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# Positive Hustle to Student Guidance-Student Counselors' Perceptions of Implementing a New Strengths-Based Student Guidance Method

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**Abstract** – This research focused on a new strengths-based guidance model and its implementation among Finnish ninth graders. The purpose of this research was to analyze student counselors' perceptions of how the new strengths-based guidance model worked and benefitted schoolchildren according to the implementation experience of student counselors. The following research questions were set for this research: (1) How do the student counselors implement the strengths-based guidance method as a part of student counseling in basic education? and (2) What are their perceptions of the usefulness and benefits of the application? The data collection method was an online survey in which 28 counselors (27 women and one man, aged 40-49 years) participated in the research. Their perceptions were categorized into actual use, perceived usefulness, and perceived ease of use of the strengths-based guidance method. The specific viewpoint was in the strengths-based guidance model, which was based on the wide conception of strengths. According to the student counselors' assessment, the method meets the objectives of student guidance and also succeeded in motivating students to reflect on their own skills, abilities, strengths, and values.

**Keywords** – Student Counselor, Student Guidance, Strengths, Strengths-Based Guidance, Qualitative Research.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Student guidance in basic education is aimed at supporting the student's growth and development in a holistic way that focuses on numerous areas of life and well-being. The context of our research is the Finnish basic education system, where the original task of student guidance was to support development and give advice in education and career-related choices [1]. Alongside changes in education and work, the role and challenges of guidance have become more varied than before [2, 3]. Global changes such as technological development, climate change, urbanization, and an aging population [4, 5] also change the objectives and contents of guidance in basic education. Thus, it has become a multidimensional and wide entity that focuses on preventing difficulties in learning and studying, making studying more efficient, smoothing the transition from school to work, ensuring educational equality and preventing exclusion [2, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10]. In addition, guidance aims to recognize individual students' abilities, interests, and skills, as well as to promote lifelong learning [11, 12, 13].

Student guidance is operated in various ways in different countries for example, as a part of obligatory studies, as a school subject of its own, or as an integrated, extra-curricular entity [14, 15]. The Finnish model, in which student guidance is tied within the syllabus and education system in general, has been in existence since the 1970s and has aroused attention worldwide [16, 17, 18]. Since its early days, student guidance has turned from the counseling professionals to a whole-school approach, in which student guidance is not just the student counselors' responsibility but concerns everyone at school, including elementary and secondary school teachers and subject teachers [3, 4, 12, 19, 20]. Student guidance is perceived as a goal-oriented reciprocal continuum from basic education toward upper secondary education. The objective is to provide a clear picture of options

and career paths after basic education in close collaboration with schools at the upper secondary education level [14].

Indeed, in the ninth grade, which is the last grade in the Finnish basic education system, the main focus of student guidance is to support the students' vocational choices, as during the spring semester, the students have to apply to upper secondary education. Many find this mandatory choice difficult, regardless of support given through student guidance [21, 22]. A general problem is that the students are not sufficiently aware of their options or their abilities, and thus, the choices students make can lead to low study motivation and disengagement [23, 24] or early school leaving [25]. Recently, the positive psychological and strengths-based approaches have gained more attention in education and student guidance, aiming to provide students with a profound understanding about their potential and forming a solid, healthy foundation for making self-appreciative choices in life [26, 27, 28]. Through a strengths-based guidance program, the students also learn that others see the potential in them and believe in their success [29, 30]. Indeed, teachers' and student counselors' roles in general have been noted as significant, especially among those who need the support the most [9, 31, 32], but also among the other extreme, the most academically successful students [33].

This research focused on a new strengths-based guidance model and its implementation among Finnish ninth graders. The purpose of this research was to analyze student counselors' perceptions of how the new strengths-based guidance model worked and benefitted schoolchildren according to the implementation experience of student counselors. The research tends to focus on the measurable effects of guidance interventions [34], and this has also been studied in the context of our research [28]. However, we consider it equally important to gain a profound understanding about the implementation experiences among newly trained counselors [35].

## II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### *CIP Theory*

The Cognitive Information Processing (CIP) theory provides a useful approach to analyze student guidance in the light of objectives in basic education [36, 37, 38]. The theory is structured in the form of a pyramid (see Figure 1) that consists of three domains: knowledge, decision-making skills, and executive processing domains [36, 37].

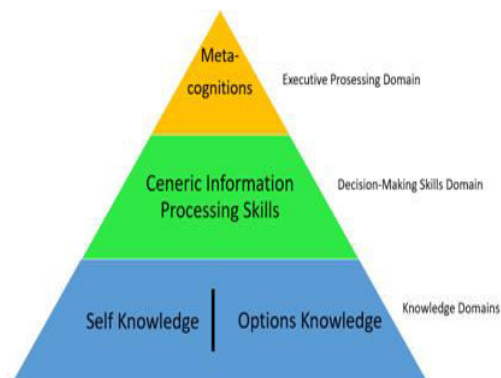


Fig. 1. The Cognitive Information Processing in career-related decision-making (molded from [36]).

At the bottom, the knowledge domain consists of self-knowledge and options knowledge. Self-knowledge refers to the student's understanding of his or her own skills and strengths, meta-learning skills, values, and interests [36, 39]. In addition to strengths and weaknesses, the students learn about their abilities and skills [49]. The better these skills are, the better the students are able to assess which kind of work is interesting and matches with their skills [5, 41, 42, 43]. While self-knowledge develops through one's whole life-span [44], guidance that increases self-knowledge also occurs through feedback in social interactions [42, 45, 46] promotes career-related decision-making as well [47]. Self-knowledge and career-related options knowledge are basic information that should be obtained before decision-making. Options knowledge means knowledge about educational options and employment, work, entrepreneurship, and future careers and occupations [36, 39].

Decision-making about one's career is one of the most important long-term decisions that a young person has to make [48, 49]. The decision-making skills domain at the second level in the pyramid (see Figure 1) is necessary when planning educational and work careers [50]. In the CIP theory, decision making is based on five elements: communication and awareness of the options, analysis, synthesis, valuing and prioritizing, and execution, which means taking the solution into action and evaluating how it worked [1, 36, 38, 44]. Those students who are interested in their future and learn decision-making skills [21] and who have high resilience levels and psychological capital [47] succeed the best in career-related decisions.

The top level in CIP is the domain of executive processing, referring to meta-cognitive skills that direct decision-making and problem-solving [36, 44]. These skills include self-awareness, self-management, and self-talk. The latter refers to positive or negative inner talk about one's own decision-making skills [51]. In particular, negative self-talk should be turned into positive through student guidance [52]. Thus, a strengths-based guidance system that emphasizes students' strengths as developing features can increase the student's growth mindset and positive self-talk [53]. Self-awareness refers to the ability to recognize one's emotions and thoughts related to decisions, while self-management helps the student to use self-talk and self-awareness in decision making and execution of the eventual choice [36, 38, 44, 54].

Societal changes have an impact on how student guidance is being developed in education both at the ideological level and methods-wise [55, 56, 57]. A core challenge-especially among students in the last grades in basic education-is to motivate students to self-reflect [58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64]. This requires the establishment of a positive interaction relationship and a safe atmosphere between the student and counselor. Strengths-based and positive pedagogical approaches offer one option to create these conditions and to support students' well-being, learning, and happiness at school [29, 30].

#### *Positive Psychology and the Wide Conception of Strengths in Student Guidance*

Strengths-based guidance is based on positive psychological research and is a part of positive education and pedagogy [27, 65, 66]. This research is based on a wide conception of strengths. This approach in student guidance is analyzed from the perspective of student counselors and how a strengths-based guidance can be applied at school according to their experiences. Research has shown that not only is increasing students' awareness of strengths enough, but teachers and counselors need practical tools and methods for providing strengths-based guidance, especially before and during the transition from basic education to upper secondary education [26, 61]. Therefore, teachers and counselors need theoretical knowledge about strengths, how to

recognize and use strengths, and how to implement strengths-based guidance in the school environment [67, 68]. Strengths-based guidance methods focus on individual resources, optimistic future goals, and empowering relationships between the student and the counselor [69]. Guidance adds a sense of being appreciated and happiness among students [61, 70, 71]. In particular, the positive and appreciative relationship between the student and the counselor is crucial for the successful outcomes of guidance [72], where the student is seen as the best expert in formulating solutions [5, 73, 74].

The wide conception of strengths is based on the idea that using any type of strengths—whether it is physical, psychological, or social—promotes well-being and self-esteem [74, 75]. However, various strengths should be viewed simultaneously by also noticing their reciprocal nature [76], from which the wide conception of strengths provides a framework [77]. The wide conception of strengths includes human character strengths, as seen in positive psychology [78], talents, skills, interests, values, and resources [76, 79, 80].

### *The Strengths-Based Guidance Method in this Research*

This research focuses on counselors who have been trained for a strengths-based guidance method called Voimakeha® [PowerZone]. The name is based on the Finnish translation from Neal Mayerson's [81] concept of the *power zone*. The fundamental idea of the guidance application is that if one is not able to use one's strengths or passion, one can still succeed based on one's talent and will but does not find completion of tasks equally satisfying or inspiring [79, 81, 82]. If one is able to use various strengths simultaneously, one is acting on a power zone that represents an area of optimal functioning or flourishing [79, 81].

The method-focused and goal-oriented guidance of the various elements relates to the wide conception of strengths. The counselors learned about the strengths theories and the variety of strengths, as well as the dynamics between various strengths groups. They adopted a so-called power zone understanding, and when implementing this understanding in practice, they actually implemented strengths-based guidance. In addition, they studied various methods and applications, of which the main tool in this method was the PowerZone tool. The counselors became licensed PowerZone counselors after passing a 5-ECTS-point course and could start counseling individuals and groups in campus-based or in online studies [64].

The idea of the strengths-based guidance method is in the personal guidance, during which the student builds his or her personal power zone by discussing with the counselor [64]. In group guidance, students build their power zones together with their peers, which makes it possible to recognize one's own and others' strengths in the group [61]. The strengths-based method is useful for all education levels, from early childhood education to higher education, in career counseling and therapy, as well as in management and work-place development projects [64].

## III. METHOD

The purpose of this research was to discover student counselors' experiences and perceptions of the strengths-based guidance method. The following research questions were set for this research:

- (1) How do student counselors implement the strengths-based guidance method as a part of student counseling in basic education?
- (2) What are their perceptions of the usefulness and benefits of the application?

This was a qualitative research study focusing on analyzing the student counselors' experiences and perceptions, and the purpose was to hear their voices carefully [83, 84]. The data collection method was an online survey consisting of 12 questions (six open-ended and six structured). Each question was mandatory, and there were no word limits for the open-ended questions. The first three open-ended questions focused on how the student counselors had implemented strengths-based guidance in their work and how they assessed its benefits for the students, but also from their own perspective. These questions were followed by a structured question about whether they would recommend the application and related materials to other student counselors (5-point Likert scale). As some of the potential respondents had just recently taken the course and had not necessarily used the application yet at work, the fifth question inquired as to what kind of support the counselors would need to start using the strengths-based guidance application. The remaining questions were background questions about gender, age, date when the licensed training was performed, form of education, and whether they had students who spoke languages other than the Finnish language. The final two open-ended questions surveyed the time worked as a student counselor and the number of students in guidance.

The survey was sent to the participants as a Google Forms survey directly via email and via social media to all counselors who had performed the licensed PowerZone training and worked as student counselors in basic education. This was considered a visually nice, economic, fast, and useful method of collecting data [85, 86]. The data collection started in January 2021, when the online form was sent by email to 327 student counselors who had completed the PowerZone training. As the deadline for participation got closer, the respondents were also prompted to answer via the Facebook group for PowerZone counselors. This resulted in 12 answers, which were considered insufficient. Thus, we extended the data collection among counselors ( $n = 16$ ) participating in training in a northern-Finnish city. They replied to the questionnaire as a part of their training day.

Altogether, 28 counselors (27 women and one man, aged 40–49 years) participated in the research. They had performed the PowerZone training in 2019 ( $n = 5$ ) or in 2020 ( $n = 23$ ). Their work experience varied between two and 23 years. The number of students under their guidance varied from less than 100 to about 250 students per counselor. About half of the participants reported that their schools were multicultural. The counselors participated voluntarily in the survey, and they could withdraw from the research at any time.

The analysis method in this research was data-based content analysis [87, 88, 89] that produced a condensed and structured description of the phenomenon under investigation [90, 91]. The analysis itself was a three-phased process, starting with reducing, followed by clustering and abstraction [92]. The fundamental idea was that the categories and interpretations were not predetermined but arose from the data [88, 93].

The first phase, reduction, started by analyzing the open-ended answers using NVivo 12 software. Words, sentences, and thoughts were coded with colors. These reduced sections, which described how the strengths-based guidance application was used, were listed. In the next phase, these were organized into thematic groups, and the groups were named according to their contents [87, 88]. The third phase was abstraction, which meant that the groups were organized into main categories and sub-categories. During this process, the categorization changed until three main categories could be found under which all sub-categories could fit, and the connection to the original data remained clear. The three main categories were actual use, perceived usefulness, and perceived ease of use. The main categories and their sub-categories are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The main and sub-categories of the content analysis.

Sub-Category	Main Category
Recognizing and naming strengths	Actual use
Education and career counseling	
Planning the implementation	
Support for the student	Perceived usefulness
Enthusiasm	
Challenges	
Materials	Perceived ease of use
Colloquial support	

When reporting the results, the participants are referred to with codes SC1-SC28, where SC refers to student counselor and the number to the random number given to each participant. The gender of participants was not revealed because only one man participated.

#### IV. FINDINGS

##### *Actual Use*

##### *Recognizing and Naming Strengths*

The majority of student counselors had implemented the PowerZone tool to help students recognize and name their strengths in various ways in personal, small-group, and whole-class guidance. When working with the whole class, the student counselors taught the theory of strengths by introducing the six strength areas in the wide conception of strengths. They had used ready practices and tasks or combined them with their self-made practices. Some student counselors reported that they had also used other materials related to self-awareness about values, hopes, or human strengths, such as the Values in Action (VIA) test [94].

*“My purpose is to introduce the powerzone theory to the ninth graders before we put the cards into use in group guidance. I have organized practices during lessons, that focus on just some parts of the powerzone.”*  
 SC11

*“I have used the materials from the web pages of the Voimakeha training and, in addition, I have invented tasks by myself.”* SC3

Several student counselors described that they had used the strengths cards included in the PowerZone tool when working with students. They had printed or self-made copies of the cards that introduced the six areas of strengths. The cards were used in group work so that students could look for strengths describing themselves from the cards and write them down. Some had also used the cards to discuss peers’ strengths. The common notion was that the group work and personal guidance where the student’s strengths were discussed increased students’ self-knowledge [42].

*“During the lessons, they have been looking from the cards those features that describe themselves and collecting suitable features into a section in their personal web pages.”* SC8.

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*"The students have simultaneously been able to think together which cards describe themselves and others. The ready papers [about their own strengths] are used in the personal guidance meetings."* SC1.

In addition, the strengths cards were used for practicing words that described strengths. The idea was based on the game called Alias, in which the players explain words to others. In addition, if a word was not familiar to the students, they were prompted to ask for help from the student counselor. By talking together about the words and their meaning, the students also expanded their strengths-based vocabulary.

*"We used the cards like Alias-that is, explain it and the others try to guess it."* SC8.

#### *Education and Career Counseling*

The method and materials were also used for education and career counseling to help students familiarize themselves with their educational choices and possible careers. The students were taught how to use their wide-ranging strengths and compare those with the professional fields, occupations, or values of work they were interested in. For example, a student counselor reported that they had been talking about the students' resources in relation to those resources needed in high school and about values in situations where the students' and their guardians' viewpoints differed regarding studies after basic education. Some student counselors had built positive CVs based on the wide conception of strengths to help students report their strengths in versatile ways.

*"In the individual guidance, the student uses the strengths cards to look for various features of themselves for example when thinking about a place for workplace familiarization or upper secondary education."* SC8

*"We have discussed education opportunities in the light of strengths."* SC5

*"We do the VIA strengths test with students and based on the results, a positive CV."* SC18

#### *Planning the Implementation*

In the data, there were student counselors who had not yet used the strengths-based guidance method. Some reported that the materials had not yet arrived or been purchased by their school, but some wanted to better familiarize themselves with the method before implementing it. One counselor wanted to do all practices by oneself first, so that they would be familiar before teaching those to students. Another student counselor wanted to mold the materials to have a better fit to the style the counselor had in guidance. At the moment of the data collection, this counselor was building a tasks bank that would be used in the next spring with eightgraders' group guidance and later in personal guidance. Some student counselors reported that they had used materials related to strengths, but not the actual PowerZone tool.

*"I havenot tested yet but based on my own experiences I will be using."* SC7

*"I want to know this thoroughly and make it look like me, so this process takes time. But the material is awesome and I will be using it."* SC16

#### *Perceived Usefulness*

##### *Support for the Student*

The student counselors reported that the strengths-based guidance application was beneficial to the students and that the students had given mainly positive feedback. The main benefit was that the method and materials



increased the students' self-cognizance. Building one's own power zone had felt nice, and students had told their counselors that they could recognize their strengths easier and more widely than before. One reason for this was that they did not have to come up with the strengths vocabulary because the numerous strengths cards helped with the task.

*"Really opens the eyes and supports the student."* SC4

*"The cards help the youth to recognize and verbalize their own strengths and abilities."* SC14

*"The students have liked it. There are so many cards that everyone finds something for sure. The students have reported that without cards, they would not have been able to tell so well about themselves."* SC10

The student counselors also expressed some criticism. For example, some words were considered weird and had to be explained carefully by counselors. In addition, the students had to be courageous enough to ask if they did not understand everything. Furthermore, some cards were not relevant to students of that age, whereas some words could have been added to the selection.

*"It is challenging that some words in the powerzone have proved challenging to understand, what they mean in practice. If the student is not able to ask when seeing a challenging word and know that it means but just puts it away, it is clearly a little bit problematic."* SC2

Another benefit was that the guidance helped students recognize expertise and skills they had obtained outside school. This was often found to be difficult. The power zone combined the various elements of strengths well, which, as reported by the student counselors, supported students because the elements were not just fragmented pieces of strengths discussions but formed an entity.

*"I perceive the model and the materials useful. It combines together elements that were perhaps scattered earlier."* SC6

Finally, the student counselors listed many other benefits for the students. The materials provided them with new tools to support students' career planning. The self-built power zones were considered especially usable for helping students make their career and educational choices. The student counselors described how the students gained new insights not only about themselves but also about various careers. They received confirmation of their choices and help in situations when choosing between two good options for future study places. According to the student counselors' perceptions, those students who actively pondered their future plans were happy to work with their power zones.

*"The power zone has provided students with new insights about future opportunities!"* SC15

*"Power zones built during the lessons have really helped in the personal guidance meetings."* SC2

### *Enthusiasm*

Work with the powerzone was perceived as inspiring to both the student counselors and students, including those who were not usually interested in learning about themselves or self-cognizance. That was the general notion, but one student counselor pointed out that the themes in the strengths-based guidance were not equally meaningful to all. Sometimes, students criticized whether it was reasonable to familiarize themselves in this way.

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*"In some lessons, I have received feedback that when we will do something that has sense. But some students do their tasks without a question and are pleased."* SC3

The tasks and practices were mainly given positive feedback from students according to the student counselors' perceptions. While students had found them useful and pleasing, the student counselors appreciated the stimuli and new kinds of action they could introduce to classes. Instead of lecturing, the students and student counselors were actively discussing and building a wide variety of strengths.

*"The functional approach in addition to just talking."* SC8

*"In the power zone lessons, we usually have a nice and positive hassle."* SC11

### *Challenges*

The student counselors reported only two types of challenges. First, the lack of strengths cards or other materials at school hindered some activities due to a lack of resources at schools. Some student counselors solved this problem by dividing students into groups and figuring out ways to adjust tasks in different ways. The creativity of finding solutions revealed how dedicated the student counselors were to using the strengths-based guidance and did not let the lack of resources hinder them from using it.

*"The most difficult part has been to work with a large group when you have just one power zone tool available."* SC12

*"In the classroom work, the cards have been circulating in small groups and everyone has picked their own strengths in a paper."* SC19

Second, some student counselors found time management challenging. Working with individual students' power zones was considered time-consuming, and therefore, it had been difficult for those with high numbers of students and less time in individual guidance. A functional solution was to build personal power zones during group work and then discuss them in personal guidance meetings.

*"It is challenging if you try to do the power zone during a personal guidance meeting and go through all elements. There is a time limit: you have just 45 minutes at a time and this is just not enough."* SC2

### *Perceived Ease of Use*

#### *Materials*

The student counselors summarized that the power zone was a clear and working tool for strengths-based guidance. It was easy to introduce to students, and the materials suited students of various ages. They discovered multiple ways of using the materials and implementing strengths-based guidance. They also appreciated the materials to make lesson plans and help students increase their self-cognizance.

*"Extremely usable and good. Has proven functional in basically all situations."* SC11

*"The web pages have given me good tips for which tasks work in the secondary level."* SC3

#### *Colloquial Support*

The usability of the strengths-based guidance was increased considerably by meeting other licensed counselors and sharing experiences and thoughts with them. They also shared good practices and provided tips to each

other. In addition, colleagues inspired and encouraged each other to try various methods and implement guidance in different ways.

*“It is easier to take in use methods, tips, and ideas that others have found good.”* SC13

*“Practical tips are useful. In addition, I am interested in extra materials everyone has made themselves.”*  
SC15

## V. DISCUSSION

In the findings, the student counselors’ main attention was on how the strengths-based guidance helps increase students’ self-cognizance and, on the other, ponders their education opportunities after basic education. These are both, naturally, core elements of student guidance. According to CIP theory, self-knowledge creates the foundation for career-related decision-making [39]. In addition to self-knowledge, the strengths-based guidance that is based on the wide conception of strengths aims to increase students’ positive psychological capital: self-efficacy, hope, self-confidence, and resilience [28]. These elements of positive psychological capital support the decision-making and meta-cognitive skills domains in the CIP theory [47]. This viewpoint is important because positive psychological capital has been noted as even more crucial for positive career transitions than human capital or social capital [95]. The strengths-based guidance described in this article is also linked with career options knowledge, as the strengths are being reflected in relation to work and expectations in various occupations [96]. When a person is able to employ his or her best strengths, it is possible for him or her to experience optimal well-being and enthusiasm [81, 97]. Although the strengths-based guidance model used in this research is not the whole answer, it seems to correspond to the elements presented in CIP theory and the fundamental objectives of student guidance.

Some critical remarks concern the fact that not all student counselors had yet tested the strengths-based guidance at the time of research. One reason is certainly that they had just finished their training only a short while before. In addition, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, schools went partly to remote teaching mode, which made working with the card decks, for example, impossible. The most enthusiastic student counselors probably invented ways of implementing strengths-based guidance in remote teaching.

The student counselors’ experiences and perceptions also revealed that they differed from each other on how eagerly or courageously they put the new methods in use or how much time they wanted to devote to the learning of strengths theories before testing any method in practice. Some student counselors also wanted to mold the tools and practices to better match their own style. According to Wenstrom [64], there is not just one right way to use the strengths-based guidance but many, and how deeply one familiarizes with theory should not limit the use of guidance. However, the theoretical knowledge increases the opportunities to adopt and implement the method, for example, in different school subjects. Eventually, using strengths-based guidance always aims to uncover the student’s best.

The findings showed that the method seemed to correspond to the new methods that help reach the objectives of student guidance [58]. A significant notion was that the student counselors perceived the strengths-based guidance as inspiring and motivating to the students. Although this research included some notions of students’ reluctance to self-study, the experiences were mostly very positive. This is an important finding, especially among the ninth graders who generally show a decrease in study motivation and drive [59, 60] and happiness

[61], and who are right at the most important transition phase from basic education to upper secondary education.

Recognizing and using one's strengths promotes well-being[62], but the fact is that people usually are more aware of their weaknesses [63]. Therefore, it is not surprising that student counselors found the strengths words presented in the cards especially useful, and they noticed that the words helped students to name and identify their strengths. Although some student counselors criticized that not all strengths words were familiar to students, our conclusion is that this can actually help the student counselor and students deeply discuss the strengths, their meanings, and how they appear in practice. In addition, Wenstrom [64] emphasizes the experience of working with strengths instead of finding the correct meaning of each word. What is more important is what each strength means to the individual student. This also resembles the narrative and socio-dynamic viewpoint of guidance [6] and the socio-constructivist conception of learning [98]. Based on these viewpoints, reality and knowledge are constructed together in interaction between human beings through language [99]. Thus, the student counselor's role is to hear the student's narrative and observe how strengths appear in it.

Although the PowerZone tool was considered good but somewhat time consuming, the student counselors found ways to compile each student's power zones in a process that could start with group work and end in personal guidance meetings. Thus, the guidance also used the scarce resources reserved for individual guidance very efficiently [26, 64]. When used through an interactive process, the strengths-based guidance can also achieve the objective of creating a positive and confidential relationship between the student and the student counselor [69, 72].

We would also like to highlight the findings about the need for colloquial support. The student counselors hoped for support from colleagues at the phase of implementing the method, but also those who had received colloquial support appreciated it and described it as very beneficial. This finding is in line with earlier research about teachers and counselors taking new methods or pedagogies into use [4]. Furthermore, colloquial support and collaboration in situations like this have been noted to improve both students' performances and teachers' satisfaction at work [100, 101]. A positive atmosphere and interaction in education institutions support enthusiasm and positive emotions that are connected with creativity, flexibility, and implementation of new methods [97, 102, 103]. That is why positive pedagogy should be embedded in all actions, all the way from management to work organization and work communities to individuals [75, 104, 105, 106].

Some limitations of this research should be mentioned. First, the online survey inspired a relatively low number of student counselors to participate. This was the case, even though each participant received the invitation to research personally [107]. One possible explanation can be that the licensed training had begun just recently, and the number of student counselors in the whole number of people being trained (rough 300) was lower. However, it is also possible to compare the findings among student counselors with our other research among ninth graders [28, 42], and thus, the picture of the usability of the strengths-based guidance becomes more profound and comprehensive.

## VI. CONCLUSIONS

This research aimed to present a practice-based viewpoint on student guidance and its methods at the time of

new challenges and expectations set for education and career transitions. The specific viewpoint was in the strengths-based guidance model, which was based on a wide conception of strengths. In addition to human characteristic strengths, it includes five other strengths areas: skills, interests, talents and abilities, values, and resources. Our earlier and others' research give reason to assume that the wide conception of strengths supports makes career planning and vocational choices easier, especially during the last grades of basic education, when continuing to secondary education and further to work.

This research analyzed student counselors' perceptions and experiences of using a new strengths-based guidance method. The interest was in finding out the benefits and usability and to discover specific insights or challenges the student counselors might have faced. According to the student counselors' assessment, the method meets the objectives of student guidance and also succeeded in motivating students to reflect on their own skills, abilities, strengths, and values, which has been the traditional problem in student guidance.

The value of this research lies in the introduction of a new strengths-based method for education and career counseling. However, implementing new methods in schools is not obvious. As this research showed, some schools had not invested in the materials, which made it difficult to implement the new method. As resources are scarce in schools worldwide, it is important to provide materials that have a sound theoretical basis and that also have scientific proof of their usefulness. This study presented the student counselors' perspectives and experiences from practice, and much support for the findings of this research can be found in earlier studies among students and in other education contexts. The findings help develop the method further and also to adopt it in different contexts and among various people wanting to discover their wide variety of strengths.

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