

ARTICLES

Kindergartners Are Ready to Learn: Applying Student-Within-Environment Theory to a School Counseling Intervention

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The authors delivered a school counseling intervention grounded in advocating student-within-environment theory (Lemberger, 2010) to 57 kindergarten students. Using an action research design, 2 school counselors implemented the intervention in 5 classrooms. Program participation resulted in enhanced executive function and social-emotional learning skills. Implications for practice and research are provided.

Keywords: school counseling, advocating student-within-environment, social-emotional learning, executive function, kindergarten students

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For young children, kindergarten can be a time of rapid growth and exploration that leads to maturation of their social, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral capacities (Early, Pianta, Taylor, & Cox, 2001). For school counselors who deliver preventive practices starting in the kindergarten years, the investment is likely to affect students' overall development and extend into the total school climate (see Sink, Edwards, & Weir, 2007). Given the importance of early intervention in kindergarten, school counselor practice must start from well-minded theory and effectual counseling behaviors.

Although the influence of kindergarten is profound, many contemporary educational systems are emphasizing achievement outcomes at the expense

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of the social, emotional, and developmental opportunities that are essential to later academic and life success (Ray & Smith, 2010). As an alternative, school counselors can serve as school leaders who provide direct services and systems support intended to amplify the personal and social capacities of students and related stakeholders (Bowers, Lemberger-Truelove, & Brigman, 2018).

Elementary school counselors report that the delivery of classroom guidance lessons is the preferred approach to support students' personal and social development (Goodman-Scott Watkinson, Martin, & Biles, 2016). While the delivery of preventive approaches to large groups of students is preferred, there is limited empirical evidence related to specific school counseling classroom guidance interventions for younger children (Sink et al., 2007). To begin to close this gap and provide school counselors with initial empirical support, we pilot tested a theoretically grounded school counseling program intended to enrich important developmental capacities, such as students' social-emotional learning and executive functioning.

THE ADVOCATING STUDENT-WITHIN-ENVIRONMENT APPROACH TO SCHOOL COUNSELING

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) suggests that school counselors implement comprehensive guidance programs in a theoretically intentional manner (ASCA, 2019). The advocating student-within-environment (ASE; Lemberger, 2010) approach to school counseling supposes that intervention efforts should cultivate children's social, emotional, cognitive, and regulatory capacities because they are experientially connected to the school context (Lemberger-Truelove & Bowers, 2019). Concurrent to priming student capacities, an ASE-influenced school counselor commits to advocacy behaviors at the school level in such a way that children's indwelling potentials are prized and encouraged.

ASE was designed as a unique theoretical approach specific for school counseling practice, as influenced by humanistic, contemplative, and social justice philosophies (Lemberger, 2010). Additionally, the architects of the ASE approach integrated findings from a variety of contemporary disciplines, not limited to the learning and educational sciences, evolutionary psychology, and neuroscience. Each one of the conceptual influences that constitute the ASE approach is actionable in a way that is uniquely relational to the roles of school counselors, the attributes of students in schools, and the idiosyncratic features of educational settings.

The theoretical focus of an ASE-informed school counselor is to help each student and relevant adult in that student's life to activate inherent abilities in such a way that each individual might better coregulate experiences, leading to more fully connected school environments. Certain student capacities, such as executive function, can be amplified by exposing that student to certain experiential opportunities in and beyond the formal

counseling relationship. Executive function refers to mental regulatory efforts, such as inhibitory control, working memory, and attention, that influence expressions, such as self-monitoring, shifting from task to task, emotional control, task initiation and completion, planning and organizing, and task monitoring (Gioia, Isquith, Guy, & Kenworthy, 2015). An ASE-informed school counselor will work to help adult stakeholders better meet the manifold needs of the developing student, and together the student and stakeholders will coregulate in ways that promote individual and social flourishing across the school environment.

The assumptions implicit to ASE theory are more than mere school counselor foci areas or expected student outcomes; rather, the unique assemblage of these theoretical features anticipates unique counseling practices. For example, given the affiliation of ASE with classical humanistic counseling, an ASE-informed school counselor appreciates and uses empathetic language. This said, an ASE-informed school counselor generally considers the limitations of empathy, as empathy infers that the counselor creates a sense of mutuality as a consequence of what the counselor has identified from the client's internal experiences. Alternatively, an ASE-informed counselor adopts the spirit of empathy and extends it in a coregulated way, resulting in a practice called connectedness (or reconnection). The practice of connectedness differs from empathy in that the school counselor identifies and expounds on what is mutual relative to the student's presenting concern or the demands of the school environment. From this mutuality, the school counselor and student can begin to enrich, challenge, or even nurture in ways that affect the various individuals and circumstances across the total school environment.

The ASE-informed counselor adopts the most empowering aspects from classical humanistic practice and refocuses concepts such as self-actualization and personal autonomy into more socially construed ends. The ASE approach is less concerned with self-centric conceptions of the student and instead is occupied with nondualism and how the student might thrive in an embodied way within complex school environments (see Lemberger & Lemberger-Truelove, 2016; Lemberger-Truelove & Bowers, 2019). Furthermore, an ASE-informed school counselor is primarily concerned with preventive practices designed to amplify student and educator capacities without expectations tied to fixed counseling practices or normative client outcomes. In this way, the approach is receptive to a great diversity of counseling strategies and formats. For example, classical humanistic counselors are cautious in using structured counseling activities, and an ASE-influenced counselor recognizes that students can have diverse and complex experiences as a result of exposure to any counseling delivery approaches (see Lemberger, 2012). Given that school counselors are required to evince evidence-based outcomes specifically influenced by a comprehensive program (ASCA, 2019), the preponderance of the evidence in support of the ASE approach is tied to a theoretically consistent, structured school counseling curriculum—namely, the Student Success Skills (SSS) program.

Ready to Learn (RTL; Brigman, Lane, & Lane, 2008), a manualized school counseling curriculum that is a part of the SSS suite of structured activities, is consonant with ASE theory (Villares, Lemberger, Brigman, & Webb, 2011; Webb et al., 2019). The activities within RTL are designed for the specific developmental abilities of students in prekindergarten through first grade, with a focus on three key areas for student and classroom development: (a) attending, (b) listening comprehension, and (c) social skills (Brigman, Lane, Switzer, Lane, & Lawrence, 1999). An initial investigation of RTL found that 4- and 5-year-old students in five treatment classrooms demonstrated greater attending behavior, listening skills, and behavior rating than children in five comparison classrooms (Brigman et al., 1999). Further investigation revealed that kindergarten students in six RTL classrooms scored significantly higher than students in six demographically equitable comparison classrooms on standardized listening comprehension tasks and a teacher-report rating scale for student behavior (Brigman & Webb, 2003).

Prior investigations of the RTL curriculum anticipated the types of social and cognitive skills associated with later school and life success, especially in children's executive function and social and emotional development. Executive functions are the neuropsychological ingredients necessary for goal-directed activity (Gioia et al., 2015). Whereas executive functions largely pertain to internal processes activated on the external surroundings, social-emotional learning refers to the manner in which environmental opportunities are integrated and responded to, as influenced by an individual's relational and decision-making attributes (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). Considered together, executive function and social-emotional learning capacities are axiomatic of ASE theory and of curricular expressions of ASE, such as RTL and SSS.

Past studies of the SSS curriculum using ASE-influenced practices and outcomes evince strong support for the effects of the intervention on students' executive functioning, social skills, and academic achievement (e.g., Bowers, Lemberger, Jones, & Rogers, 2015; Lemberger, Carbonneau, Selig, & Bowers, 2018; Lemberger, Selig, Bowers, & Rogers, 2015). Although it might be inferred from the theoretical relatedness of the various SSS curricula that RTL should contribute to young students' development of executive function and social-emotional learning, there are currently no studies that explicitly consider intervention effects for these important school outcomes. This area of inquiry is especially important given that kindergartners' executive functions are directly related to early math and reading abilities (Schmitt, Geldhof, Purpura, Duncan, & McClelland, 2017) and to social behaviors, such as small-group and play activities (Timmons, Pelletier, & Corter, 2016). Furthermore, kindergarten children with increased social-emotional competence have more success in developing positive attitudes about school, greater success in early adjustment to school, improved grades, and greater overall achievement (Denham, 2006). Considering the importance

of executive function and social-emotional learning on student and school outcomes, coupled with the unique potential of ASE theory and the RTL curriculum in particular, we explored the following research questions:

Research Question 1: What intervention interactions occurred between school counselors, classroom teachers, and students during the RTL intervention as delivered by ASE-trained school counselors?

Research Question 2: What changes in executive functioning and social-emotional development occurred for kindergartners participating in the RTL intervention as delivered by ASE-trained school counselors?

METHOD

The ASE theoretical framework calls for an investigation of school counseling interventions that contribute to socially useful executive functions and desirable social-emotional learning outcomes in a coregulatory manner among counselors, educators, students, and other relevant stakeholders (Bowers & Lemberger, 2016; Lemberger-Truelove & Bowers, 2019). For the current investigation, we designed a mixed-methods, quasi-experimental, nonrandomized study to illustrate how two ASE-trained school counselors delivered a relevant curriculum (namely, RTL) and how the intervention contributed to select student outcomes. This design was used for the following reasons: (a) to work within the parameters established by the cooperating school district, (b) to align with action research practices familiar to practicing school counselors (Rowell, 2006), and (c) to evince how a theoretically informed school counseling intervention affects student outcomes (Research Questions 1 and 2).

Participants and Setting

Fifty-seven kindergarten students whose parents consented to participation and data collection constituted the sample for our institutional review board (IRB)-approved study. The participants were each embedded within one of five preexisting classrooms at a single school site. Although only 57 students were included in the sample, all students in each of the five classrooms were exposed to the RTL intervention, per the requirements of the cooperating school. The sample demographics were racially/ethnically diverse (i.e., 46% White, 28% Native American, 14% Hispanic/Latino, and 12% other race/ethnicity). Of the sample, 51% were female and 77% participated in the free or reduced-price lunch program.

The participating school was located in a midwestern city, close to the downtown region, and received supplemental Title I funds, which are allocated on the basis of the number and percentage of students from low-income families. The administering school counselors were both White females with an average of 2 years of school counseling experience. The

school counselors did not practice from a comprehensive guidance curriculum; rather, they delivered small-group and individual counseling services for identified student populations. The kindergarten classrooms were not exposed to any form of school counseling intervention prior to the study.

Procedure

The school district administrators solicited aid from the first author to support their preventive services, especially those focused on kindergarten students' social-emotional development. In response, the first author provided the school counselors with training on the ASE theoretical approach and the RTL curriculum prior to the beginning of the academic year. Training on the ASE approach pertained to the school counselors' general orientation toward and behaviors when working with students and teachers, whereas the RTL program training was delivered as a 5-week manualized intervention (see Brigman et al., 2008). Students participated in one RTL session (i.e., lesson) per week. After training, the school counselors delivered the RTL curriculum to all students in the five district-identified classrooms (i.e., two in the fall semester and three during the spring).

Before administering the intervention, we disseminated IRB-approved recruitment materials to all students and their parents. Teachers of consenting students received the Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS) Rating Scales (Gresham & Elliott, 2008) and Behavior Rating Inventory of Executive Function, Second Edition (BRIEF-2; Gioia et al., 2015), pretest packets to complete 1 week prior to RTL implementation. One week following the final RTL session, teachers completed their respective assessments again for the purposes of the posttest. In addition to collecting the teacher-completed instruments, we collected observational field notes for all 25 RTL sessions. Members of the research team, which included the three coauthors and the school counselors at the school site, collected the following data: (a) RTL and ASE implementation fidelity; (b) quotes from students, counselors, and teachers; and (c) behavioral observations, including observations of individual actions and classroom climate.

Instruments

BRIEF-2. The BRIEF-2 (Gioia et al., 2015) is a 63-item instrument that includes parent report, teacher report, and self-report forms designed to assess impairment of executive function in youth ages 5 to 18 years. Items are grouped into 10 subscales within three indices: Behavior Regulation, which includes Inhibit and Self-Monitor subscales; Emotional Regulation, which includes Shift and Emotional Control subscales; and Cognitive Regulation, which includes Initiate, Organization of Materials, Plan/Organize, Task Completion, Task Monitor, and Working Memory subscales. The Global Executive Composite score comprises all 10 subscales. Some

subscales apply only to a specific form (e.g., Task Completion is included only on self-report). Participants respond to items with ratings of *never*, *sometimes*, or *often*. The BRIEF-2 teacher report form has an internal consistency (alpha) of .98 for the three indices and the composite score, based on a sample of children ages 5–7, and a test-retest reliability coefficient of .90 (Gioia et al., 2015).

SSIS Rating Scales. The SSIS Rating Scales teacher rating form is designed to capture students' social, emotional, and academic-related behaviors (Gresham & Elliott, 2008). Social skills are aggregated across seven subscales: Assertion, Communication, Cooperation, Empathy, Engagement, Responsibility, and Self-Control. Responses addressing problem behaviors are included in the following subscales: Externalizing, Bullying, Hyperactivity/Inattention, Internalizing, and Autism Spectrum. The teacher form includes additional assessments of Academic Competence, measuring student performance in reading, math, motivation, parental support, and general cognitive functioning. The SSIS Rating Scales teacher form has a test-retest reliability coefficient of .81 and an internal consistency reliability (alpha) of .96 with kindergarten student populations (Gresham & Elliott, 2008).

Field notes. For each RTL session, two members of the research team collected field notes to capture information pertaining to the counselors' implementation fidelity to ASE and RTL adherence and, also, to chronicle the activities of the participating students and teachers. The field notes were collected using a minute-by-minute structure and included quoted utterances, behaviors, classroom dynamics, and other pertinent information related to the intervention and affects. The school counselors' responses were recorded in addition to teachers' and students' reactions, responses, and engagement. All student behaviors were noted, including on- and off-task behaviors.

Data Analysis

To explicate school counselor behaviors, student reactions, and teacher cooperation in an ASE-informed RTL intervention in five kindergarten classrooms, we completed open coding of the field notes. This process was used to extract the lived experiences of the participants, bracketed from the theoretical assumptions of the researchers and the intervention design in the spirit of the phenomenological tradition (Hays & Woods, 2011). The initial codes were then probed with an eye toward the interactions among the counselors, teachers, and students in light of ASE themes for the purpose of answering Research Question 1. To answer Research Question 2, we conducted nonparametric Wilcoxon signed-ranks tests on the pre- and posttest scores on the BRIEF-2 (Gioia et al., 2015) and the SSIS Rating Scales (Gresham & Elliott, 2008). To connect theory-informed intervention to student-level effects, the research team discussed the relationships between the qualitative themes and quantitative change scores. Finally, to

triangulate the qualitative themes and the surmised relationships between the mixed-methods results, we solicited an independent, professionally trained scholar for comment and validation.

RESULTS

The open coding of the field notes yielded four themes (see Table 1): (a) student engagement, (b) story recall, (c) task transition, and (d) connectedness. Engagement, the primary theme found in the field notes, pertains to incidents in which the delivery of the RTL curriculum or responses to ASE-inspired counselor utterances resulted in students' on-task behaviors and attentiveness. Data indicated that the participating students became progressively engaged with the didactic and experiential activities over the course of the five RTL sessions. Full engagement in the sessions was preceded by consistent engagement with the RTL stories beginning in the first session and continuing throughout the intervention period, suggesting the importance of narrative growth. This theme relates to the themes of story recall and task transitions, especially given that students across all five classrooms exhibited early difficulties in responding to the RTL reflective questions of "who, what, why, where, and how," which matured into on-task behaviors by the third session and full engagement by the fifth session for all classes of students.

Changes in student engagement were evident within school counselor responses and student behavior from Lesson 1 to Lesson 5 throughout all classrooms. Within Lesson 1, students would often speak out of turn, ask to use the restroom, or divert eye contact toward external classroom stimuli. On average, the school counselor redirected students on 12 separate occasions within a 30-minute window during Lesson 1. Comparatively, the school counselor redirected students on only two occasions, an average taken across each classroom during Lesson 5. Furthermore, students responded accurately when prompted during processing questions in Lesson 5, which was dramatically different from their responses in Lesson 1.

TABLE 1
Field Note Themes, Descriptors, and Observed Sessions

Theme	Descriptor	Observed Session
Student engagement	On-task behaviors and attentiveness, such as sitting on pockets quietly, eyes on speaker, and listening.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Story recall	Correctly answers the who, what, why, where, and how of the story from previous lesson.	3, 4, 5
Task transition	Shifts from task to task throughout the lesson without behavior disruption or redirection.	3, 4, 5
Connectedness	Participates in pair-then-share activities and accurately reflects partner's contributions.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5

Given the story structure of the RTL program, story recall is an essential skill set that captures students listening and comprehension skill sets. Students' ability to recall a story, not just immediately after the story concluded but over prolonged periods of time, was found to vastly improve. Within Lessons 1 and 2, students struggled to accurately recall story details at the conclusion of each session or to reflect on the story presented the previous week. When asked to recall the story immediately after it was told in Lesson 1, students responded inaccurately by stating "cards" or in another class, "I know what they're going to drink, they're going to drink nectar." When asked who the main character was in Lesson 2, a student stated, "I don't remember." When asked what Fuzzy learned, students responded inaccurately by stating "to swim in the water." In Lesson 5, by comparison, students were adequately able to recall events from the 4th week, stating, "They went at night and they flew," and during the 3rd week, a student explained the context of the story covered 2 weeks prior.

During Lessons 1, 2, and 3, the school counselors struggled to manage transitions and initiate new activities. Students were asked to relocate from their positions on the floor to their desks or to form groups to facilitate other activities. In Lesson 1, students took an average of 4 minutes after receiving instructions to move from their story circle to their desks and begin the new activity. By comparison, in Lesson 5 students took less than 1 minute to switch between tasks. This skill set speaks to the coregulatory relationship between school counselor, students, and the classroom teacher.

The field notes contained examples of the ASE theoretical axiom of connectedness, including the importance of safe, growth-focused, and meaningful coregulatory relationships between the counselor and teachers, the counselor and students, and the students and teachers. Although teachers were not directly involved in the RTL implementation, they remained in the room and would often support the school counselors' lessons, support classroom management techniques, and assist during times of transition. Such coregulatory actions were essential to validate the school counselor's activities, impacting classroom connectedness both directly between the school counselor and the teacher, and indirectly with the students. For example, the school counselor would coregulate within the classroom environment by prompting reflection questions that included the teacher, such as "What would you do if (your teacher) is talking and you are listening and paying attention, but you still don't understand? What should you do?" or language consistent with school and classroom themes, such as "sitting on our pockets" and "do the right thing."

As the various connections developed and the counselors more deeply embodied the ASE approach, the types of connected dialogue evolved. For example, in Lesson 1, a counselor redirected students in a punitive and threatening manner, stating, "If I see someone is not listening, I am going to tell your teacher, and we want our class to have a good report," whereas by Lesson 5, connectedness/coregulatory quotes were more consistent: "I am

loving the way you are paying attention and you just seem so captivated in the story because your eyes are on me and you are listening.”

To illustrate the possible intervention effects on students’ executive functioning and social-emotional development, we performed a Wilcoxon signed-ranks test on the pre- and posttest scores from the instruments disseminated to teachers. For teacher-reported changes in executive functioning (BRIEF-2), the results showed a statistically significant positive effect in both the Working Memory subscale ($z = 2.23, p = .026$) and the cumulative results of the Cognitive Regulation Index ($z = 2.23, p = .026$). For the teacher-reported changes in social-emotional development (SSIS Rating Scales), the change scores evinced positive growth for assertion ($z = 2.60, p = .009$) and engagement ($z = 2.05, p = .041$). See Tables 2 and 3.

DISCUSSION

Results from the current study provide initial support for a theoretically informed school counseling intervention as delivered to children in five separate kindergarten classrooms. Results from this pilot study echo results from past studies with ASE (Lemberger et al., 2018; Lemberger & Clemens, 2012) and RTL (Brigman et al., 1999; Kuba, 2017). Akin to past results, the current study illustrates how this intervention approach affects students’ gains in executive functioning and social-emotional development; however, it extends past those empirical studies that focused chiefly on student outcomes by appending qualitative findings related to the counseling process and classroom dynamics. In this manner, the current study has implications for evidence-based school counseling in general, especially how counselors trained in a specific theoretical orientation might contribute to student capacities, including assertion, cognitive regulation, engagement, and working memory.

The development of cognitive and social capacities is essential for young children as they enter the formal school setting in kindergarten and mature through the elementary and later grades. The intervention effects in the current study are consistent with other manualized interventions delivered to young children, including the Tools of the Mind kindergarten program, a recent study of which found decreases in teacher reports of students’ behavior problems and increases in emotion regulation, positive teacher-child relationships, and self-regulation (Blair, McKinnon, & Daneri, 2018). Similar encouraging outcomes have been found in interventions targeting social-emotional development, such as a preschool delivery of the Head Start Research-Based, Developmentally Informed program, in which youth evinced gains in learning engagement (Nix et al., 2016). Considering these results together, it is reasonable to assert that structured programs can potentially accentuate normal maturation and ward off potential school interference in youth development. This end is especially germane to school counselors, who possess the training, access, and professional qualities to

TABLE 2
Intervention Results Based on the BRIEF-2 Teacher Report Form

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>M</i> Difference	<i>SD</i>	<i>z</i> Score
Inhibit		−0.12		0.19
Preintervention	13.30		4.96	
Postintervention	13.18		5.40	
Self-monitor		−0.42		1.01
Preintervention	8.60		2.96	
Postintervention	8.18		3.23	
Shift		−0.75		1.08
Preintervention	12.35		4.25	
Postintervention	11.60		3.58	
Emotional control		0.14		0.33
Preintervention	10.72		4.57	
Postintervention	10.86		4.30	
Initiate		−0.46		1.84
Preintervention	6.65		2.49	
Postintervention	6.19		2.57	
Working memory		−1.11		2.23*
Preintervention	14.07		5.33	
Postintervention	12.96		4.81	
Plan/organize		−0.58		1.17
Preintervention	12.46		4.12	
Postintervention	11.88		4.14	
BRI		−0.54		0.52
Preintervention	21.89		7.58	
Postintervention	21.35		8.36	
ERI		−0.61		0.61
Preintervention	23.07		8.28	
Postintervention	22.46		7.37	
CRI		−3.05		2.23*
Preintervention	51.28		17.13	
Postintervention	48.23		16.55	
GEC		−4.21		1.56
Preintervention	96.25		29.97	
Postintervention	92.04		29.15	

Note. Items on the Behavior Rating Inventory of Executive Function, Second Edition (BRIEF-2), are reverse scored: Increases in executive function are determined by decreases in assessed behaviors. Wilcoxon signed-ranks tests were performed on the pre- and postintervention scores. BRI = Behavioral Regulation Index; ERI = Emotional Regulation Index; CRI = Cognitive Regulation Index; GEC = Global Executive Composite.

* $p < .05$.

deliver highly effectual approaches, including theory-informed dialogue and manualized psychoeducational didactic guidance.

Many kindergarten students experience rapid changes in their executive functioning, especially in their working memory capacities (Monette, Bigras, & Lafrenière, 2015). Such findings are consistent with the results of the current study in that the students were provided an intervention designed to elicit and reinforce the regulation of memory recall. For example, the participating students consistently recalled story details provided in the RTL curriculum,

TABLE 3
Intervention Results Based on the Teacher Report
of the SSIS Rating Scales

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>M</i> Difference	<i>SD</i>	<i>z</i> Score
Communication		0.33		0.78
Preintervention	13.42		3.50	
Postintervention	13.75		2.91	
Cooperation		0.67		1.69
Preintervention	10.16		3.87	
Postintervention	10.82		3.43	
Assertion		1.02		2.60*
Preintervention	11.19		3.60	
Postintervention	12.21		2.88	
Responsibility		0.32		0.89
Preintervention	10.70		3.76	
Postintervention	11.02		3.06	
Empathy		0.32		0.65
Preintervention	12.91		3.81	
Postintervention	13.23		3.33	
Engagement		0.86		2.05*
Preintervention	12.67		4.04	
Postintervention	13.53		3.61	
Self-control		0.05		0.17
Preintervention	12.67		4.19	
Postintervention	12.72		3.78	
Sum of raw scores		3.56		1.56
Preintervention	83.72		20.52	
Postintervention	87.28		17.42	
Externalizing		0.09		0.19
Preintervention	5.61		5.78	
Postintervention	5.70		6.01	
Internalizing		0.12		0.77
Preintervention	2.79		2.73	
Postintervention	2.67		3.12	
Problem behaviors		-0.91		0.98
Preintervention	13.60		11.82	
Postintervention	12.68		11.87	
Academic competence		-0.04		1.16
Preintervention	21.60		8.26	
Postintervention	21.56		9.83	
Bullying		0.02		0.45
Preintervention	1.32		2.15	
Postintervention	1.33		2.46	
Hyperactivity/inattention		-0.26		0.93
Preintervention	5.54		4.66	
Postintervention	5.28		4.84	

Note. Wilcoxon signed-ranks tests were performed on the pre- and postintervention scores. SSIS = Social Skills Improvement System.

* $p < .05$.

which illustrate narrative comprehension and also regulation of memory. The findings from the current study are consistent with other studies of preschool children whose recall of oral text was followed by meaningful questioning (Van den Brook, Kendeou, Lousberg, & Visser, 2017).

In the current study, student participants who were exposed to the Fuzzy the Butterfly story recalled appropriate narrative details and were able to respond to the counselor's questions pertaining to who, what, why, where, and how. This same structure was followed at the beginning of the next lesson, when students were asked to recall information from the previous week. Initially, students were found to struggle in this area, but the eventual repetition of the task and story structure proved to be effective in increasing their ability to accurately recall details from previous weeks. Although accuracy of story recall was observed in the classroom, these findings are consistent with individual student data on working memory abilities. Kindergarten students were found to have an increase in working memory ability, suggesting that the tasks of story recall and repetition were related.

The entirety of the classroom environment was affected by participation in RTL activities as grounded in ASE theory. The school counselor and teacher worked together with each student to create a climate of coregulation shared between each member of the classroom community. In this way, the class identified and invested in feelings of connectedness, as informed by shared awareness of goals, progress, and tasks (e.g., Hadwin, Järvelä, & Miller, 2011). In this way, the ASE postulate of coregulation (i.e., each student self-regulating in a manner that contributes to the total classroom flourishing) anticipates another ASE postulate of school connectedness (see Lemberger-Truelove, Ceballos, Molina, & Dehner, in press; Liu, Kim, Carney, Chung, & Hazler, in press). This is to suggest that the feelings of mutuality that are experienced in a connected classroom contribute to the coregulation of experiences that enhance those connections and also promote the self-regulation and executive function expressions necessary for learning and social successes (see Lemberger-Truelove & Bowers, 2019; McCaslin, 2009).

The interaction of classroom connectedness and coregulation of experience was clearly demonstrated in the results of the current study, given that students were found to experience increased social skill assertion and engagement at the same time that they exhibited heightened social solidarity with each other and with the adult counselor and classroom teacher. Regarding assertion, students were rated more highly in their ability to express feelings when wronged, to ask for help from adults, and to advocate for others who were treated unfairly. These findings are consistent with the activities found in the RTL program, such as when the school counselor prompted the students to identify what a classroom should look like, sound like, and feel like. Students coconstruct their ideal environment through facilitation by the school counselor in the presence of their classroom teacher. Regarding engagement, students experienced increased ability to join with activities already initiated, such as games, or with groups, to invite others to join activities, to make friends easily, and to interact with other children. Results are consistent with outcomes

from the Second Step program, a guidance curriculum administered at the classroom level, pertaining to first-grade students who were shown to experience minimal increase in assertion and a larger increase in engagement (DiPerna, Lei, Cheng, Hart, & Bellinger, 2018).

Implications for Practice and Scholarship

Elementary school counselors favor classroom guidance lessons as a preferred modality toward meeting students' personal and social development needs (Goodman-Scott et al., 2016). However, with respect to interventions focusing on younger children, the empirical evidence for school counseling interventions is limited (Sink et al., 2007). Results from the current study encourage school counselors to reframe the process by which they engage in comprehensive guidance curriculum implementation. Considering the application of ASE theory into any evidence-based practice provides school counselors with the opportunity to overcome socially based obstacles that are unique to the school environment. As seen within the current study, the school counselor was able to achieve positive outcomes by joining into a coregulatory relationship with the teacher and students of the addressed classrooms.

Limitations and Future Research

Although our results are promising, there are limitations to the current study. The researchers were asked to intervene in the selected classrooms, and there was a practice focus on the intervention and related research design. Consequently, the sample was limited in size, in number of classrooms, and to treatment-only conditions. These limitations in design are different from past ASE-related studies with comparison groups and larger samples and number of intervention sites and classrooms (e.g., Lemberger et al., 2018). These limitations might have affected the number and types of significant results garnered, as executive functioning and social-emotional development might change over protracted periods and in ways not immediately identifiable to teachers.

A second type of general limitation to the current design pertains to the assumptions in the mixed-methods design. The current study makes a unique contribution in its pairing of qualitative data related to the counseling intervention dynamics to the student outcomes; however, it is impossible to connect descriptions of dynamics with pre- and posttest change scores. Therefore, we present theoretical deductions to support the influence of the ASE theory on the counselor behaviors and student outcomes. In response to these limitations, future studies might include a greater number and diversity of participants and sites, varied data types (e.g., behavioral observations that might lend to growth modeling of development), and the inclusion of a control or delayed-treatment group.

CONCLUSION

Given the increasing number and types of stressors that confront young children in and beyond school environments, there is an urgent need for school counselors to provide preventive counseling activities aimed to amplify students' internal social and cognitive capacities. By supporting the natural proclivities of students to learn, adapt, and connect, school counselors contribute in a critical way to the resilience and actualizing tendencies necessary for learning and life successes. The results of the current study, and by extension the ASE theoretical approach and the RTL curriculum, might increase the likelihood that school counselors curate these development opportunities for students, educators, and other stakeholders.

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