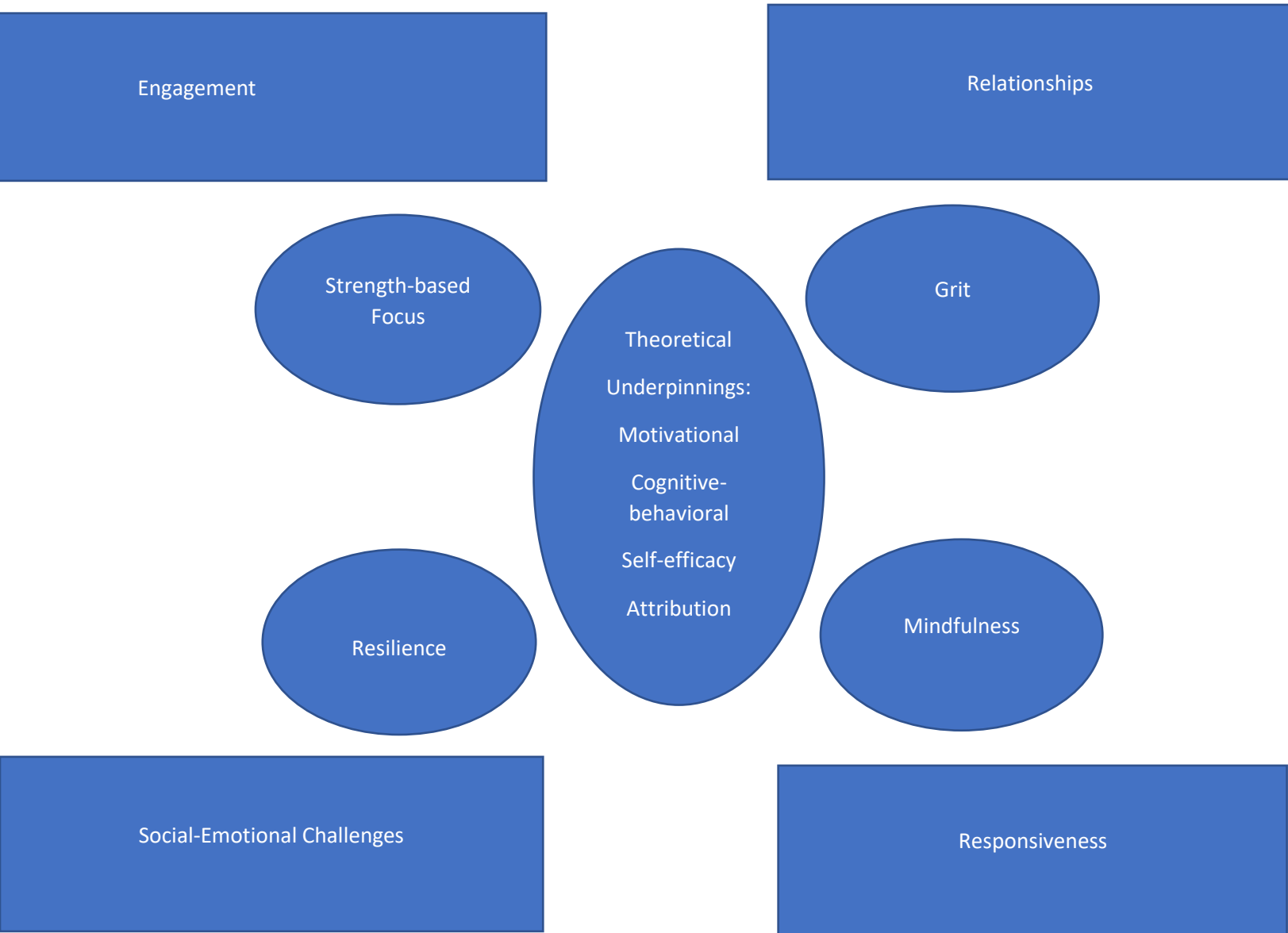
The shared vision of the five school counselors who participated in this study falls into two categories of agency, those being growth mindset **foundational prerequisites** and growthmindset **content components**. Foundational prerequisites are the building blocks that need to be put into place by school counselors and other educators so that growth mindset can be optimally fostered in a supportive setting. Growth mindset components are those responses that school counselors encourage as objectives in their motivational work with students.

As a result of the coding conducted in this research, foundational prerequisites include **engagement, relationship-building, social emotional support, and responsiveness**. These categories were defined by the coded responses of all the study participants who strive to create a learning environment that is conducive to growth mindset precepts. They require action on the part of the school counselor.

The growth mindset components of student learning that school counselors strive to generate includes the categories of **strength-based focus, grit, resilience, and mindfulness**. As participants related the focus of their growth mindset focus, these categories were further defined, as described in the growth mindset component section below. These components and their subcategories require action on the part of the students who receive services from school counselors. It is noted that while other educators work specifically with a portion of the school population, school counselors are charged with servicing the total population of their student grade-level target grouping.

In summary, all school counselors in the study sample, comprising 100% of the sample, cited aspects of all four categories within each of these constructs. They are discussed separately within this chapter, in keeping with the coding of the participants' interview responses.

FIGURE 5.2



The Confluence of Foundational Building Blocks
And Content Components of the Growth Mindset Construct

Foundational prerequisites

While the participants’ experience and programming differed from site to site, as their narratives illustrate, there were several foundational conditions that they considered essential for the motivational work that school counselors seek to provide. The thematic categories are

interrelated and not sharply delineated from each other. These prerequisites require action on the part of the school counselor in her role, to which all five participants actively responded. In this way, it is the school counselor who is the agent of these categories. While the conditions they establish pertain to broad target areas, these prerequisites were viewed as being essential for growth mindset learning to take place.

Engagement

The study's participants believed that it was important to engage students. As described in Chapter 4, they found a myriad of ways by which to do this. Using their "draw" to capture student interest in becoming involved in the conceptual learning task, they were able to procure their students' attention, trust, and responsive action in most cases. All the participants in this study noted that to be able to reach students, creative engagement strategies are necessary. This charge involves a host of activities that provide a sense of commitment on the part of students. In coordinating the school counselors' many responsibilities, student investment and ownership has been a top priority, crafted in a way that fits the mission of the school and the surrounding district.

Each school counselor sought to engage students through strategies that reflected her training, experiences, and a recognition of their own strengths and growth. Hands-on examples offering a means to growth mindset outcomes included check-in's, goal-setting, strategy development, lunches bunches, small groups discussions, role-playing, movement, games, wilderness challenges, visual arts, journaling, media use, the presence of a therapy dog, and a host of other creative ways to gain students' attentiveness and commitment. With similar objectives in mind, each participant exhibited her duties a bit differently and put her own individual mark on the school counselor role.

Using their customized strategies, participants were able to procure their students' attention, trust, motivation, and responsive action in many cases. This was viewed as the initial entry to the ongoing connection between the school counselor and student. It was seen as critical to fostering motivation in the students who are most in need of counseling, according to each of the participants in the study's sample.

The use of motivational materials was emphasized by each participant. Artistic expression, music and media, and cooperative challenges and games were all cited as sources of learning about oneself in relation to others. Kelly stressed "the power of the woods," with lessons to be learned from navigating the outdoors.

All five participants noted the importance of promoting involvement with students individually, in small groups, and in full class activities. Individual expressive experiences, as well as other incentives, can promote engagement, the school counselors in this study stressed. Small group games and creative topics that provide a sense of collaboration and camaraderie also generate ownership and can have an ongoing draw, noted each of the participants. Classroom lessons were carefully crafted so that students could understand its applicability to their own lives in an engaging way.

Malory emphasized that it is vital to create "buy-in and the importance of what's going on in your classroom" in offering counseling lessons encouraging a growth mindset. Judy stressed that "the more connected that you are to something, the less behavior problems you have." For Kelly, the outdoors provided a vibrant opportunity for growth mindset challenges and lessons. Lindsay noted the importance of seeking full engagement with students' families as well.

Nora summed up this imperative by saying, “You need many tricks in your toolbox. Each person’s toolbox will be a little bit different, with differing knowledge of methods and techniques. There are so many ways of accessing the kids.” The use of hands-on activities fosters learning and understanding, stated Nora. The presence of her therapy dog is a notable example of an inviting measure to nurture student receptivity. Nora acknowledged that her service dog is only one of many strategies to connect with students.

Relationship-building

Another response pattern that emerged from all five of the respondents was the reliance on relationship-building in helping students to be successful. While none of the research questions specifically asked about the school counselor’s relationships with students, the interview dialogue was flowing with references underscoring the importance of building relationships with students. From an affective standpoint, all counselors stressed the importance of trusting and positive relationships to help students move forward in the growth process. Each participant was adamant that without the existence of relationships, students would be less likely to be imbued with the motivation to do what is necessary to engage in the effort it takes to progress and overcome challenges. Relationships were viewed as providing a foundation of trust, safety, and support, upon which other encouraging interactions and learning could grow.

While connections with students were at times made in very different ways, they nevertheless all served as a foundation for subsequent work with students, allowing for students to be open to assistance and support. Judy and Lindsay described how they made sure to be present for students in the morning when they arrive at school. Nora noted she has lunch groups with students on a regular basis. All participants spoke of social learning groups that are held throughout the day. The counselors’ methods of connecting with students were interwoven,

sometimes shared across schools and sometimes reflecting the school counselor's own creative path.

The bond and mutual regard between each school counselor and her students was readily observed. Students often ask to meet with the school counselor, underscoring the task of juggling many different responsibilities, according to the participants. In many cases, school counselor visits provide incentive for students who are reluctant to attend school. There is a relationship that students strive to continue throughout the school year. All the participants noted students' eagerness to meet with the school counselor and develop that bond. Appreciative comments made during and at the end of the school year have highlighted the strength of these relationships.

Malory stated, "There's no magic answer to getting kids to stick with it. 'I think it's, um, relationships, I think that the more they know how much you care about them, the more that's going to positively affect them.'" She emphasized, "Develop the relationship and find out what's really needed."

Judy noted that at times it is the simple act of being attentive to students that creates a strong bond. Presenting interest in a student's thoughts or feelings can begin an ongoing school-based relationship that makes the school site a safe and welcoming place. Often the attention provided stands in contrast to the busy home lives that some children experience, Judy added.

Lindsay concurred, stating, "I think having an adult who believes in them is it, because you know a lot of the kids ... were in trouble a lot, especially during unstructured times, they were hearing their name over and over and over in a negative way." She added that it is important for students "to start the day with somebody who cares and 'they're in my corner and they're going to fight for me.'" "Take time to build those relationships," she stressed.

Lindsay went on to say that building relationships shows students that an adult has an understanding of their struggles. In wanting to be with the school counselor, as each participant observed in many children, students indicate that they show they are willing to work on issues, added Lindsay. Her view is that the school counselor communicates with the child and the child “gives back” by communicating in turn with the school counselor. Simply opening up to the school counselor and accepting encouragement and support is a potential movement toward growth mindset, stated Lindsay.

Kelly expressed gratitude at the opportunity to create comfortable interaction with children who undergo anxiety, stress, and struggles. She has continued to view the encouragement that stems from a trusting and supportive relationship as a tool that fosters motivation through a variety of strategies. Even a simple “warm welcome” is powerful, Kelly noted, pointing to the “sense of belonging being met and the feeling of being taken care of and heard.” “Just knowing that they have people who do care about them and want the best for them, doing whatever they can to help them succeed” can affect academic behaviors, noted Kelly. She added that “working together and supporting each other” gives students the opportunity to engage in community-building.

Malory stated that she encourages students to lead in small groups. This leadership promotes self-esteem in students and seems to motivate students to set goals and find solutions to problems. The strengthening of growth mindset within groups was present in each of the participants’ narratives. The common theme of community-building was shared by all the school counselors in the study.

Nora has explicitly worked on developing skills of empathy through her many activities with students because “a lot of those kids don’t have empathy for somebody else,” She

encourages students to better understand their reflective impact on others, serving as a role model of empathy in the support she provides for her students. Students often take the lead through means such as role-playing, with some videotaping taking place in her group meetings. Helping other students builds self-esteem in students and enables students to learn from each other, noted Nora.

As the only participant who has a canine in her office, Nora also emphasized the impact of her therapy dog in her work with students who display challenges in regulating their behaviors. She noted that she has seen phenomenal growth in behaviors conducive to social and academic functioning in those students. Nora has consistently touted the value of animal friends in promoting growth among students.

Working with families was cited specifically as being critical by three participants in the study. Malory explained those relationships in the following terms, saying, “I think that goes right back to relationships, a relationship with the kid but you also have to have a relationship with the family.” She added, “You know your kids are going to hear their parents talking, they’re going to see how they feel, even if it’s not with words about school and if you can build that positive relationship and get that buy-in early, you’re going to get the best results at the end.” Malory pointed out that teachers are vested in their relationships with families as well, keeping a close eye on changes throughout the school year.

Lindsay noted that she generally has good relationships with parents. She pointed out the importance of this connection “so that they will trust their children to me and let them visit me. I try to build that, you know, we’re all on the same team, we just want what’s best for your child.” She added that home visits have allowed her to strengthen home-school relationships and develop a better understanding of some of the issues with which her students are dealing.

In terms of professional collaboration and community building, staff partnerships in working with individual students were consistently valued. Working as a team, making connections, holding ongoing conversations, and understanding different role experiences were noted as being essential by each participants. Some staff members are more receptive to that professional relationship than others, stressed Judy. When connections and conversations take place, the school counselor can learn much about a student's struggles that can aide in the development of coping skills and responses, noted Malory.

Ongoing dialogue helps both classroom teachers and school counselors detect issues and respond to student needs. In that way, teachers and school counselors form a partnership, noted the respondents. Malory pointed out that the school counselor can benefit from conversations with teachers because they have knowledge of family issues while working consistently with the student and keeping a "closer eye" on that child each day. Judy worked with teachers to identify students who might benefit from personalized interaction and attention. Judy noted, "The teachers that have been there for life, they just know just what to do all the time. I get information from them. I think we learn from each other." The combined expertise of school counselors, classroom teachers, and other staff members serves as a tightly interwoven collaborative safety net for students.

This collaboration and relationship-building extends to intervention work that identifies promising strategies for helping students succeed. School counselors often serve on intervention teams, leadership teams, and advisory councils to identify ways to help students overcome academic, social, and behavioral challenges. Positive behavior, intervention, and support (Ryan, 2019) is one of the platforms utilized to establish intervention planning. Response to intervention (RTI) plans are drawn up with school counselor input and awareness of challenges

and goals, stated Lindsay. School counselor input is valued by their colleagues, noted other participants. The collaboration between school counselors and other staff are viewed as a strong foundation of support, noted all the study participants.

Administrators were viewed as being integral to the school counselors' services and their work with students. Each participant emphasized the importance of their relationship with administrators. Each school and each school district is different, they emphasized. Principals are influential, differing even within a particular district. Changes in administration bring about changes in programs and service delivery. All five participants cited the influence of administration, noting that with frequent shifts in leadership, shifts in priorities have resulted.

While all the school counselors participating in the study were the only professionals filling that role within their schools, collaboration with other school counselors and other professionals in the mental health field was viewed as beneficial. Peer supervision was valued, although not always allotted substantial time. As the only school counselor in their schools, these professionals sought contact with others who focused on the social-emotional needs of the students.

Kelly stated, "So I have a big picture regarding inclusion and growth mindset, like all this stuff about working together as a team and supporting each other. Some you can control and some not." She added, "People in schools don't always know what we do. School counseling is seen as a priority by some but not all." Yet Kelly strongly communicated the importance of her supportive work with students. Along with the other participants, she emphasized that encouraging students to overcome challenges can be a powerful and motivating force.

Social-Emotional Support

It is apparent that the school counselors interviewed expressed a dedication to academic growth, seeing such growth as being integral to the purpose of schooling and the ultimate success of the student. The rigor and attention required by students allows them to refocus their energies and help put their lives in order, according to the participants.

From a cognitive perspective, each participant noted the importance of meeting the social and emotional needs of students while simultaneously striving for academic progress. They stressed that it is difficult for students to focus on learning when emotions pose distraction in thought and behavior. For that reason, emotion management was viewed as a goal that coincides with academic learning.

Participants acknowledged that students enter the school environment with a host of issues that impact their ability to focus on academic growth. Some of these needs manifest themselves in violent outbursts and unsafe behaviors. For that reason, they noted that it is important to address social-emotional conditions that impact learning in the process. By strengthening social emotional skills and the obstacles presented by social and emotional factors, barriers can be removed. Addressing social and emotional issues is in keeping with encouraging the growth of the “whole child,” a focus that each participant stated they espouse.

Nora pointed to the fact that many of her students come from homes with constant trauma. Referring to her work with these students, she stated, “So it is social emotional, absolutely one hundred percent social emotional, we keep saying that.” She emphasized that the struggle with trauma is often generational.

Lindsay stressed that “the non-academic piece enters into it,” when trying to motivate students to reach their full potential. She added, “Early trauma has an impact, even if things are

going better now,” a reality she described in her work with students who have experienced high levels of trauma. Poverty, deprivation, and anxiety over basic needs play a part in a student’s readiness to meet the challenges of learning, noted Lindsay.

Malory pointed out that emotional distress is part of the whole picture. Noting that behavioral issues seem to be on the increase, Malory stated, “What’s going on right now, you know, you do have to look at the whole child, the whole picture, because that’s obviously going to give you some major clues ... if you just look at academics and you don’t look at other aspects, you’re going to miss major pieces.” She went on to say, “In any kind of meeting that you’re talking about academic or behavioral issues you’ve got to say, ‘Let’s talk about the home life, what’s the past history of this child, and, when appropriate, how much trauma have they been through?’”

A host of conditions lend themselves to the mental health challenges that students face, as described by the study’s participants. Malory noted that her school is situated close to homeless shelters that serve as a place of nightly residence for her students, “so that brings its own set of issues.” Having one parent who is incarcerated is also an experience for many of her students. Lindsay referred to the addiction services and incarceration sites situated in her city. Other participants also spoke of the impact of support services that are nearby, drawing families to the area.

These factors lead to transience, mobility, and uncertainty on the part of the student population. Students may reveal their social-emotional struggles and then move away. They develop closeness with the school counselor only to leave that relationship behind in a move that is beyond their control. For those who remain in the community, food pantries, clothing

closets, and other supportive services assist families as they juggle the demands of daily life, described in detail by several of the participants.

Judy cited both mental health and environmental issues that affect her students., with anxiety being on the increase. She expressed dismay over how much her students know about dysfunctional aspects of their family. According to her, they seem well aware of the struggles that their families are undergoing. Judy stated, “I think it’s just a little disturbing that they just kind of know what’s going on,” adding, “Kids need to be able to just be kids and not have to worry about the things the adults have to worry about.” She noted that, “Some kids are hard to motivate. I think there’s a lot of things going on at home or maybe even with school or some mental health issues that’s going on with them.” Judy at times intercepts notes that say, “I hate myself and everything is going wrong,” adding that “anxiety seems to be on the increase, whether you’re rich or poor.”

There was some discussion of the timing of social emotional issues. When speaking of student success, Lindsay acknowledged that social-emotional issues need to be addressed before, or while, striving for academic success. Malory stated,

I don’t know if it needs to be first, but it needs to be part of the conversation if you’re having any kind of a meeting and you’re talking about academic or behavior you’ve got to figure out why, let’s talk about the home life, whatever we know about it, what is the past history of this child, how much trauma have they been through?

Kelly noted that “overcoming challenges is transferrable to academic struggles. She stressed that it is critical to address Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (McLeod, 2020), with a view toward ensuring that basic psychological concerns are heeded first. If those basic needs are not met, students are less likely to address more intricate needs, she emphasized. “They’re unable to

do the higher levels if their basic needs aren't met, and I think some of the emotional stuff, you know, the safety piece, is there for some of them or the hunger piece," Kelly stated.

Kelly's belief that educators need to "take care of their [students'] hearts first" is a call for addressing social emotional issues as a precursor to other demands. Once engaged in fostering cognitive and behavioral growth, resulting changes can aid academic growth, noted Kelly. She added that "one of the key components I think that drew me to school counseling, is the social emotional as taught alongside the academic, like it's all kind of interwoven."

Malory added, "What's going on right now, you know, you do have to look at the whole child, the whole picture, because that's obviously going to give you some major clues that if you just look at academics and you don't look at other aspects, you're going to miss major pieces."

Each of the participants cited an increase in efforts to meet the social-emotional needs of students. Malory noted, "There's more awareness of social emotional learning that when I started." This shift was viewed as a response to societal conditions that have an impact on students' mental health, with behavioral challenges often being displayed as a result. Recent mental health concerns stemming from a global pandemic were seen as contributing to a growing concern over the social and emotional needs of students, along with a growing awareness of the impact of social emotional issues on learning. The participants' school systems have included more mental health resources, support services, and universal programs to help students address issues and engage in social and emotional learning. This shift has been welcomed by the school counselor participants, strengthening the relevance of their role and helping them to support the students they serve. Referring to educational leaders, Lindsay stated, "I think they're getting a lot better at realizing we have to meet the kids where they are and not everybody's going to fit into the scope and sequence the way it's written right away."

Responsiveness

In helping to promote growth among students, the needs are many and varied. Along with analytical planning and intervention, there is a degree of creativity and spontaneous action that is required in responding to those needs of students, along with analytical planning. This differentiation was viewed as strengthening the school counselors' impact on student growth, providing relevance and meaning to their customized and specialized work.

There is much that the school counselors seemed to believe they could do with students to promote academic success and overall well-being. Helping students develop the skills to face life challenges and future goals is part of this overall picture. The school counselors placed confidence in the power of school-based support, giving little credence to any overriding influence of innate ability when asked.

Malory pointed out that students come to school with different experiences and circumstances. She noted that, "Obviously every child is going to be 100% different than the one sitting next to them." Yet she, like her colleagues, believes that each child can grow in the many aspects of their lives and overcome challenges. Mallory described this further by saying,

They're just struggling. There's just pieces you have to find out...like what's making them the way they are, you know, why are they behaving the way they are, so there are so many factors. I don't think it's ever easy to, rarely is it easy, to say 'this is why, and then we got to do this, it's like you're going to put the work in to figure out what's going on, what does this kid need.

Lindsay pointed to the "importance of tending social emotional needs, like a similar vision, a similar set of goals, what we want to achieve. She added, "I've found that everybody does it a little differently and that's great."

Nora noted that in the school counselor's multifaceted role there are many tools in the toolbox to use, based on the school counselor's own experience and expertise. For instance, at times, she may draw upon cognitive-behavioral therapy techniques or motivational interviewing. She acknowledged that other school counselors have their own strategies, as she observed that a regular school counselor may not have all those tools in their toolbox at this point."

Judy acknowledged that, "What works for one kid doesn't work for another or it works for this week and next week but the week after that you have to kind of pull something else." She added, "I think the role involves a lot of adjusting and readjusting.... There's always more you can do."

Malory stated, "You can try to give everyone the same structure. They're not all going to take it the same way and they're not all going to have the same result at the end, so it isn't like a business where you plug in a certain code and you're going to get the same thing at the end."

Kelly spoke to the need to "roll with the demands, especially coming out of Covid." Included within this view were the directives to "be responsive and flexible, roll with what comes my way, and deal with emergencies and crises that come up." She went on to say, "So I have a big picture regarding inclusion and growth mindset, like all this stuff about working together as a team and supporting each other. Some you can control and some not... I have a plan, but my plan is to be flexible with my plan."

Kelly summed up this view by saying "You need to be responsive to needs, as in a responsive classroom. You look at what they bring, their strengths, and you build on those. She added, "As school counselors, we have the opportunity to put our own spin on things, through creativity and responsiveness."

Given the host of issues that burden students of all ages, “meeting students where they are” was a common thread among the school counselors. Referring to a new school year, Kelly stressed, “I just want to see where everyone is at and I think they will all be in different places.” Pointing to the devastating stories that some children bring to school, Nora incorporates “whatever it takes” to support her students. “Bring kids to where they need to be, over time.”

There was marked agreement among the participants that responsiveness, creativity, and evaluation were necessary components of their supportive and encouraging work with students. In viewing the whole child, the participants recognized that the potential for growth was present in all students. None of the participants placed weight on innate intelligence as a prerequisite for success.

Academic growth is a constant in schools and yet circumstances arise that sometimes challenge the goals that are set. Throughout their focus on meeting the needs of the whole child, school counselors remain committed to goal attainment through an attention to rigor and academic skill development, testing, and data collection. The participants noted that they are involved in the development of academic plans that best meet the needs of their students.

While promoting learning and academic success on a continuous basis, the emphasis on academic performance was nevertheless a notable concern to the participants. Certainly, as professionals providing service to students in a learning environment, academic growth, knowledge attainment, and learning skill development are shared goals with their educator colleagues. The overarching goal is for students to be successful, preparing them for a productive and satisfying future. School counselors help students to be ready to fulfill that goal and to meet the expectations that will serve them through their journey to adulthood.

Without prompting from the interviewer, several participants suggested that an overemphasis on academic attainment can be confusing and counterproductive when working with students who have high social, emotional, and mental health needs. Mallory noted that while goal-setting is necessary, an overemphasis on achievement before social-emotional issues are addressed puts a great deal of pressure on both students and teachers. Lindsay stated, “It’s very hard for the teachers when they have these pacing guides that they have to keep up with, you know.” Mallory added that rigid expectations do a disservice to teachers who feel the stress of meeting specific levels of achievement while trying to meet the emotional needs of their students. She helps teaching staff deal with such stress and is cognizant of not adding further demands to their responsibilities.

Although participants recognized the importance of academic rigor as a goal for the well-being of the student, they also expressed their concern that students are often pushed into attaining academic goals that they may currently not quite be ready to embrace fully at the time. They noted that at times students need to process and resolve their emotional and mental health issues before they are able to tackle some learning tasks. Expecting outcomes before those concerns are resolved can create conflict and frustration, they added. The cautionary message extended to the impact of high standards on teaching staff, noting that there are at times too much on teachers’ plates regarding performance. An overemphasis on achievement before social-emotional issues are addressed puts a great deal of strain on both students and teachers, Malory emphasized. “Students feel pressured, as educators are pressured,” she stated.

Nora pointed out that some teachers “push” academics to such an extent that difficult behaviors arise as a consequence. Lindsay pointed out that a focus on excellence needs to include an acknowledgement of personal struggles. “So you’ve got these kids with higher needs

yet we're pushing them higher" she noted. Lindsay added that often the students' distress is exhibited in their behaviors.

Regarding the observations of her students, Malory stated that they notice the groups they are in, even when young. "Kids are grouped according to where they're at, and they know what group they're in, why they're there, so it's really evident the older they get." She stressed, "It's hard when every child has to be at a certain level." She added, "You program them as much as you want; some of them will get that programming and get to that level, and some of them won't."

Both Malory and Lindsay underscored that higher-achieving students, as well, feel the pressure to succeed. They, too, sometimes suffer under the weight of competing demands. Lindsay noted that "Some of our kids with anxiety were those super high achievers who were trying to do all the accelerated work, leaving little time for play and creating anxiety. It's an emotional piece. There is stress for those who have perfectionist tendencies."

A shift to expand the learning outcomes to include social-emotional learning has been noted by the participating school counselors. This shift was viewed as a positive step by the participants. . Lindsay noticed steps being taken to step back from a pure focus on performance. "We're not doing favors by pushing so," she stated, adding, "I'm glad to see that change." She added, "I think they're getting ... to realize that if you don't have food in your home, then getting yourself to school or doing homework isn't the number one priority." and they're getting a lot better at realizing we have to meet the kids where they are and not everybody's going to fit into the scope and sequence the way it's written.

Growth Mindset Content Components

Included among the coded growth mindset components were broad categories of creating a strength-based focus, portraying grit, exhibiting resilience, and exploring mindfulness. I must state here that those headings are my own classification, however each category reflects many of the elements that are interrelated within the growth mindset framework. A positive approach, grit, resilience, and mindfulness have each been a focus of educational practice, as reported by the participants of this study. As opposed to the foundational actions promulgated by the school counselor, listed above, these growth mindset components are the actions that school counselors attempt to encourage in their students. They are transferred from the school counselor's direction to student goals and are thereby exhibited through the student's agency.

While often introduced conceptually by the school counselor, each of these components requires action on the part of the student. Students are encouraged to recognize their own thought processes surrounding their progress and are called upon to identify ways to change current outcomes. In this way, the process mirrors the conceptual underpinnings of cognitive-behavior theory. Students explore their emotional impetus and shift their cognitive approach, thereby putting growth-oriented action into motion. With a mindset strengthened through an understanding of motivational factors, students are better able to engage in progressive action and move toward goal attainment.

In culling through the responses, the school counselors repeatedly indicated their incorporation of growth mindset concepts in their daily work with students. They noted that they provide a shifting and yet interlocking framework within the growth mindset model. Those components compose the building blocks of the growth mindset framework and can be further defined by more specified sub-components.

The following chart defines the categories and subcategories that were created by the coding of the participants’ responses. Each of the major component categories was cited as a growth mindset focus by each of the school counselors. The chart reveals just which component subcategories each participant highlighted in their discussion of their work with students.

TABLE 5.2

Components	SC 1	SC 2	SC 3	SC4	SC 5
Strength-based Focus	X	X	X	X	X
Reframing	x	x	x	x	x
Positive Self-Talk	x	x	x	x	x
Empowerment	x	x	x	x	x
Grit	X	X	X	X	X
Perseverance	x	x	x	x	x
Setting Goals	x	x	x	x	x
The Power of Yet		x	x		x
Resilience	X	X	X	X	X
Learning from mistakes	x	x			x
Trying new strategies	x		x	x	x
Overcoming Obstacles	x	x	x	x	x
Mindfulness	X	X	X	X	X
Self-regulation	x		x		x
Emotional Self-awareness	x	x	x	x	x
Focus	x	x	x	x	x

Grid of Component Inclusion in School Counselor Responses

Strength-based Focus

A primary objective of the participants’ growth mindset work was a strength-based focus, reminding students of their capabilities and potential. This focus, along with other messages, was established in many different ways by each of the school counselors, but the point of the message was the same. Stressing positivity and asking students to acknowledge positive conditions and positive gains are part of this growth mindset process. This adjustment provides a facilitative perspective. These components are interrelated.

A strength-based focus begins with the recognition of various traits that may lead to success. While students' acquired or innate abilities may contribute to success, it is the support, openness, and belief in one's potential that students apply to ongoing achievement. Conversely, the opposite of those personal strength-based traits may interfere with success. Specific strategies are evident in the examples of reframing, positive self-talk, and empowerment that the school counselor participants reported.

Reframing involves looking at aspects of one's life from a positive perspective. Taking the same conditions, one can choose to see them as steppingstones to success or as obstacles. This reframing leads to a positive outlook and a recognition of one's strengths. Each school counselor in this study promoted this positive reframing, helping students move from a negative mindset to a positive one. The negative self-labeling that each of the participants hear from students changes to a more constructive mindset in this process.

Malory noted that she asks the question, "You're thinking this, how can we shift it to this," giving some coping strategies to kind of shift that mindset. She referred to this as a process of mindset readjustment.

Nora stressed the importance of focusing on strengths and capabilities, "because you know they can do it. And it's like 'wow, look at that and there's a big smile on their face,'" so I guess just a different approach." "And stay calm and keep your tone," she added. She referred to the use of the cognitive-behavioral perspective to change that mindset from negative to positive.

Nora went on to say, "Some boys too, but a lot of girls are more of that negative self-talk and 'I can't do it' and kind of shut down so a lot of the groups, in particular for girls, they focus on self-image and.... Negative talk about themselves too."

Nora pointed out that she works on self-esteem issues, positive mindset, positive affirmations, and identifying strengths when students are “feeling down” about themselves. Such negativity is promoted by a counterproductive mindset, Nora noted. She talks to students about what they can change and what they can do at present. She tries to show them “a different way,” letting go of debilitating issues and using the tools offered through school counseling to change their perspectives.

Judy offered a similar viewpoint, stating that when her students present themselves in a fixed mindset state, she encourages those students to identify strengths. She added, “What I don’t do is I don’t argue with them about whether they’re smart or not smart, it’s more like just working from the positive.” She exuded, “It’s wonderful the time that they give us if you look on the positive.”

Kelly stated that you need to look at student assets, rather than deficits. She went on to summarize, “You look at what they bring, their strengths, and you build on those.” She challenges students to identify the “silver lining” in any difficult situation that presents as a “dark cloud.”

Lindsay noted that reframing sometimes involves a simple shift in observation. Instead of assigning negative meaning to oneself, with critical labels, a student having trouble with a difficult learning task can assign the difficulty to the complexity of the task at hand. Struggling with a math test might mean that the questions were challenging, not that the student was innately deficient. Meeting the challenge of a test with the development of further skills could easily resolve a sense of frustration. These reframed thought processes promote growth and a readiness to meet challenges. They allow the student to examine their attributes from a new vantage point.

Positive self-talk calls for inner conversations in which students remind themselves that they can succeed. Students might point out what they can accomplish. This repetitive messaging can shift a student's mindset into embracing positive outcomes. Consistent positive self-talk helps to promote an encouraging cognitive awareness and self-motivation, noted the school counselors in this study.

Affirmations are part of the work that Nora conducts with her groups of students. In describing writing that reflects students' own traits and preferences, those students create a treasured manuscript that describes their uniqueness in positive terms. They are invited to share the contents with other students. Pride and increased self-regard are an outcome of this process, Nora noted.

Malory pointed out that she incorporates positive self-talk into the skill building and coping strategies that she promotes in her work with students. Often this focus comes at the request of classroom teachers who seek to strengthen students' identification of their own potential.

Lindsay reported that she asks her students to create sticky notes or cue cards of positive comments that they make regarding their strengths and abilities. She asks them, "What can you say to yourself when things are hard?" When students start to "shut down," she draws attention to what steps can be taken, continuing to delve into their mindset by querying "What would you say to a friend?" Lindsay reminds students to provide the same support to themselves through self-talk as they do for others when goals are challenging and they are disheartened. Pointing to the difficulty of the task at hand, rather than defining struggles through innate capabilities, is critical in this process, noted Lindsay. The task, itself, becomes the focus, with a range of assets being part of the remedy.

Developing a sense of empowerment reflects a belief in potential and the acknowledgement of what one is capable of achieving. It often begins with a recognition of others' belief in what one's potential for mastery is, thereby noting the importance of encouragement in an emotionally safe environment. The development of confidence and self-esteem are by-products of this focus on empowerment.

Kelly stated that she actively works to convey that she "sees potential in every student" and helps students with an awareness of their capabilities. She noted that there is a great sense of satisfaction in meeting the challenges with which her students are confronted.

Nora noted the benefit of positive feedback, stating, "You want them be successful; if they're not successful, even if they did a little bit you need to identify the fact they did it. They need not just tangible rewards but also positive feedback."

Lindsay stressed the importance of allowing students to experience a sense of control over their growth and learning. She reported that she attempts to give her students "some control and choice and power," pointing out that without that sense of empowerment, students "dig their heels in" and often become defiant "in a way that is not beneficial for them."

This is not to say that incentives were not provided in the school counseling programs. In the classroom, Judy provided slips of encouragement when students responded in a positive manner. She encouraged teachers to identify responsive learners as well. She and other school counselors were involved in a check-in, check-out program that provided incentives for positive learning behaviors.

All the participants expressed the view that knowing that, as Lindsay stated, "someone believes in them" is an impetus for positive response on the part of students. "And to start their day knowing somebody cares and is going to fight for me, I think that really helps," stated

Lindsay. She added that she “shifts their perception that people at school do like me and are trying to help me; they’re not out to get me and they don’t dislike me; they’re just trying to help me with my behavior. This approach has made a difference in the responses of many children, Lindsay noted.

As a caveat, Lindsay pointed out that some children carry the need for success to the point of perfectionism, putting a high degree of strain and anxiety on their learning. In those cases, Lindsay has stressed the strengths that the student possesses but notes that all learners face challenges and strive to succeed.

In acquiring a sense of empowerment, as well as engaging in reframing and self-talk, students act upon the motivation to move forward. Knowing others believe in themselves, they are able to shift that positive belief process to themselves and embrace their own potential for growth, noted the study’s participants. They reflect their own agency as individuals who are engaged in the growth process, gaining skills and attaining goals as they do so.

Grit

Grit is a term that has taken hold within the educational realm. It suggests that even when there are obstacles, those impediments can be overcome through ongoing effort. The conceptual grasp of grit involves continuing to strive for the attainment of goals in the face of obstacles and setbacks. Grit was viewed by all the participants of this study as an important ingredient in the encouragement of growth. It involves a degree of self-awareness, a taking stock of how to approach the varying tasks at hand. Each of the school counselor participants referred to instances in which grit is exhibited by the students whom they encourage and support. Perseverance, goal-setting, and reference to “the power of yet” are all subcategories related to the overall construct of grit, as related in the participant interviews.

Nora noted that “It is important that they have the grit and perseverance and a sense of ‘we’re always learning.’” She added, “It is vital that students have the ability to face difficult challenges, without giving up.” Each school counselor referred to the pride and confidence that comes from attaining a difficult goal.

Perseverance is a value that has long been touted and is closely aligned with grit. It is akin to the concept of drive, as the individual remains constant in the pursuit of a goal. Perseverance involves continuing efforts to achieve and the ability to refrain from giving in to the frustration of setbacks. Each of the school counseling participants embraced this messaging in their work with children.

Kelly pointed out that the experience of facing difficult situations and challenges without giving up is empowering. She went on to say that it sets the stage for further efforts, with the grit that is required seeming to grow stronger with each successive definitive action. Succeeding with one challenge influences the ways by which students face a following challenge, stressed Kelly.

By recognizing small success, Nora stated that she helps students build their sense of accomplishment one step at a time. As students are encouraged to acknowledge positive outcomes, they often feel empowered to set future goals, she added. Nora went on to emphasize that what is most important is “the student believing that they can learn and grow.”

Judy stated that “Kids need to feel good about what they’re doing. They don’t have to necessarily be the brightest. I do that as a habit, commenting to kids on the effort that they put into things rather than you’re so smart. I could see you working really hard at that, and you could just see the light bulb go off.” The relationship between putting forth effort and achieving desired outcomes is reinforced with this approach.

Goal-setting and the development of strategies to meet goals are part of Nora's growth movement with students. She and her students work on their plans together. Nora's overriding question to her students is "Where would you like to see yourself at the end of the school year?"

Malory stressed that encouraging students to continue to put forth effort, thereby showing grit, is critical to the growth process. Getting students to recognize the importance of those learning behaviors is part of her work with students.

"The working hard and the grit, we talk about that too in our social emotional learning, about not giving up and that not everything is going to be easy and setting goals, so that you can get through hard things," stressed Lindsay. Once goals are established, Lindsay asks students, "What are you grateful for, what's your goal for the day" and then checks out whether the goal was met, what can be done further, and what kind of support the student needs to meet his or her goal. At times, she noted, that might mean adjusting the goal to make it more achievable.

When reviewing the outcome of goals, Lindsay observed that students were fairly accurate regarding their reaching goals, with observations that matched their teachers' assessment. Laying the groundwork for setting reasonable goals and imbuing students with the belief that they could accomplish them was a key step in this process.

"You never quit, if you can't do it, you don't say I can't do this. you say I can't do this yet." "And always keep practicing and never, never say that you can't do something, that's huge, and that's huge in every grade," Lindsay pointed out. She added, "What happens when I keep falling off, what should I do, should I just give up?" "I put that question to them and then stress, no, no, keep on trying."

"The Power of Yet" is a phrase which has been presented as a tool to students who might be frustrated by their efforts. It is a phrase that can help children understand that even if they

have not accomplished a goal at present, that is simply the current status, and they can yet achieve what they set out to do. Several of the participating school counselors saw benefit in this orientation. Nora reported that her school has referenced “the power of yet” as one of its school-wide themes.

As Lindsay noted, “We focus on process, not saying you didn’t make it, just maybe you didn’t make it yet.” Nora stated, “We work out a lot of strategies and ways to solve problems. The power of yet and the possibilities that lie in the future remain a constant reminder in that process. A positive mindset leads to growth, she emphasized, as did the study’s other participants.

Grit suggests mustering the strength and courage to move forward despite the stumbling blocks that one encounters along the way toward growth. Grit gives students the impetus to continue to strive for success. It is evident from the responses of the study’s participants that they have an essential role in developing the skills to move forward.

Resilience

Resilience has been a focus of educators in an everchanging world. It is seen as a way of bouncing back and then moving forward, even when that process is difficult. It recognizes the need to respond to changing conditions. It is a recognition that individuals can move beyond their own family and environmental issues to get to a point of growth. It requires staying open-minded and accepting change and newness. This awareness dovetails with the growth mindset process as described by all of the study participants, with reference to students who learn from their mistakes and utilize new strategies to overcome obstacles.

While students at every level present a range of resilience strategies, they all respond to coping skills development if taught at the appropriate developmental level, noted the

participants. Malory noted that the younger students, such as those in kindergarten, generally adapt well to unexpected circumstances, responding well to situations requiring resilience when connections with others are made. She pointed out that difficult circumstances may be all that those children are familiar with in their lives. Malory added that by the time the student reach the older grades, anxiety and depression serve as stumbling blocks as resilience is reinforced.

Lindsay noted,

I think they're teaching resilience to the kids full impact, of course, I think for the kids that need that motivational piece, we have to teach them the skills. Resilience is a big part of the overall growth mindset picture... I don't want to say they have given up, but it's hard and they're tired and sometimes it's easier not to put the effort in, so I think we have to teach resilience and teach them to set goals and you know to think about their strengths and know that they can overcome hard things, that they're not stuck, Some things are hard right now but that doesn't mean it's going to be hard forever. They're not stuck. They can grow and change...They do have to put in the effort. Learning from mistakes is an important part of the overall learning process.

The school counselor participants agreed that looking at mistakes and finding ways to avoid such mistakes in the future creates a valuable lesson. Learning from mistakes suggests the elasticity of the brain as it grows and develops.

In her work with students outdoors, Kelly presented obstacle courses that were challenging, often requiring problem-solving and redirection on the path to success. Kelly noted that she encourages students to look at their options and counsels her students on what to say to themselves during those challenging and yet inspiring times. There are continuing conversations

about how the process of problem-solving and meeting challenges are unfolding in her work with students.

Nora also described her encouragement of developing skills through physical challenges and creative expression. When outcomes do not match goals, Nora stated that she helps students to reassess their strategies and learn from missteps so that they can move forward. Other school counselor participants reported similar encouraging responses.

By learning from mistakes, individuals can build on past experiences, therefore moving forward to new heights of learning. This experience engenders a sense of strength and purpose to students who continue despite challenges. As Nora stated, “It’s okay to be frustrated. It’s what you do with it.”

Developing new strategies is a way of problem-solving and looking at challenges from a new perspective. Looking at ways to approach challenges differently often provides a clearer path to success. Each participant passed that message along to their young students.

Kelly acknowledged that “it’s okay not to know the answer the first time. How do you learn and who can you ask for help?” Seeking alternative strategies is an integral aspect of this process, added Kelly.

Through role-playing, artistic expression, and interactive games, Nora reported that she encourages her students to rehearse strategies that promote social and personal development. Through this technique, students have the opportunity to problem-solve and consider a variety of productive options.

Overcoming obstacles is an ultimate goal of agency in the growth mindset process. The concept of grit acknowledges the existence of obstacles in the pursuit of achievement. Recognizing that stumbling blocks exist but pursuing goals in their wake is a critical piece of the

growth model. Each school counselor interviewed stressed that they help students overcome obstacles that might get in the way of success. Kelly pointed out,

With the growth mindset, if we came across an obstacle and trust that everybody had some skills, how to be able to cross the obstacle and how we could be supportive and understanding of everyone's differences, maybe this is hard for the one person today, it might be hard for someone else at a different time or different obstacle.... So the differences among individuals is acknowledged and the group support is helpful.

Kelly did acknowledge that "some of the barriers tend to be the messages that they [the students] hear outside of school." This observation suggests to Kelly that the school setting is a safe place for students to risk taking action that will promote growth and confidence.

Embracing challenges and the opportunity to overcome them were stressed in the learning response of students for the purpose of strengthening assets and growth. By passing through difficult situations and achieving goals, students are able to strengthen their coping skills and are better equipped to move forward in a growth manner. In embracing challenges, it is often helpful to view them as opportunities, noted the participants.

As Lindsay stressed, "You know if you have a closed or fixed mindset, then you've kind of pegged yourself to be stuck and give up, whereas if you have a growth mindset, then you welcome the challenges." A sense of pride and accomplishment can result from continuing to put forth effort in the face of struggles, she added.

Kelly has observed her students expressing excitement about challenges. Seeing challenges as an opportunity to grow and gain skills, she has heard students say in unison, "We like challenges, let's try it," bringing forth an encouraging mindset.

The lasting impact of overcoming obstacles has been observed by Nora. Both self-awareness of growth and praise from others have a reverberating effect, creating “a positive mindset that just keeps going,” noted Nora.

Resilience makes it possible for individuals to move past challenge to further outcomes and achievements. It allows for individuals to navigate the inevitable obstacles that come that they encounter in a way that allows them to move toward growth and progress. In this way, resilience provides a motivating force for growth in the many different areas of a student’s experience, as stressed by the participants of this study.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness has grown recently as a concept that is promoted in educational settings, as the participants of this study confirmed. Mindfulness includes a focus on the here and now, as individuals utilize their senses to concentrate on their inner resources. In this particular conceptualization, mindfulness includes an awareness of thoughts and feelings, with a sense of control in recognizing them. Self-regulation of emotions becomes important so that those emotions do not get in the way of learning.

Self-regulation, emotional awareness techniques, and a focus on what is present for the student are aspects of mindfulness that the study’s participants described. They report using the tools of guided imagery, breathing techniques, yoga, movement exercises, affirmations, and other self-reflective practices that heighten students’ clarity of their place in the moment. A range of counselor and teacher-oriented resources are used to help students manage their emotions. Included among these are the Zones of Regulation Program (Kuypers, 2011), responsive classroom techniques (Bowers, Flinders, and Bowers, 1990), and other materials that were reported as being useful in developing mindful responses.

Self-regulation helps students become aware of their current state, thereby quieting the distractions that often become obstacles to growth. Several of the participants of this study see this as a promising way to encourage growth-oriented practices, related to cognitive-behavioral approaches. This focus empowers students to have control over their impulses.

Kelly stated that she sees mindfulness as a way “to awaken self-enlightenment and a motivational mindset.” With specific mindfulness techniques to help students become aware of their process of growth. This approach brings some students “out of their shell.” When students are reluctant to participate in mindfulness exercises, Kelly gently confronts those students and asks about the thoughts and feelings that lead to such a response.

Nora described how she extracts a cognitive-behavioral approach from her toolbox, which includes breathing and relaxation techniques. She reported that she provides sensory breaks in stations for her students that allow them to breathe fully, using different muscles. She noted that sometimes she places students in the hallways so other students can see them managing their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Conversely, if a student is showing dysregulation in the hallway, she may bring that student into her room to practice breathing skills and focused attention.

In promoting mindfulness activities, along with whole body movement and artistic expression, Nora states, “So they learn, so they start identifying on, I’m starting to get upset, what can I do to settle my body?” Mindfulness techniques help promote an encouraging mindset.” Self-regulation is often used as an incentive. Nora reminds her students “to stay calm and keep your tone.” She works with students on how to steady emotions and how to move forward. Behavior as an offshoot of social and emotional issues were brought to light by the participants. Nora, speaking of a student, stated, “She’s not going to learn until she’s

regulated.” In order to attain self-regulation for this student and others, Nora has established groups that utilized a wide array of calming techniques and movement activities.

Developing emotional self-awareness is a response pattern that teaches students how to recognize their feelings and assign a name to them. Such awareness involves introspection and a growing understanding of individual responses. It can include an awareness of one’s sense of motivation and the impact of encouragement from others. Through such awareness, management becomes more possible, noted the school counselor participants.

Nora reported that she asks students to explore their feelings in the small groups she conducts, encouraging students to turn their negative self-regard into confidence regarding their capabilities. Understanding one’s own motivation and strengthening self-esteem is a focus of each of the other participant’s work with students as well. Self-reflection is at the heart of this approach.

The identification of presenting emotions is a skill that the participating school counselors focus upon in their work. Peer reviewed programs such as Zones of Regulation, the Second Step Program, and Responsive Classroom are often used for this purpose. Students learn ways of recognizing their own feelings, as well as the feelings of others, in these skill-building initiatives.

Strengthening emotional awareness is a key aspect of Lindsay’s work with struggling students. In pointing to the family stressors that many of her students’ experience, with family members who are often dealing with issues of addiction, poverty, or incarceration, Lindsay emphasized that her students often display a high level of anxiety. Discussing the issues at hand and promoting emotional awareness allow the students to move forward from a static stance of

anxiety. A range of mindfulness techniques help students to work through the issues they bring to school and develop the skills needed for growth.

Focus involves the ability to disregard the noise surrounding oneself for the purpose of attending to the task at hand. It is a skill that involves observation and practice and is often encouraged as a means to attain goals. School counselors participating in the study referred to this skill development of focus and attentiveness that enhance growth and goal attainment.

Lindsay noted that she encourages her students to refocus through a two-minute deep breathing break. Malory and Nora both stated that they use “settling” as incentive to be able to continue to engage in school counseling work. Nora proffered that she “kind of spoke with them each individually a little bit I said, you know, in order to come to the group, you have to really settle your body... You have to settle down because you’ve got to learn and don’t be distracted... and you have to really settle your body and stay settle and that’s all it took. So settling is incentive to stay in the group.”

Nora reported that she also provides a sensory path that challenges students to undergo certain directives, requiring a high degree of concentration. Walking on a thin line or jumping from log to log helps students to regulate their bodies and focus on the task at hand. These activities allow students to breathe fully and use different muscles in their focused movement. The accomplishment of these sensory tasks can be transferred to other learning tasks, noted Nora.

The counselors in this study use constructive dialogue, along with mindfulness techniques such as deep breathing, movement, and yoga, to refocus student energies and create a calming space in which to attend to learning. As narrated, they offer these activities in various forms, including individual sessions, small groups, and class instruction.

Summary of Component Findings

Each of these interrelated components were found in the in-depth conversations of each school counselor who was interviewed. The majority of subcategories were also referenced by each participant. These categories form an interlocking model of growth mindset teaching and support at the elementary school level. As such, these growth mindset components serve as powerful tools to motivate young students to move beyond their struggles as they move toward personal, social, and academic success.

School Counselors in the Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted with two school counselors to check on the validity and reliability of the questions being asked. There was consistency between the pilot study participants and those participants in the formal segment of the study. Like the participants in the general study, these pilot-designated school counselors were responsive to student needs and endeavored to promote growth mindset among those students.

The pilot study participants believed that a genuinely positive, supportive focus lays the groundwork for growth among students. Trusting relationships and social-emotional support were viewed as vital to the growth of the whole child and the related academic growth that serves as an ongoing goal within the school setting. Furthermore, “meeting students where they are” was seen as a critical element of growth mindset skill development. The pilot study participants shared the importance of a strength-based focus, grit, resilience, and mindfulness with those school counselors in the study’s primary sample. The first pilot study participant spoke about developing safe and trusting relationships so that growth mindset work can take place. She stressed working together with students to build on past experiences, to move forward with knowledge from mistakes, and to achieve goals, noting that

“perseverance is key.” She added that it is very difficult when students “shut down” and stresses the importance of acknowledging feelings.” This school counselor noted that it is important to celebrate little accomplishments but cautions against “sugar-coating” the process. Identifying “silver linings” and helping student know that “it is okay to make mistakes” is a way to promote a positive mindset, added this school counselor.

The second pilot study participant also stressed the importance of perseverance, adding that while motivation cannot be taught, the school counselor can help students “identify factors that will spark motivation. This school counselor offered a solution-focused approach as she encourages her students to move forward toward success. The process she espoused includes the acknowledgement of the “emotional pieces” that stand in the way of goal attainment. Helping students “identify what they want, the end goal” is important as students gain a “willingness to push themselves” and overcome challenges. Like her colleagues, this participant stresses that “grit and perseverance” are motivational tools that lead to success, once basic needs of safety and support are addressed.

The similar focus of both the school counselors in the pilot study and those in the full-blown study strengthens the evidence of shared conceptualization of the purpose and practice of the school counselor position, suggesting the reliability of the questions asked of them. Responses indicated that the participants in the pilot study considered the area of professionalism that the questions were crafted to explore, suggesting validity of the questions. They affirmed that through differing strategies and techniques, school counselors set the stage for the development of growth mindset in their responsiveness and commitment to students.

The Pandemic Experience

It would be an act of omission to fail to cite the pandemic experience that was ongoing during the collection of this research data. In some ways, the Covid-19 pandemic required a growth mindset response. There were many instances in the pandemic experience during which grit and resilience were called upon to move education forward. In facing challenges, a positive focus on what could be accomplished was part of a success regimen during this time, as schedules and ways of learning experienced upheaval. Pandemic conditions highlighted the depth of the challenges facing school counselors.

Students and their families were thrown into a whole new way of learning at this time, relying a great deal on technology and remote learning. Families had to take on a larger role in the learning program of their children, often reporting frustration and confusion. School counselors felt that their support and encouragement extended to families in perhaps a greater way than in less challenging times, as reported by the study's participants.

Nora noted, "Parents were tired of fighting with kids to get on and I would just say, 'You know what, do your best.' You got parents crying. 'Do your best, if you can get them to do one little thing, great, put it away, try the next day, and don't stress over it, just do what you need to do.'"

Academic goals were carried out differently, coupled with personal struggles and social concerns stemming from the changes brought on by the pandemic. Isolation, social distancing, and self-reliance were all aspects of these challenges. Children and their parents were asked to follow a brand-new learning protocol.

Interaction with students often had to take place in different ways, with distancing requirements, mask-wearing, and other restraints. "I think Covid helped us to push ourselves out

of the traditional classroom, for sure,” stated Kelly. “A lot of growth mindset took place in the woods this past year.”

Malory noted that “They did it. They just did it because they didn’t really have another option. They just did it and so they stuck with it, even though nobody wanted to do it. It was hard those hot days when it’s 80 degrees and nobody can breathe and we’re all in masks, but we did it.”

Nora observed that “even kids that you wouldn’t think want to be at school or don’t like doing their work or anything were saying, ‘no, I’d rather be at school.’ They’ll say that, even though they might not follow the rules, they’d rather be a school.” This statement is a testament to students’ view of schools as a safe place to learn and grown.

Lindsay noted that post pandemic conditions and remote learning will require “helping kids just kind of relearning how to tolerate each other,” adding that Covid presented challenges and a high degree of change. The resulting uncertainty calls for resilience and a positive growth mindset, noted all five of the participants.

In some ways, the pandemic time framework was a microcosm of many of the shifts in perspective that a growth mindset encourages. The positive attitude needed to accept a different way of learning, the grit and drive needed to persevere against learning challenges, the resilience to respond to changing conditions, and the willingness to learn how to work together to move forward through unknown territory are all components of the growth mindset experience.

Professional Development and Training

With these shared responses, the school counselors agreed that motivational growth-oriented approaches to learning are beneficial to goal attainment and a sense of academic

success. They were familiar with growth mindset precepts and integrated those conceptual elements into their counseling of elementary level students.

The conceptual understanding the participants exhibited was learned through exposure to school counseling materials, bulletin board highlights, conference workshops, and other means, they reported. As professionals that are engaged in educational awareness that are presented to the entire school staff, the school counselors shared educators' knowledge of growth mindset as a motivating force. It is apparent that these participants received knowledge and awareness of distinct growth mindset elements.

The school counselors in this study indicated that they would consider training related to the individual components of growth mindset to be helpful. They were not necessarily seeking broad-based offerings but rather focused workshops, conferences, or courses on the elements that compose the growth mindset framework. In this professional way, the school counselors hoped to expand their repertoire of strategies, reaching beyond what is familiar to other techniques to consider, mirroring the same growth that they have encouraged in their students.

Summary of Research Findings

There was full consensus among the five participants in this study regarding both the foundational elements of a growth mindset approach and the components that school counselors work to promote among students. The participants described their role in this process through their responses to the research questions.

Coding exhibited the foundational elements as being engagement, relationship-building, social-emotional support, and responsiveness. These are the conditions that the participants believed need to be set by the school counselors so that students will respond to their motivational encouragement. Counselor agency was highlighted in these categories.

The student response components that were coded included a strength-based focus, grit, resilience, and mindfulness. These are the behaviors that are conducive to the adoption of a growth mindset, according to the study participants. They are actions that are encouraged by each of the school counselors in the study, promoting student agency and ultimate growth.

Such strong agreement among the five school counselor participants indicated a shared sense of school counselor action and targeted student behaviors. This consistency also reflected common conceptualization of the growth mindset framework. Although the participants came from differing areas within this northern New England state and created different experiences for their students, their professional vision was markedly similar to their colleagues in this research study.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Discussion

The final chapter of the research publication includes a synthesis of findings, general and specific conclusions, a discussion of the implications of this research, and suggestions for further action. Full regard is given to an understanding of the value placed upon growth mindset initiatives within the elementary level school setting. Appropriate conclusions are in keeping with the parameters of the research design, recognizing its limitations and the need for further research. Throughout this research, the multi-faceted and nuanced role of the school counselor is given close attention, with the objective of achieving understanding of the motivational role that the school counselor plays in the development of the elementary level learner. In this way, the conclusions drawn from the research, having been guided by the initial research proposal, inform the school counselor's role, in particular, and the burgeoning area of growth mindset initiatives, in general.

The case study process inspired by qualitative research provides a means to better understand a particular human experience. In the research outlined herein, the experience to be examined is that of promoting growth among young developing students. While the focus of this research is targeted and individualized, with no direct impact of interpretation upon a larger stage, the potential understanding to be gained by this research can broaden one's base of knowledge in an important area of educational focus, that which touts the motivational efficacy of growth mindset.

The sample was randomly selected from one particular northeastern state, with the

criteria that participants were purposely selected from vastly different parts of the region, as part of the methodological construct. Differences among participants notably seemed to reflect the school counselor's own experience and strategy preferences, as well as school setting, rather than differences in professional philosophies. In addition, the composition of the population that each counselor served had bearing on the types of responsive services they provided.

Professional background and environmental forces combined to shape the counselors' practice.

Despite this differentiation, there were several thematic patterns that emerged, themes that I labeled within the framework of growth mindset research. These themes reflected two expressions of agency. The first category pertained to the setting of foundational elements by the school counselor that lay the groundwork for the development of growth mindset. The second category pertained to the responses that growth mindset strategies seek to encourage among students, with the support of school counselors.

There was a recognition of foundational factors that foster growth mindset among students. All school counselors who were interviewed were markedly consistent in citing these elements as being critical to the nurturing of growth mindset practices. They included the promotion of engagement, the building of trusting relationships, the identification of social-emotional influences, and the provision of relevant responsiveness. There was consensus that students need to be fully involved in learning interactions and invested in the learning relationship, with an acknowledgment and support of their struggles throughout the entirety of their young lives. Deference to a whole child approach was stressed, noting interrelated affective, cognitive, and behavioral struggles. There was repeated recognition of the belief that only after these foundational conditions set the stage for meaningful connections can growth mindset strategies be promoted.

Through the development of trusting and engaging relationships, school counselors help students to address personal issues that create obstacles to both academic attentiveness and healthy developmental growth. Students come with a host of influencing factors - homelessness, poverty, family incarceration, family addiction, and many other worrisome circumstances. It is difficult for students to thrive when those issues are not appropriately addressed, noted each participant. Each school counselor related stories of trauma and disruption that affected students deeply. In the processing of that disruptive experience with students, school counselors were able to help them move beyond the trauma to a recognition of their strengths and potential.

The emphasis on these foundational steppingstones to growth mindset expansion recognizes serves as a protective factor for students who seek to be successful. School counselors, knowing in-depth their students' strengths and challenges, as well as any cultural factors that may serve as obstacles to growth. By taking the time to develop this understanding, in a trusting and meaningful relationship, school counselors can ensure that goals are tenable and realistic. School counselors can proceed to advocate for adaptive goals that are in their students' best interest,

Relationships with other educators were stressed by the participants of this study as well. Dialogue with the classroom teachers of the students that the counselors work closely with was viewed as being instrumental in promoting the well-being of students. Administrative leadership and approach was cited as being a vital factor in the participants' work with students. This awareness points to the importance of collaboration among educators within a school site.

Once the foundations are laid for growth mindset exploration, school counselors engage in strategies to develop the varying aspects of the growth mindset framework in accordance with national standards, such as those published by the American School Counseling Association

(2021). This work can be accomplished in a myriad of ways, based on the unique and creative expressions of each school counselor. A strength-based focus, grit, resilience, and mindfulness, along with all the sharply defined yet interrelated sub-elements of the growth mindset model, form the operating principles of the growth mindset focus (Dweck, 2007, 2015). The relationship among these elements warrants continued examination (Duckworth and Grove, 2014).

The Role of the School Counselor

It seems crucial to acknowledge the role that school counselors play in schools as they help to alleviate the impact of social-emotional struggles upon learning growth and achievement. With the embedded flexibility and priority-setting of their role, school counselors help students to recognize their potential, to move toward a strength-based acknowledgement of their abilities, and to embrace growth. They are integral to the educational process, providing support and encouragement through their trusting relationships with students, as well as others who also support students in their striving for success. As such, they deserve a recognition of their vital role in furthering the vision of the educational community.

School counseling is a unique, multi-faceted role. While the focus on student potential, the establishment of goals and strategies to move toward success, and the achievement of positive outcomes were shared among the school counselors interviewed, there was substantial variability reported in how growth mindset strategies are advanced among students. Each participant provided many examples of the ways by which they identify issues, provide creative solutions, and dedicate time and energy to meeting the needs of their students as they help them to learn and accomplish the goals that they establish.

In their specialized role, the participants spoke about how they responded to the individual needs of their students. They took note of the students' resources and experiences to help them navigate the pathway to personal and academic well-being. Not only were they in the position to help them meet challenges but they were able to advocate for these students and help the students advocate for themselves in the process.

Part of the variability stems from the school counselors' background and training, talent, and individualized focus, which provides the tools for these professionals to respond to the multiple tasks inherent in their role. As such, school counselors bring a wealth of experience and perspective to their role. Each school counselor has her own story, with many different steps leading to her current responsibilities. Some of the differentiation is a reflection of the population being served, with different needs, different resources, and different social histories.

It was apparent throughout the school counselors' reflection of their practice that they consider their role to be integral to the promotion of a growth mindset approach, as they work with educators within their schools by means of a team approach. The school counselors use creativity and flexibility to respond to the specific goal establishment of their students, providing a foundation upon which those students can focus on the acquisition of their learning skills.

In their role, school counselors pull together all of the threads within their educational community to create an educational tapestry that best meets the needs of their students. They promote relationships throughout the school setting and, as such, appear to be appreciated by students and staff alike. This responsiveness in terms of what best promotes growth among students is vital to a school's mission. As a collaborative approach becomes a standard model in education, a promising area of investigation is the role of educators outside the classroom who work with students, including school counselors.

As a researcher in this study, the enthusiasm that these participants had for the work that they do with students was continuously apparent. These school counselors described many ways by which they take their well-crafted, customized role seriously. They seemed to genuinely seek a forward movement in their students' growth, unencumbered by social, emotional, and behavioral issues that often stand in the way of such growth. Their openness in conveying their thoughts and feelings related to their work for the purpose of enlightening others was evident throughout each of the interviews. Their willingness to participate in this research and enlighten others about their work with children was immediate. This response suggests a positive collaborative mindset that seems to be inherent in the school counselor's role.

Drawing upon my own role as a school counselor, I was able to access my own knowledge of professional responsibilities in my analysis of the data provided, a response that suggests some degree of subjectivity in evaluating the strength of the participants' responses. Certainly all researchers wrestle with connections to their own experience in their research lens. Conversely, my experience as a school counselor allowed me to develop a full understanding of the approaches that the participants conveyed.

This research study highlights the variabilities within the school counseling profession while also pointing to the cohesiveness of the school counselor mission. Supporting students through relevant meaningful connections seems to be the goal of school counselors. The need is great. As such, school counselors appear to have a vital role in providing a preventionist and interventionist influence regarding learning obstacles (Riffel, 2011) and in promoting student success and well-being.

Implications for Practice

This particular focus on school counselors as they prioritize their objectives and identify the skills they seek to impart serves to more sharply define the school counselor's role. Recognizing barriers to learning in regard to social emotional factors, environmental factors, and the self-perception and the view of one's potential are areas to consider. Sharing practices and gaining awareness of the strategies that are effective in the promotion of growth mindset is a promising step forward in the development of growth mindset among students.

Professional Development Considerations

There was little formal training in the application of a comprehensive growth mindset model as reported by the participants of this study, suggesting a lack of overall growth mindset training opportunities for school counselors. With what the school counselors observe as a growing interest in the growth mindset construct, they noted that the professional offerings might be limited only as of "yet," coining a growth mindset phrase.

Despite these limitations, the school counselors interviewed were able to glean both the value of the growth mindset construct and the utilization of specific strategies through professional development publications, educational resources, curriculum content, display materials, and conversations with teachers and other educators who themselves had knowledge of a growth mindset approach. It was from these resources that the school counselors acquired the tools to provide growth mindset encouragement with their students, utilizing them as they support students in their striving for success.

In that the broad framework has been deconstructed into categories of strategies for each of these school counselors, they seek further professional training on specific strategies to incorporate into their work with students. Concepts such as mindfulness techniques, resilience in

the face of trauma, and promoting grit and perseverance were seen as growing topics in their field, ones that they were eager to learn more about while including them in their practice. They would like to continue to expand their “toolboxes” so that they can best serve their students. While maintaining a focus on the overall growth mindset construct, they seemed eager to utilize the effective approaches that can be found in the growth mindset framework. This observation is valuable to those educators who develop school counseling programs and other training opportunities.

Further Action

While continuing to speak to the overall goal of student academic success, the importance of relationships and the recognition of social-emotional factors were repeatedly voiced by the participants. Relationship-building and positive responses were viewed as being critical to the growth of students. There was an acknowledgement that such responses take time and commitment during the school day. While the school counselors recognized a shift toward increased responsiveness to social-emotional needs, they expressed the belief that academic pursuits need to incorporate the management of behavioral and mental health issues. Their concern regarding a heavy emphasis on performance without monitoring the emotional state of students was strident. Their call for balance and meeting the needs of the whole child was clear.

Given these messages, it would seem beneficial to create procedures for identifying social emotional needs that might interfere with academic learning. Taking the time to develop relationships and gaining a perspective of both experiential outcomes and trauma would be conducive to promoting this support of the whole child. While steps seem to be moving in this direction, according to the participants of this study, further schoolwide goals might be considered for the benefit of students, their teachers, and their school counselors.

A phrase that was referenced by all the participants, furthering agreement, was to “meet students where they are.” Within the discussion of social-emotional impact came the concern on the part of several participants that pushing academic standards too rigorously adds debilitating pressure for both students and teachers. This consideration does not negate the importance of academic standards. It simply adds the consideration of social and emotional influences on learning. The participants of this study expressed optimism over the observation that their colleagues and administrators recognize this awareness of the impact of social-emotional struggles as well. Shifts in educational initiatives have become apparent.

Opportunities for Further Study

This research contributes to the literature pertaining to the impact of growth mindset strategies among young learners, specifically through the work of school counselors. Growth mindset is a field that has garnered increased attention in recent years but would benefit from more consideration in order to define its placement in the field of educational theories. The juxtaposition of the growth mindset model in relation to existing theories offers a broad opportunity to further define the growth mindset construct. While motivational theories and cognitive behavioral therapies touch upon the growth mindset process, additional research is warranted.

Along with this research direction comes the call for scrutiny regarding how to remove barriers to learning and “whole child” growth. Socioeconomic factors, cultural biases, and the social-emotional responses to those realities are part of the overall promotion of students’ success. Understanding the authentic experiences of students is critical in this research. The range of counter-influencing variables is great and needs to be considered in setting up expectations for each student (Gorski, 2013).

Further research is also called for in clarifying the role definition and impact of the school counselor at the elementary level. This study illustrates that there are many different pathways and experiences that lead to the school counselor's work and a variety of talents and orientations that shape school counseling services. The impact of school counselors' unique role in promoting growth mindset among students, bringing varied skill sets and knowledge bases stemming from experience and training, is an essential component of this field of inquiry.

Limitations of the Study

The study was conducted in one portion of the United States, in a state in northern New England. Although the participants in the sample were drawn from different parts of the state and reflected both urban and rural living, they shared a Maine-based perspective. They were all Caucasian females located in a state that is lacking in diversity compared to other states. This homogeneity of the school counselor population, leading to sameness among the participants, may have had some bearing on their shared perspectives. The data revealed that these participants conveyed strikingly similar attitudes, perspectives, and ways of looking at growth mindset, even though they lacked formal training and the specific details of their work differed in various ways.

The sample of the study included five participants. While a weighty amount of data was collected over two interviews, the number represents a small representation of the school counseling pool of professionals. A larger sample would reveal an even broader understanding of the school counselor's role in motivating students to grow and learn.

Through the self-report of the participants in this study, the fullness and structure of the school counselor role was highlighted. This allowed for rich and varied stories. Those

variations make it more difficult to draw conclusions regarding specific strategies, even the participants viewed their mission in quite similar ways.

There is another limitation that is inherent in the role of the school counselor. In examining the effectiveness of their work, school counselors make many observations and gather a sense of whether they have had an impact on each student's progress. The school counselors in this study were generous in their report of anecdotal and narrative data in qualitative form. Quantitative data related to the school counselor's impact is harder to obtain. It is, moreover, difficult to determine the degree to which a student has been assisted by the work of a school counselor at a time that is concurrent with her services. Oftentimes, the true impact of the school counselor's work is not revealed in full until students reach much further developmental stages.

Finally, this study was conducted during a global pandemic that tested the responsiveness of everyone connected to school goals. While there were challenges related to the pandemic time period, there were also opportunities to put growth mindset components into action, particularly in terms of positive action, grit, resilience, and mindful behaviors. It seemed that in some ways, the pandemic served as a microcosm of growth mindset assets and allowed for more scrutiny of the work that is needed to support students. Educators took this opportunity to pull together to provide a meaningful learning experience for students, as evidenced in the accounts of the participants in this study.

Through the participants' self-reporting in this study, the school counselors' belief in the possibility of learning, growth and change, even in the face of hardships and difficult conditions, resounded clearly. By observing the needs of each student, the school counselors interviewed assist students in fostering the growth mindset that provides the impetus to move forward in their lives.

Conclusions

This multiple case study endeavored to identify the role of growth mindset motivation in the work of elementary level students from a specific geographical region. The findings showed both consistency and variation among the five participants who formed the study's sample.

While specific practices varied, the foundation that the school counselors laid out, promoting responsive relationships and addressing a concern for the well-being of the whole student in his or her life circumstances were shared. The motivation that the school counseling professionals endeavored to promote were those approaches that fostered a mindset of growth and possibilities.

This process was conducted by all participants in an organic manner, rather than following a rigid protocol. The basis for that orientation was a lack of professional directives on promoting a growth mindset approach. Furthermore, the school counselors' role involves a responsiveness to the conditions being observed and the needs of children in specific settings, calling for customized strategies that encourage these students to grow and succeed.

In a school setting, the promotion of growth mindset strategies can be found in many places, in classrooms and support services as well as other areas of the educational structure. Educators work collaboratively to provide the most effective way of promoting student success. School counselors, as reported in this study, play an integral role in this overall response system, initiating their own strategies to help students learn. As illustrated by the participants of this study, they seek to promote broad growth, pertaining to both personal and academic development. As such, their work is critical to the overall effectiveness of the educational programming being implemented in service to young children.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Informed Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a research project being conducted by Sheryl Baker, a graduate student in the Department of Education and Human Development at the University of Maine. The research will be overseen by Dr. A. Jim Artesani and Dr. Susan Bennett-Armistead, both of whom are professors in the Department of Education and Human Development at the University of Maine.

The purpose of this study is to better understand the current role of school counselors in promoting the concept of growth among struggling students at the elementary level. Through this research, I hope to strengthen the understanding of school counselors' beliefs, practices, and professional development that serve as motivational factors for students' school success. I am interested in whether school counselors implement a growth mindset framework in their practice, as this is an area that has yet to be explored in depth.

What Will You Be Asked to Do?

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to engage in two interviews that reflect upon your school counseling practice. You will be asked about what strategies you use to motivate and support struggling students. You will also be asked to think of the training you have received to support students in their learning. The questions will relate to your own practice and experience. Each interview should take between 45 and 60 minutes and will not require any traveling on your part.

Risks

There is minimal risk to participating in this study. The study, if you participate, will involve the time it takes to complete the interview process. Your identity will remain confidential throughout the communication and publication of the findings of this research. The questions are focused on your specific work with students and will encourage you to think about your professional experience. You may choose to keep any questions unanswered. You may discontinue participation in this study at any time should you consider that preferable.

Benefit

Participation in this study may help you to reflect upon and clarify your understanding of the motivational work that you engage in with your students. Questions may give you the opportunity to consider the impact you have in promoting your students' learning success. The insights that you provide will contribute to research on how a school counselor contributes to learning growth among students. Your experience using growth mindset techniques will be included in an emerging area of research which may highlight the school counselor role.

Compensation

Once a second interview is completed, you will be compensated with a \$25 gift card within a two-week period.

Confidentiality

The responses to the interview question will remain confidential. Your name will not be on any of the data. A code number will be used to protect your identity. Your identity will remain confidential throughout the communication and publication of the findings of this research and in any narrative that evolves from this study.

Voluntary

All participation in this study is voluntary with your informed consent. Should you choose to participate in this study, you may stop the interview process at any time. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. You may discontinue participation in this study at any time should you consider that to be preferable.

Contact Information:

Should you have any further questions about this study, please feel free to contact me, the primary investigator, at: sheryl.baker@maine.edu or (207)310-0552. If you have additional concerns that you would like to share, you may contact my faculty sponsors, Dr. Jim Artesani, Associate Dean of Accreditation and Graduate Affairs and Associate Professor of Special Education, via arthur.artesani@maine.edu or at 144 Shibles Hall, University of Maine, Orono, Maine 04459, (207)58104061 or Dr. Victoria Susan Bennett-Armistead, Associate Professor of Literacy, via susan.bennett-armistead@maine.edu or at 205 Shibles Hall, University of Maine, Orono, Maine 04469.

Thank you in advance for considering participation in this research regarding your professional role. In doing so, you are providing valuable insight into your vital work with your students.

Appendix B Recruitment Script

Phone Script:

Hello, my name is Sheryl Baker and I am a researcher at the University of Maine. I obtained your name by random selection among a pool of all elementary school counselors in central Maine. I am calling to ask if you would be willing to participate in two interviews that will provide information about your work as a school counselor. The interview will be conducted by means of a Zoom meeting. The interview should take approximately 45 -60 minutes. The interview will be recorded.

If you would be interested in participating in this interview, we can set up a time now or you can let me know when a good time would be to schedule the first interview. Please share your email address with me, if you are comfortable doing so, so that I can send the Informed Consent document to you.

If currently interested in setting up a time, the date and time is confirmed as scheduled. If you have any questions, I can be reached at sbaker@auburnschl.edu or 207-310-0552. Thank you for your willingness to participate in this research.

(If participant is not interested, the call will end.)

Thank you for your time.

Appendix C

Interview Questions

First interview:

1. What is your experience as a school counselor?
 - a. How would you describe the setting and composition of your school?
 - b. Please tell me about your professional background, both in your current school setting and previously.
 - c. Please describe the students with whom you work mostly, including their age and grade.
 - d. How has your work as a school counselor changed over the years?

2. What are your thoughts, views, and philosophy of motivating students to face learning challenges and move toward learning success?
 - a. What learning traits do you believe are most conducive to student success?
 - b. How do you view the impact of innate potential on student success?
 - c. How do you view the impact of continued effort, grit, or perseverance on student success?
 - d. What does the term “growth” or “growth mindset” mean to you as it relates to the learning process?

3. How do you motivate and encourage your students?
 - a. When students encounter a challenge or a difficult situation, what approaches do you use to help students become successful?
 - b. In what ways have your efforts to motivate students toward growth been effective?
 - c. How has the encouragement of growth strategies been useful in helping your students adapt with resilience to new or changed learning practices?
 - d. Who are the students with whom you are more likely to encourage growth strategies and what identifying background characteristics are they likely to have, if any?

Second interview:

3. What is the place of growth mindset or other growth strategies in your role as a school counselor?
 - a. In what ways have you become more aware of, or more reliant on, growth strategies since our first interview?
 - b. In what ways is the encouragement of growth, grit, and perseverance a part of your work with individual students or small groups of students?
 - c. In what ways is the encouragement of growth, grit, and perseverance a part of your classroom guidance curriculum work and your collaboration with classroom teachers?

- d. How does the discussion of growth strategies and growth mindset help you to reflect on your role and inform your practice as a school counselor?
2. What is the place of motivational strategies in the direction of your school and school district?
 - a. How does your school pull together to help students with learning challenges?
 - b. How is the encouragement of a growth mindset part of the intervention framework in your school?
 - c. How does the use of growth strategies contribute to your sense of efficacy in working with other educators to help struggling students?
 - d. What is the response of other educators to your motivational work with students?
3. How prepared do you feel you are to use specific growth strategies?
 - a. How would you describe your level of knowledge of growth strategies, or specifically, the growth mindset approach?
 - b. What professional development have you received pertaining to the encouragement of growth and the overcoming of learning challenges and has that training been adequate?
 - c. How have you specifically engaged in any growth mindset training or study since our first interview?
 - d. As you look toward your continued practice as a school counselor, what further training or professional development would you like provided to help students grow, learn, and become successful?

BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR

Sheryl Baker was born and raised in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. After graduating from the Philadelphia High School for Girls, she proceeded to attend Trinity College, receiving a bachelor's degree there in English. After working as a high school teacher, Sheryl enrolled in a program in Human Development and Family Relations at the University of Connecticut, receiving a master's degree from that school.

Upon moving to Maine, Sheryl enrolled in the Counselor Education Program at the University of Southern Maine, receiving a master's degree there before becoming a longstanding school counselor at the elementary level in Auburn, Maine, as well as surrounding towns. She served on the Maine School Counselor Association Board and was an adjunct instructor at Central Maine Community College. Sheryl is a candidate for the Doctor of Philosophy in Education from the University of Maine in May 2022.