

## Advocating Student-within-Environment (ASE)

### I. Basic Assumptions of ASE Theory

- A. The school context and the roles and responsibilities associated with school counseling require unique theoretical assumptions and practice behaviors
  1. School counseling with an educator-counselor identity (non-dual); “The situatedness in schools compels all behaviors to be in service of the educational mission of the school and in support of student needs as learners and social beings. Parallel to the educator identity, the term counselor in school counselor suggests a certain orientation that is concerned with the delivery of services focused on prevention and development that anticipate a medley of wellness and social justice outcomes” (Levy & Lemberger-Truelove, 2021, p. 1)
  2. The philosophical bases of counseling (as distinct from other mental health and education professions) pertains to the blend of prevention, development, wellness, and social justice
  3. The qualities of a school context, the dispositional characteristics of students as social learners and teachers as professional educators, etc.. each suggests that counseling interventions must be germane to the total features of the school as a distinct context
  4. The identity and advocacy of school counseling as a distinct and additive profession demands nuanced beliefs, practices, and modes of evaluation
- B. ASE on Nature/Nurture & Epistemology: Students, educators, and other school stakeholders are situated in school environments as co-determinants of experiences.
  1. Students (and educators) are always bound to their prior influences (e.g., biology, culture, spatiality) to varying degrees (see ASE kaleidoscope metaphor), although one’s personal experience and teleonomy is always dynamic based on a profound latticework of exposures, social forces, and personal history and responses to circumstance
  2. Given co-determination as an epistemological stance, adherents of ASE theory believe that manifold prior influences (i.e., *governors* of experience) largely influence current experiences and functioning, yet the individual (student, educator, family member) is not completely inert or beneficiary of social forces.
  3. Volitional control is the manner that personal experience emerges uniquely out of the prior co-determinants of experience; this is not a priori personal agency, but through more contributory personal aptitudes and social circumstances, students are more liberated to experience and act intentionally and in solidarity with others/ecology; experience is a co-determined *emergence*
  4. In tandem with volitional control (as expressed through one’s executive functioning tendencies), ASE is an approach to school counseling which focuses on impacting students and the environments they inhabit and circumstances they face through a social justice framework for lasting desirable development
  5. The relationship between personal (liberated) volition and social justice is the student’s (and educator’s) critical consciousness (*sapience*), which is the developmentally feasible and appropriate acumen to operate in one’s ecology
  6. Various school and broader ecological influences affect personal and schooling experiences, therefore interventions performed by a school counselor must be reflexive – i.e., germane and effective in ameliorating both personal and social development

## 7. The 3-5-1 C's of ASE Theory

- a) 3 Cs – Ontological assumptions of students and school environments (assessment); prior determinants of experience
  - (1) Constitution – “the aggregate of a person’s physical and psychological characteristics”
  - (2) Culture – attitudes, values, and practices that characterize and influence institutions or groups of organisms
  - (3) Circumstance - a condition, fact, or event accompanying, conditioning, or determining another
- b) 5 Cs – Counseling practice priorities
  - (1) Curiosity - includes qualities such as openness, reflexivity, tenacity, humility, inquisitiveness, flexibility, emotional dexterity, and many other attributes necessary in affiliating prior states with emergent states of being;
  - (2) Connectedness - is the experience of acceptance, safety, encouragement, and respect shared between students, school counselors, educators, or other school-related persons;
  - (3) 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;
  - (4) Compassion - is the orientation and practice of personal and social acceptance with discernment; compassion suggests that to endure the complexity of being a complex self who is tethered to various competing systems, discerning prior causes and effects of experience in a benevolent and focused way can protect one’s wellbeing and better position oneself for future personal and social development; and
  - (5) Contribution - is the co-regulated efforts to change social systems and personal commitments to social advocacy.
- c) 1 C – the aim of ASE (i.e., how the 3Cs are affected by the 5 Cs)
  - (1) Community – people and systems with generally common interests, including contributory variation and evolution

## II. Assumptions of Wellness

- A. For adherents of ASE theory, wellness must occur at both the personal (student, educator) and social (school, culture) levels to be fully actualized; it is inappropriate and potentially harmful to suggest wellness is the sole responsibility of the most affected and least empowered members of social systems. Similarly, it is potentially disarming and harmful to not include these students as arbitrators of their own development and wellness;
- B. Reflexive and co-regulated development and wellness can inadvertently transmute into consensus or complicity, which is not the intention of ASE; wellness is generative and persistently dynamic through self- and social-reflection and -evolution
- C. Wellness requires a profound and patient commitment to personal and social solidarity
- D. Wellness is not a fixed or presupposed state, even when affiliated with desirable school outcomes (e.g., academic achievement, desirable classroom behaviors); instead, wellness is only concerned with the persistence of curious, co-regulated, connected, compassionate, and contributory experiences and behaviors in and beyond the school environment

## III. Assumptions of psychopathology and/or disturbance

- A. There are various forms of social and personal disturbances that threaten students (and educators) in schools, including forces that affect people from outside of the immediate school context and influences from within the self-and/or school
- B. ASE is a strength-focused orientation, therefore potential threats are conceived as experientially real; although they are veritable in the lived experience of the student or educator, how they are experienced is dimensional and dynamic
  - 1. Efforts to ameliorate personal or social governors is not to be confused with discounting or merely reframing concepts, rather conceiving of the governors through the 5 Cs, students and educators can operate on their determinants of experience in more personally and socially meaningful and contributory ways

#### IV. Therapeutic Change Process:

- A. ASE informed school counselors utilize the delivery systems typical of school counselors (e.g., classroom instruction, consultation, small group and individual counseling, indirect services, systems advocacy), using manualized curriculum, spontaneous dialogue and behaviors, advocacy at the systems level, etc.
- B. ASE is concerned chiefly with the creation of the preconditions of well development, including cultivating individual (student, educator) capacity and ameliorating more just and facilitative environments (school, community); counseling is a preventative and developmental praxis
- C. The counselor takes on a leadership role in part of a triad to create a well student and environment. The counselor should enter the students' inner world while considering their social circumstance and then empower the student to tap into their personal resources to navigate various environments.
  - 1. Students are able to engage more if they feel connected to school environment in some capacity with peers and adults, thus school counselors can cultivate a shift in safety and acceptance in their schools through various preventative and responsive services programs.
  - 2. Counselor should also strive to evoke change in the school environment to allow for continued reinforcement of students' acquired skills.
  - 3. Counselor engages student dialogue and fosters students' ability to critically look at their dispositions and goals. As student learns new strategies, they can apply them to other contexts.
  - 4. Counselor also provides preventative services to further facilitate the progression of students' abilities; reflexive interventions occur when students and educators are provided complimentary interventions

#### V. ASE and the pertinence to diverse students and school settings

- A. As an ecological approach to school counseling, ASE centers ideology and practice on personal and cultural diversity, within students-as-individuals and schools-as-systems, and education-as-sociopolitical structures
- B. Each student is conceived as a cultural and personal agent, with varying degrees of influence and expression
- C. Schools as systems are conceived as a reflection of broader sociocultural systems; interventions and advocacy must be compliant to the culture of the school (broadly defined) and yet school counselors must persistently advocate for cultural refinement that lends to the personal and social liberation of students

#### VI. ASE and empirical studies

- A. ASE practitioners and scholars adopt a dialogical position on research – i.e., data is captured, analyzed, and disseminated as symbolic, non-essentialized approximations of experience;

detailing what is possible rather than what is de-contextually probable; as such, school counselors use data critically to advocate for the student and to challenge the most fruitful permutation of schooling systems

- B. The school counseling literature is limited in randomized controlled trials (i.e., less than .01% of the counseling literature [Griffith et al, 2019]), although ASE is the most researched theory specific to school counseling (Kim et al., 2024) , including
  - 1. Student outcomes associated with ASE interventions include development in executive functioning, feelings of connectedness, social curiosity, and achievement in reading, math, and science on standardized academic tests (Bowers et al., 2020; Ceballos, et al., 2021; Lemberger et al., 2018; Lemberger-Truelove et al. 2021). Treatment outcomes include samples of ethnically and economically diverse students, ranging from PreK to high school settings in both rural and urban schools.
  - 2. For teachers exposed to ASE interventions, results have demonstrated significant changes in teachers' perceived stress, mindfulness, and teacher-student relationships (Lemberger-Truelove et al., in press; Molina et al., 2022).

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## **I. Basic Assumptions of ASE Theory**

- A. The school context and the roles and responsibilities associated with school counseling require unique theoretical assumptions and specific practice behaviors.
  - 1. School counseling is an educator-counselor identity that does not operate with dual roles; rather, it is situated in schools where all actions serve the educational mission and support students' needs as learners and social beings. Similar to the educator identity, the term "counselor" in "school counselor" implies a focus on delivering preventative and developmental services aimed at wellness and social justice outcomes (Levy & Lemberger-Truelove, 2021, p. 1).
  - 2. The philosophical foundations of counseling, distinct from other mental health and educational professions, emphasize prevention, development, wellness, and social justice as integral components.
  - 3. The unique qualities of a school environment, along with the social learning characteristics of students and the professional responsibilities of teachers, imply that counseling interventions must be aligned with the distinct features of the school context.
  - 4. The identity and advocacy efforts of school counseling as a unique and contributing profession require specific beliefs, practices, and evaluation methods to be effective.
- B. ASE Theory's Perspective on Nature/Nurture and Epistemology: Students, educators, and other stakeholders within the school environment are co-determinants of individual and shared experiences.
  - 1. Students and educators are influenced by their biological, cultural, and spatial backgrounds, as illustrated in the ASE kaleidoscope metaphor. However, personal experience and purposeful behavior are dynamically shaped by a network of exposures, social forces, and personal history.
  - 2. Through the co-deterministic epistemological stance of ASE theory, it is understood that multiple previous influences, or "governors of experience," significantly shape current functioning and experience. However, individuals are not merely passive products of these forces.
  - 3. Volitional control represents how unique personal experience emerges from these prior co-determinants. Rather than simply being agency, it is through a mix of personal aptitudes and social environments that students gain the freedom to act intentionally and in solidarity with their communities. Experience is thus a co-determined emergence.
  - 4. Alongside volitional control, ASE positions school counseling as focused on positively impacting both students and their environments, using a social justice framework for long-term, beneficial development.
  - 5. The relationship between personal volition and social justice manifests as critical consciousness, or "sapience," allowing students and educators to operate insightfully within their environments.
  - 6. Given the influence of school and broader ecological factors on personal and educational experiences, school counselors must design interventions that are reflexive and relevant, addressing both personal and social development needs.
  - 7. The 3-5-1 C's of ASE Theory:
    - a) **3 Cs** – Ontological assumptions regarding students and school environments.
      - (1) Constitution – The combination of an individual's physical and psychological traits.
      - (2) Culture – The attitudes, values, and practices that characterize and shape institutions or groups.
      - (3) Circumstance – A condition, fact, or event that accompanies, influences, or determines another.
    - b) **5 Cs** – Counseling practice priorities.
      - (1) Curiosity – An openness, reflexivity, tenacity, humility, inquisitiveness, flexibility, and emotional adaptability necessary to connect prior states with emerging identities.
      - (2) Connectedness – An experience of acceptance, safety, encouragement, and mutual respect shared between students, counselors, and educators.
      - (3) Co-regulation – The interaction between self-aware individuals drawing from various sources to shape and influence behavior.
      - (4) Compassion – The capacity for discerning acceptance, understanding the complexity of self in relation to diverse systems, fostering well-being and future growth.

(5) Contribution – Co-regulated efforts to enact social change and individual commitments to advocacy.

c) **1 C** – The aim of ASE Theory.

(1) Community – A network of people and systems sharing common interests, evolving and varying contributively.

## **II. Assumptions of Wellness**

- A. According to ASE theory, wellness must occur at both the individual (student, educator) and social (school, culture) levels for true actualization. It is both inappropriate and potentially harmful to assume that wellness lies solely with the least empowered members of social systems. However, students must also have an active role in shaping their development and wellness.
- B. Reflexive and co-regulated development in wellness should not transform into conformity, as ASE values dynamic, generative growth through continuous self and social reflection.
- C. True wellness requires a dedicated commitment to both personal and social solidarity.
- D. Wellness is not a static or assumed state, even when associated with positive school outcomes such as academic achievement or desirable classroom behavior. Instead, it is the ongoing cultivation of curiosity, connection, co-regulation, compassion, and contribution within and beyond the school setting.

## **III. Assumptions of Psychopathology and/or Disturbance**

- A. Many social and personal disturbances can affect students and educators in schools, arising from both internal and external forces within the school context.
- B. ASE adopts a strength-based orientation, recognizing disturbances as real in lived experiences, yet viewing these experiences dynamically.
  - 1. Addressing personal or social factors influencing experiences is not about dismissing or reinterpreting these influences. Instead, by applying the 5 Cs, ASE encourages students and educators to shape their experiences in meaningful ways.

## **IV. Therapeutic Change Process**

- A. ASE-informed counselors utilize standard school counseling methods such as classroom instruction, small group and individual counseling, systems advocacy, and indirect services, delivered through structured curriculum and spontaneous interactions.
- B. ASE prioritizes creating optimal conditions for wellness by building individual capacity and promoting equitable environments within schools and communities.
- C. The counselor, as part of a triad, works to support students and environments. This involves entering the student's world, understanding their circumstances, and empowering them to navigate different contexts.
  - 1. Students engage better when they feel connected to their environment, so counselors can foster a sense of safety and acceptance.
  - 2. Counselors should advocate for environmental changes that reinforce students' skills.
  - 3. Counselors should encourage self-reflection in students, helping them apply new strategies to various contexts.
  - 4. Reflexive interventions that complement students' and educators' growth can facilitate lasting development.

## **V. ASE and Pertinence to Diverse Students and School Settings**

- A. ASE approaches school counseling with attention to both personal and cultural diversity within students and the broader educational and sociopolitical landscape.
- B. Each student is regarded as a cultural and personal agent, with unique levels of influence and expression.
- C. Schools mirror broader sociocultural systems, making it essential for counselors to respect school culture while advocating for improvements that support the liberation of students.

## **VI. ASE and Empirical Studies**



- A. ASE practitioners and researchers adopt a dialogical research stance, viewing data as approximations that symbolize possible outcomes. School counselors critically use this data to advocate for students and promote effective school systems.
- B. Though limited, the school counseling field has conducted some research with ASE, making it one of the most explored theories in school counseling.
  - 1. ASE-related interventions have shown improvements in executive functioning, connectedness, curiosity, and academic achievement on standardized tests among diverse student groups in various settings.
  - 2. Teachers exposed to ASE interventions report reduced stress, enhanced mindfulness, and improved teacher-student relationships.