Chapter 4:

The Practice of Advocating Student-within-Environment

Matthew E. Lemberger-Truelove

https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8916-9678

Chapter 4 Abstract

Interventions informed by the Advocating Student-with-Environment (ASE) theory for school counseling are intended to support student's individual capacities while also simultaneously pursuing more just and facilitative school circumstances. In this chapter, the author introduces a variety of example practice behaviors that school counselors can adopt when inspired by the ASE approach. Each of these practice behaviors are affiliated with the "5 Cs of ASE theory" which are curiosity, connectedness, co-regulation, compassion, and contribution.

Although each person is always a student, there is a special signature to the experience of being a student in a formal school environment. The broad intention of a school is to provide various conditions for each student to develop in personally and socially useful ways. Unfortunately, not all schooling conditions are supportive and, instead, students are often confronted by deleterious conditions. Both helpful and injurious experiences in schools result in learning. In turn, learning opportunities are internalized and shared back into the school and societal environments.

For school counselors, the inevitability and complexity of learning require intervention foci that are both compliant and additive. Interventions are compliant when they are germane to the cultural, environmental, and circumstantial condition of the student. Almost paradoxically, interventions must consistently apprehend these relevancies while also stretching the student in novel ways. Lev Vygotsky alluded to this when he posited the *zone of proximal development* more than a century ago; that is, learning occurs in that space between the prior unmediated capacities of the learner and the introduction to experiences that encourage new vistas of development (Zaretiski, 2009).

Advocating Student-within-Environment (ASE) is a school counseling-specific theory intended to describe students as learners, schools as systems, and how school counselors can best support the development of all participants in educational systems as interacting determinants of experience (Lemberger, 2010; Lemberger & Hutchison, 2014; Lemberger-Truelove & Bowers, 2019). Utilizing manualized protocols, advocacy activities pointed at various social ecosystems, and spontaneous counseling dialogue and behaviors, ASE-informed school counselors intervene both with students and adult stakeholders in corresponding ways such that individual capacities ripen into co-regulatory experiences and outcomes.

As mentioned in previous chapters, ASE is not necessarily a collection of counseling techniques; rather, it is a theoretical overlay that can be applied to almost any classic or emergent school counseling practice. Specifically, ASE is a steadfast concern with how personal and social capacities can be cultivated in ways that result in improved outcomes for students and others in the school environment as interacting determinants of experience. This conceptual focus suggests that school counseling interventions must be relevant to the student and school context alike, which can be challenging given that these entities might not always exist in concert with the other.

It is assumed that interventions inspired by ASE can have multiple outcomes for the student and the school system given the focus pertains to amplifying the prior conditions of experience, as opposed to the pursuit of fixed or even specific goals. Certainly, specific outcomes can be accomplished using ASE, but given the labyrinthine nature of systems in schools and the complexity of the system as a person within various systems of influence, it is more prudent for school counseling to aim at general and flexible capacities rather than distinct results. This position is liberating in various ways, as it suggests that it is the student's capacity to develop and that such development can continue to evolve in helpful ways beyond the intervention. In this way, the ASE school counselor is not the sole arbitrator of the intervention or the outcome but another additive determinant of experience with the student and school environment.

The Structures of ASE Interventions

More than two decades before this current chapter was written, I (Matthew) found myself as a school counseling practicum student in a high school. I was assigned to work with a freshman who was experiencing a variety of academic struggles. Many of the ideas found in

ASE today were percolating in my mind, and yet I wasn't always the most consistent practitioner in implementing the acme of ASE with students. Nonetheless, this early professional experience was a watershed moment and became an important influence on the structure of ASE related interventions.

The student described constant anxiety as he neared a state-mandated academic test. At the time in Florida, passing each section of these high-stakes tests was necessary to move on to the next academic grade. My intention was to introduce relevant and accessible strategies for learning. We practiced several strategies, but he was particularly drawn to mnemonics (i.e., prompts that aid in information retention and memory retrieval). I knew that working memory is a critical to learning and an executive functioning skill associated with various desirable personal and learning outcomes for children and adolescents (Otero et al., 2014).

He left an individual meeting one afternoon particularly excited about a mnemonic strategy we practiced. I recall vividly how he expressed his excitement to use it in his next class. To my dismay, he didn't return to see me the next week as he had customarily done for more than a month prior. I then saw him as he was finishing his lunch and I asked him how he had been and briefly asked about his progress with the mnemonics. His response was chilling. He said, "You know. It didn't work. I sat in class waiting to use it. The teacher just never did anything in class where I could use it. I decided not to come back to counseling with you. School is already hard enough for me. Why should I learn new things with you if they don't help me? Other kids don't need to learn these things. They just get it. I don't get it if I try new things or if I do the same old thing, so why try something new?"

I found myself genuinely impressed with his logic. I was also disappointed that this was his experience. As he walked away to his next class, my thoughts then pivoted to his teacher,

"What must she be thinking? She let him out of class and there were no observable differences. Maybe the only observable difference was that her distressed student is further dispirited."

It then hit me. There were probably no less than ten or more times that the teacher said or did something in class when the student could have used a mnemonic or one of the other skills we worked on in our times together. Further, the teacher could have made these opportunities more explicit had she known how to specifically prompt and reinforce one of the student's strategies. At this moment, it was clear that the student and teacher were co-determinants of experience and related outcomes. It was clear to me the importance of reflexive interventions.

Reflexive interventions occur when the school counselor connects the capacities of the student with the conditions of the school environment. The acme reflexive intervention occurs when the school counselor connects with the student in such a way that the intervention helps cultivate one or more capacities in the student, and those capacities are further connected to the behaviors and conditions in the school. For example, a school counselor can work with a student on the executive function of emotional regulation (Zelazo & Cunningham, 2007). While protecting the privacy of the specific student, the school counselor can then work with that student's classroom teacher to fortify emotional regulation. In this manner, the intervention operates with the student and teacher (as a representative of the school environment) as a co-determining system, as different than a deficit to be remedied in either the student or teacher discretely.

Although school counselors who adopt the ASE approach are encouraged to deliver reflexive interventions targeted at both students and people in their various systems (often teachers or other influential adults), it is feasible to work directly with one entity and assume that such efforts will affect other players in the system. For example, one of my early experiences as

a first-year professional school counselor occurred between a student who came to see me wanting to change math teachers. After a few minutes of conversation, it was evident that her concern with this teacher reflected relational dynamics with older female authorities (especially those who resembled her grandmother, who was her caregiver). While her veteran teacher was unwilling to consult with me, the student and I worked on approaches to regulate her reactivity to the teacher and remain engaged in the instruction. The focus of the work was the student-within-environment, which in turn affected her performance in the class and subsequently affected her relationship with her grandmother.

The reality for many school counselors is that they are outpaced by the critical needs in schools, with student caseloads that often exceed recommendations and empirical evidence (ASCA, 2019; Woods & Domina, 2014) and outstanding student learning and mental health needs (DeKruyf et al., 2013). The demanding nature of reflexive interventions might seem infeasible, yet, the generative manner that such approaches can affect total systems might merit investment and sacrifice.

Additionally, school counselors might incur resistance, especially from school personnel who are also overwhelmed with responsibilities and who are often given messages that they are singularly responsible for the conditions of education. For example, one type of reflexive intervention endorsed by ASE theory is when a school counselor performs one or more classroom guidance activities (i.e., psychoeducational and counseling approaches targeting entire classes of students and their teacher[s]) where the teacher actively engages in the in-class experience and often further participates in consultation with the school counselor before or after the in-class activities. The intention is varied, including generating investment in the teacher and priming skills exposed to students to the teacher (to be used in subsequent classroom

experiences). There have been several ASE empirical studies that substantiate the value of these reflexive interventions (e.g., Bowers et al., 2020; Lemberger et al., 2018(b); Molina et al., 2022), yet the duration and commitment can be daunting. Alternatively, persisting without substantive change can be even more daunting; as such, the school counselor can advocate the potential for change that is mutually gratifying to students and educators over longer periods of time and with myriad desirable outcomes. In fact, qualitative studies of ASE interventions have yielded surprising and unintended outcomes for teachers, where the benefits were not only felt in their classrooms and with students but also in their personal lives beyond the school environment (Molina et al., under review).

Anticipated Student and School Environment Outcomes

Foremost, ASE is a social justice approach to school counseling in the tradition of the various liberation psychologies (Chávez et al., 2016). In this manner, social change occurs through empowering various individuals within systems. The individual (student) is not understood as an automaton but rather as a co-determinant of personal and social experiences.

It feels like we're making contemporaneous decisions, but mental and physical actions are bound up in prior personal and social determinants. Our intuitions suggest a type of teleology where purposeful effort drives experience (rather than prior material causes), whereas ASE theory is more in line with teleonomy (Pittendrigh, 1958), which retains a goal-oriented denouement but concedes that natural and social forces mediate and shape outcomes for people and events. This posture suggests that the student emerges out of prior influences, yet the student still does have some volitional influence over one's experience within the environment. Change leading to new outcomes are embodied as experience. Stated simply, the orientation of

the student can be cultivated, and reflexively the school environment can be altered, how each interaction affects the ensuing experience of the other.

When a student experiences new insight (learning) or new social conditions, it appears like change manifests because of personal insight. This is a dualistic way of thinking about student development that does not cohere with ASE. Instead, insight is experiential within a social context and thus embodied with a varying magnitude of influence. The experience of change occurs as an observation of embodiment, which in turn affects contemporary experience and the trajectory of future learning. Change for the student (and school environment) is the observation of the experienced cultivation of self (student) and reflexive observations of change in the school environment. School counseling, therefore, is the creation of the personal and social experiences that contribute to this appearance of change, which in turn affect the actual experience of the student and school.

School counseling intervention is thus a persistent process of priming. When working with the individual student, the school counselor does not pursue specific desirable schooling outcomes. This is an alluring approach to school counseling practice, but it is infeasible, unsustainable, and disarming to the student. A specific outcome, like finding a specific solution to disagreements amongst peers, suggests that the past will replicate the future with perfect precision. Instead, it is more prudent to draw from past experiences and collaborate with the student so that that student can anticipate and respond with flexibility and adroitness. Correspondingly, the school counselor is in a persistent process of priming the relevant features found in the school environment. Are there conditions in the family or classroom context that contribute to peer conflict? Priming the student and school environment contributes to simpatico

outcomes, even given the profound complexity of systems and the evolution that occurs across time in schools.

In some of the original ASE writings (Lemberger, 2010), the term student sapience was used to describe a deep wisdom in the design and operation of experience (Trowbridge, 2011). In the tradition of philosophers such as Baruch Spinoza (1677) and Metzinger (2004), sapience does not operate as a mental phenomenon outside of one's body or circumstance in the world; rather, it is an integrated and experiential way of being. This is to say, a student does not have to understand the total composition of experience or all consequences, but only that some intentional contribution to self and the environment affects outcomes.

This distinction is important for the psychological and social development of students. A school counselor does not necessarily anticipate that a kindergartener will be fully aware of the influences of poverty on their plight as a student, but a classroom activity on how to balance healthy sleep habits in challenging environments might help avert some biological delimiters and contribute to better schooling outcomes (Hayes & Bainton, 2020). The technical insights about sleep biology are less important than the experiential perspective.

In practice, the outcome of student sapience reflects the emerging term allostasis, that is, how the student accomplishes efficient regulation of needs and capacities prior to incidents when those needs and capacities are required for survival or thriving (Sterling, 2012). Regulation of the self is not to be confused with accomplishing some hypothetical homeostatic state, rather, it is a perpetual predictive pursuant of outcomes (Schulkin et al., 1994). School counselors connect with students in a manner that encourages the cultivation of capacities that are usable in various ways. There is some evidence in support of these claims in the empirical literature in support of ASE. For example, Lemberger and colleagues trained school counselors to deliver

psychoeducational content to entire classrooms of students and teachers and found that the intervention that focused on social and cognitive skills contributed to social and emotional learning outcomes in addition to improvements in academic achievement tests (Lemberger-Truelove et al., 2018). The content of the psychoeducational activities was not explicitly academic in nature, and yet changes in personal and social development cohered with math and reading achievement.

Outcomes at the student level are primary, although the student is never understood as the single or even primary cause of experience or the school environment. The student in the center of change ensures that advocacy on behalf of the student is always relevant to the emerging capacities and values of the student, not the school system or even well-intended school counselor as arbitrators. Just as students are understood as co-determinants of change, agents in schools are expected to ameliorate outcomes. So not to compromise the student as primary, pursuing more just and contributory outcomes at the school level must cohere with the immediate experience of the student.

In practice, accompanying any anticipated outcomes in students, the school counselor must advocate for changes at the school level. Outcomes can vary based on the recipient or circumstance. For example, in some cases, merely providing empirical insights into how ethnic discrimination affects academic outcomes and disciplinary practices can result in radical new perspectives. More invasive interventions might require the school counselor to work extensively with educators or policymakers to challenge implicit biases pertaining to groups of students.

The highest aspiration of ASE is manifest in co-regulated contribution shared amongst as many relevant players in the school environment, including but not limited to the student.

Contribution (as one of the 5Cs of ASE theory) is an outcome and a practice where the schooling process includes tangible activities of personal and social liberation. For example, students who were formerly participants in a grief group might later serve as support agents for students in subsequent years. Teachers who engage in consultation with school counselors might be recruited to advocate for gender and identity equality policies at the district level.

ASE Counseling and Advocacy Relationships

Across all forms of counseling, scholars have found that a quality relationship shared between counselor and client is predictive of desirable outcomes (Wampold & Budge, 2012). Many clinicians misconstrue these findings in some pollyannish manner. Instead, adherents to the ASE approach conceptualize healing relationships in a very specific manner. When interacting with any agent in a school, the school counselor approaches each new moment with a radical curiosity that is mediated by a sense of connectedness and compassion and aimed at personal and social contribution.

Figure 1

Advocating Student-within-Environment Relational Map

<table>
<tr><th>Student</th><th>within</th><th>Environment</th><th>Educators & policy makers, guardians & family members,
social & cultural systems</th></tr>
<tr><td>Curiosity</td><td rowspan="3">Co-regulation (endogenous)</td><td colspan="2">Curiosity</td></tr>
<tr><td>Connectedness</td><td colspan="2">Connectedness</td></tr>
<tr><td>Compassion</td><td colspan="2">Compassion</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Contribution (allostasis)</td></tr>
</table>

At the core, there is an uncompromising belief in the potential of the student (and school environment) for growth (Yeager & Dweck, 2020). This recognition that changes and development are inevitable is not confused with asserting or pushing a top-down outcome for the

student (or school); instead, this is a steadfast commitment by the school counselor to share in the unique circumstance of the student and their environment.

The exemplar ASE informed relationship is endogenous. Endogenous is defined as "within" or "increasing by internal growth," which reflects the word "within" in Advocating Student-within-Environment. The counselor strives to experience *within* the student's perspective and context. The K12 student, as a child and adolescent, is emerging from the various influences of one's biology, one's experience, and one's positionality in the various environments that one inhabits. Similarly, the counselor operates *within* the various social contexts that constitute or influences the school environment. With both the student and features of the school environment, the *within* posture is not stagnant; rather, it is assumed that development emerges when the school counselor engages the student (or school) with curiosity, connectedness, and compassion, that is, in turn, co-regulated in the school environment and might lead to mutual contribution.

There is a double-sidedness to an endogenous orientation as a school counselor. Within suggests a sincere commitment to the student or school as each is and yet further suggests that within both the student and school are more capacities and possibilities than are often known or expressed. For example, the practice of cultural broaching (Day-Vines et al., 2021), which is when the counselor engages in a direct and respectful conversation about the client's various intersecting identity positions, from an ASE perspective is both prizing the student's cultural influences and yet pushing for the most facilitative version of those cultural forces. In this manner, each interchange prizes the determinants of experience, present perceptions and predilections, and future possibilities.

Vygotsky (1978) wisely offered, "the method is simultaneously prerequisite and product, the tool and the result of the study" (p.65). The endogenous (within) relationship is what the school counselor presents but also the anticipated outcomes for the student and school environment. The school counselor utilizes curiosity which will stoke curiosity in the student, which will, in turn, serve the student and school environment in ways that extend beyond the initial counseling relationship. In similar ways, the school counselor will embody connectedness and compassion, and the mere experience will prime these generative capacities in students. How these various capacities expressed will be unique to each student, as the counselor holds no preconceived notion or expectation of their manifestation.

The counseling literature has matured over the decades, with an advancing concern with issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion. These are important for the various mental health professions including school counseling and foundational for ASE theory. This said, the preponderance of the diversity, equity, and inclusion literature often discusses counselor values and less often articulates the praxis necessary to produce such laudable ends. ASE takes a hard stand on how a school counselor can pursue justice in and beyond school systems. Sustainable change comes from within co-regulating individuals and systems. The school counselor is both within the school system and yet something different as a student advocate. Therefore, the school counselor can identify the mechanisms to change the system while recruiting the student to be a self-advocate of change that is, therefore, more likely to be relevant and persistent.

From an ASE perspective, the school counselor always intervenes with relevance to the student and the school environment as co-determinants of desired outcomes. What dictates the intervention focus are the assessed needs and the anticipated magnitude of effect. There are occasions when the structural issues in the school are so profound that it is most reasonable to

initiate intervention at the school level. The school counselor remains steadfast to the needs and capacities of the student, and yet the greatest change for that student most likely will result from support provided at the school system level. For example, if a teacher is experiencing debilitating stress that is affecting classroom pedagogy, the school counselor certainly works with the teacher but does so insofar as the efforts towards stress reduction contributes to classroom climate and student support. Alternatively, the school counselor might choose to intervene directly with one or a group of students based on personal or social struggles. In focusing on the individual student's need, the ASE-informed school counselor intervenes with environmental resources and the context in mind.

Regardless of the intervention focus, the development of the student-within-environment is the Archimedean point for the school counselor. Social systems greatly influence the experience of the student, and yet the persistence of relevant systemic change is catalyzed in the individual student. In the spirit of liberation approaches to social justice, the ASE-informed school counselor conceives of the K12 student as newly emerging and therefore has the greatest time and influence on the future permutations of the social environments.

Personal liberation and social justice are baked into ASE. There is an oscillation between practice activities directed at the student or at the various constituent aspects of the school environment, with the ideal interventions simultaneously engaging as many individual participants as possible in the school environment. This position does not suggest that students are solely responsible for confronting discriminatory, oppressive, or generally unhelpful forces in schools but it does propound that student engagement is necessary for any systems change to be relevant, sustainable, and adaptive as threatening personal and social forces evolve over time and across circumstances.

ASE Informed School Counseling Behaviors

As stated, ASE is not a mere assemblage of techniques that a school counselor uses to work with students or members of a school environment. Instead, ASE is an orientation that is concerned with cultivating student capacities and creating just and complimentary schooling environments. In this way, the theory is concerned with amplifying diversity, prizing a diversity of student experiences, and valuing a rich ecological diversity in a school that might provide ample opportunities for student development.

While ASE cannot be whittled down into techniques, it can inform specific school counseling behaviors. It has been used in manualized psychoeducational interventions delivered to whole classrooms or small groups of students (e.g., Lemberger & Clemens, 2012; Webb et al., 2019) and teachers (Molina et al., 2022). Furthermore, it can be used in various formats such as small and large group work, individual and planning activities in schools, and consultation, collaboration, and advocacy in schools. ASE practice integrates into various delivery frameworks including experiential activities, verbal counseling, and psychoeducational activities. Although there are various applications, the practice of ASE is truly a theory intended to be a conceptual orientation that dictates spontaneous helping behaviors throughout the school environment.

The 5Cs (curiosity, connectedness, co-regulation, compassion, and contribution) of ASE are merely mnemonic devices intended for a school counselor's practice behaviors. These devices are not the full extent of intervention behaviors; instead, almost any appropriate school counseling behavior that is concerned with cultivating student capacities while advocating for more contributory environments is compatible with ASE theory. As such, ASE theory can be

actualized using transtheoretical counseling skills or even nascent techniques more closely originated to ASE theory.

Curiosity

Curiosity is a "drive state for information" (Kidd & Hayden, p. 450); as a practice, curiosity is the non-evaluative expression of inquisitiveness about one's circumstance and experience. In this way, the outcome of curiosity is not the acquisition of an unchanging or even ideal end; rather, curiosity is a persistent openness to ongoing development.

As an intervention focus, curiosity is foundational in establishing rapport with the student (or other recipients of school counseling services). More than merely capturing information about the student, the school counselor is eliciting and attending to the experiences of the student. Assumingly, when a student experiences curiosity from a school counselor, it introduces a new dimension of experience that is both germane to one's past determinants of experience and also pertinent to nascent experience. Curiosity expands the character of experience.

For example, consider the standard open-ended question often used by counseling practitioners. Open-ended questions are intended to elicit information from the client, generally requiring more than a simple response and generating client reflection. From an ASE perspective, open-ended questions elucidate how one is capable of responding with intention to one's influences (as self-within-environment).

"What did you have for breakfast this morning?" This example question is certainly open-ended, as it requires the respondent to answer with more than one or a few words. But this is not an example of a fully curious question, for it inadvertently compels the child to restrict their answer to what one eats. In so doing, the counselor is not curious about the student or the

environment, as the student's family might be experiencing economic stressors and, therefore, not typically have access to breakfast. Not only is this question not curious, but it can also potentially rupture the trust of the student or incline the student to misrepresent experiences.

Alternatively, asking the student, "What are your typical morning rituals before school?" is more fully curious as the onus is on the student to detail information and priorities. The structure of this more curious question is specific enough for the counselor to generate relevant information and yet unfurled enough that the student's experience is centered.

A school counselor can generate curiosity in more directive ways. For example, in the Student Success Skills program that has been associated with ASE theory (Webb et al., 2019), there are many mantras that school counselors exercise with students that illustrate the practice of curiosity. One example mantra is, "Don't doubt your ability, try a different strategy." Although this phrase is a directive initiated by the school counselor, it embodies curiosity in that it encourages the student to consider one's various capacities. Further, it suggests that behaviors do not fully define one's total constitution, but rather there are other manifestations that are possible. Curiosity is concomitantly about one's prior determinants of experience and various permutations of new experience.

Connectedness

Connectedness is the experience of acceptance, safety, encouragement, and respect shared between the student and other member of the school environment (Resnick et al., 1997). Whereas one can be curious about an experience, connectedness pertains to the relational quality of that experience. Curiosity can be exempt from value while connectedness acknowledges the interrelatedness of experience and how necessary contributory relationships are for students and members of the school community.

Student: I don't like sitting in class with them… (pause) those kids and that teacher… (pause) they're all pretty stupid, and they treat me like I am stupid.

School Counselor: It is frustrating to have to be in place and with people where there is not a feeling of mutual respect.

In this short couplet, the school counselor utilized the classical counseling skill called reflection of feeling. A generic reflection of feeling only requires the school counselor to identify the student's most salient feeling and anchor it in some causal condition – you feel this, because. An ASE reflection of feeling pertaining to connectedness validates the student's experience while placing it in the context of the school environment. Here the student's frustration is experientially personal and yet provoked by what has occurred in the classroom.

One of my (Matthew) more memorable experiences as a school counselor was working with a sixth-grade boy named Michael. He was universally feared throughout the school by peers, teachers, and administrators. In fact, during my first week at this school, the principal was contemplating expulsion from the district as a consequence of persistent fighting. I asked the principal for one week to intervene as I knew a longer request would be met with resistance.

I watched Michael in his classroom, on the playground at recess, and at lunch. In each setting, he was either sleeping or in some extreme conflict with others. It didn't help that he was one largest sixth graders I have seen, almost eye-to-eye with me at 6'3. On the playground, other kids cowered away in mortal dread. His relationships with teachers were equally adversarial, and each warned me that no matter how much kindness I extended, he would resist.

I didn't want to take total credence in the reports and the brief episodes I witnessed during my brief observations, yet after a few introductory statements, it was clear that he was unimpressed and there was no inherent connection between him and me. What came to mind

was, “He might be large like an adult, but there is a kid housed in that impressive stature.” Given the little bit of time I had with him before expulsion, his outstanding history, and the critical importance of supporting this young person, I tried something risky to inspire connectedness.

School counselor: I have been told that you have this amazing ability for new adults to try and talk with you, and you can sit there and be completely unaffected and unimpressed. As a school counselor, I always want students to do their best at what they are the best at doing. So, I am going to ask you a few questions, and I want you to continue to do what you do best, that is, sit there and not feel required to respond. Just like you have a talent for sitting there and not responding, I have a hidden talent too. Without you answering, I have a pretty good hunch to the answers of the questions I will ask you. So I ask, you sit, and then I answer. Cool?

Student: (nothing; except doing what he did best to adults)

School Counselor: Great!!! This seems to be working. Okay, I can imagine that it can be pretty lonely on the playground with no one wanting to play with you. I also imagine that those feelings of loneliness turn to anger pretty quickly, which could explain some of the fights.

Student: (Smiling) How did you do that?

This story has many more details when I tell it to my graduate students, and I generally suggest to them not to try this approach. I don’t typically recommend assuming you know your K12 student’s experiences, but in this case, I had a real deadline with high stakes consequences for his life. What occurred after was that I told Michael that what I did was a kind of magic that we all possess. The magic was empathy. For the next few weeks, he and I worked on anticipating the reactions of others and responding with empathy. Certainly, there were

occasions when he was being mistreated, but creating connections in these cases made him more able to control his internal experience and instigate change in those around him.

This story illustrates the conceptual relatedness between ASE and social and emotional learning (SEL) (Elias et al., 1997), which are competencies necessary to recognize and manage emotions, pursue goals, appreciate the perspectives of others, and interface constructively with others. From an ASE perspective, feelings of connectedness through SEL is not a prescription for student compliance, rather it

> refers to students' experiential discernment and the inclination to suspend pernicious identification or evaluation of these experiences. Stated otherwise, students from disenfranchised communities do not accept inadequate or deleterious social conditions; instead, using social–emotional and mindfulness strategies, they accept their cognitive and affective reactions and respond with clearer intentionality. (Lemberger-Truelove, et al., 2018(a), p. 299).

Co-regulation

As a school counseling practice, co-regulation is the interface of two or more self-aware, intentional individuals who draw from various cultural, social, and personal sources to inform and influence behavior (McCaslin, 2009). For example, a self-regulated individual can monitor, predict, shift, and direct one's internal and external experiences, whereas operating out of co-regulation one extends beyond one's inner experiences and places total experience in a broader social and historical context. "What have you done to improve yourself" is different than "How have you pursued your goals given the influences of (insert circumstance)?"

Recently I was working with a group of teachers at an elementary school. As we concluded a consultation session on teachers' stress responses in the classroom, we saw a

teacher's aide disseminating snacks to the students. One young boy was sitting at his desk banging a cup vigorously on his desk, yelling, "I want my milk, I want my milk…!" The teacher looked over at me, and we had the following interchange:

Teacher: So, Dr. Expert, what would you do with this little darling?

Me: (walking over to the student) I can hear from your song that you're really enthused to get your milk. But I wonder, how can the teacher pour the milk into your cup if you are banging it upside down on the table?

Student: My milk would be all over the floor (as he turned his cup right side up).

In this episode, it would be easy to be recruited into the student's discontentment and over-eagerness. It would also be easy to disregard the student's intentions or the habits of the classroom. Co-regulation engages the attentional and inhibitory control necessary for volition while not disregarding other students or desirable classroom procedures.

Returning to another SSS mantra, school counselors are encouraged to expose students to the phrase, "Little by little, bit by bit, I am improving every day." Students are encouraged to notice and celebrate small yet important changes that contribute to larger aspirations. This can be a co-regulatory lesson for students if the school counselor prompts the students to consider environmental factors that contribute to or inhibit ongoing and intentional growth.

Compassion

For an ASE-inspired school counselor, compassion is the composed concern with either persistent or circumstantial feelings of suffering. The etymology of compassion is com (to be with) and passion (strong emotional connection). Compassion is a precursor to empathy, focused on ameliorating suffering or one's emotional reactivity. From an ASE perspective,

compassion is a mechanism to break or slow down emotion-laden reactivity and introduce more co-regulated responsiveness.

In chapter 1, the concept of co-determinants of experience was explicated. There are various social forces that contribute to contemporaneous experiences for students and other individuals in schools. For ASE theory, these are called governors. Governors do not fully dictate experience, but they are the ingredients that profoundly influence both opportunity and response. Compassion is a counterforce to the various personal and social governors of experience.

There are various strategies that the school counselor can use to vivify compassion when working with students or school personnel. A few examples include but are not limited to the following framing (Rothman & Salovey, 1997), priming (Bargh & Chartrand, 2014), and mindfulness (Bishop et al., 2004). In the case of mindfulness, there are various ASE intervention studies with students (Lemberger-Truelove et al., 2021) and teachers (Molina et al., 2022) to illustrate its utility. Rather than becoming passive and compliant, ASE mindfulness can help elicit one's reactions to governed experiences and respond with greater compassion to these responses.

In a similar way, school counselors can encourage compassion in teachers working with students. By reframing student expressions as governed responses to the determinants of experience, there can be greater connectedness and co-regulated intentionality in the classroom. Further, a teacher can extend compassion inward, especially when the tribulations of teaching are most grueling.

The spirit of compassion in the ASE approach is encapsulated in the following prompt provided to classroom teachers in a recent consultation intervention study (Lemberger-Truelove et al., in press):

> The purpose is neither to invalidate an experience or even provide new, more appealing alternatives. In the context of your experiences, any reaction is reasonable. Instead, we simply want to interrogate your inner experience and some of its influences, which might lead to you coming to accept the experience as one response (*acceptance)*. In this process of interrogation, other perspectives on experience might manifest (*discernment*). Again, the purpose is not to invalidate or replace, but curiosity in these alternatives might allow you to simultaneously appreciate the conditions of the initial experience while with nascent alternatives emerging, you can respond out of awareness of more options rather than reacting to the impression that there is only one experiential option feasible (*compassion for self and others*).

Contribution

The most aspirational intervention strategy in ASE theory is contribution, which is the curious, connected, co-regulated, and compassionate commitment to action. For the student, contribution includes how one responds to the determinants of experience in and beyond the school environment. For the adults in the school environment, contribution includes the explicit behaviors to advocate for student development.

Contribution also demands that the student and other members of the school community act in solidarity for the purposes of social change. This does not suggest compliance or assimilation, as ASE requires constant personal introspection and social revision; rather, there is

a shared and general agreement to participate in tangible behaviors to improve the school climate.

The ASE informed school counselor must ardently ensure that contribution is not exploitative or trivial. The action of contribution must be mediated by the other elements of the 5Cs. For example, a school counselor can partner with a teacher to eradicate ethnic and gender identity discrimination in the school. In so doing, the school counselor must consider one's own privileges and ally with that teacher and the various students the advocacy will affect.

Contribution demonstrates the liberation focus of ASE theory. The process is the outcome; engaging in liberating experiences ushers in liberation at the individual level while embracing the inevitable situatedness within various systems. A change in the student affects the school environment, just as changes in the school affect the student.

ASE and the Use of Time

Adherents of ASE theory prioritize direct counseling and education school counseling services that are intended to support students and the various adults in their lives. While these value-added services are privileged, many school counselors are mired by other indirect and administrative duties that can distance interventions from the desired targets. It is often helpful for the school counselor to think pragmatically about these other professional tasks. In differing ways, these activities affect the school environment, and therefore they have some potential influence on the experiences of students. As such, rather than unthinkingly resist and resent these opportunities, in the spirit of ASE, a school counselor should approach each task with the skill and perspective to amplify student opportunity and advocate for more contributory school environments.

This recommendation is neither an endorsement of inappropriate school counseling duties nor permission for school counselors to passively adopt an identity or practices that are removed from counseling and education. Instead, the suggestion is to reimagine each moment in a school as a potential contribution to the determinants of experience students and the people in their lives. For example, while it is unequivocally inappropriate for a school administrator to use a school counselor as a standardized testing coordinator or proctor, I (Matthew) vividly recall a student who benefited from me occupying such a role. A student who I advised and who also participated in one of my small counseling groups was riddled with anxiety as the state mandated test approached. Upon seeing me walk into her classroom to disseminate the test materials, she smiled at me and said, "Just seeing you gave me confidence to make it through this test." Prior to this moment, I used such vituperation when I was told that I had to suspend my meetings with students and hand out test papers; but in that instance, I realized that that student received as much or more educational and emotional value from our shared smile as she did in any advising session or group meeting.

The use of a school counselor's time is so valuable. Deciding how to prioritize one's contribution to students and the total school environment can be layered and often dispiriting. Foremost, it is important to recognize that all cannot be accomplished at once and every action in a school affects the total school system, in varying ways and in differing magnitudes of influence. In this manner, what matters most is *how* one approaches each moment. From an ASE perspective, providing direct services to students matters, consulting with teachers and parents matters, maintaining data and self-reflective practices matters, and so on. What binds these different school counseling activities and usages of time together is the disposition of ASE;

that is, the ASE school counselor is led by intention to cultivate student capacities and improve schooling opportunities in all possible moments, regardless of the setting or activity.

The ASE informed school counselor considers the likely magnitude of influence. No school counseling activity is zero-sum, yet the school counselor must be scrupulous how one's use of time yields the deepest and most sustainable germination. For example, a school counselor does not engage students in small group activities simply because the ASCA National Model suggests a certain percentage of time performing such a task. A school counselor does not deliver a psycho-educational activity as a reflection of one's passion for a certain topic. Rather, a school counselor invests time and commits to intervention because the related activities project more desirous outcomes.

Earlier in this chapter the phrase "Little by little, bit by bit, I am improving every day" was introduced as a mechanism to encourage students to recognize persistent growth and accomplishment. In the spirit of reflexive interventions, an ASE-inspired school counselor inverts this sagacious phrase and applies it to one's comprehensive school counseling program. With intention to amplify capacities of students and members of the school environment, over time and across various aspects of educational systems, school counselors incrementally contribute to people and systems better positioned to evolve and thrive.

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