

USING THE ACHIEVING SUCCESS EVERYDAY (ASE) GROUP MODEL TO PROMOTE SELF-ESTEEM AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT FOR ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE (ESL) STUDENTS

The Achieving Success Everyday (ASE) group model is used to promote self-esteem and academic performance of English as a second language (ESL) students. The findings from the preliminary data indicated that the participants' self-esteem was significantly improved after participation in the group. There was no significant improvement in the total GPA of the participants, although 75% of the participants made modest improvement in GPA. This article explores implications for practice and research.

American public schools have been enrolling an increasing number of students who speak English as a second language (ESL). This rapid growth in the ESL student population is due in part to the dramatic demographic change in the United States over the past 30 years. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2011), the percentage of students aged 5-12 who speak a language other than English at home has doubled since 1980. ESL students are the fastest growing population in U.S. K-12 schools and the trend will continue throughout the next few decades (Sheng, Sheng, & Anderson, 2011). In fact, one in every four students in U.S. public schools will be an English language learner by the year 2026 (Garcia, 1999).

Despite the fast growing trend, there is still no consensus on the terminology used to categorize the ESL population. Currently, a variety of ways exist to describe ESL students, including ELL (English language learners), ESOL (English for speakers of other languages), ELD (English language development), ELS (English language service), and bilingual (Rance-Roney, 2009). In this article, these terms are used interchangeably to address students who are learning English as a second language.

Significance of Serving ESL Students

A Blueprint for Reform, published by the U.S. Department of Education (2010), specifies some priorities in educational reform. One priority includes "equity and opportunity for all students" (p. 5) and English language learners are listed as one of the target student populations. U.S. schools are called to provide appropriate services that support students' educational suc-

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cess and prepare them to be “college and career ready” (p. 3). However, a huge achievement gap between ESL students and their non-ESL counterparts continues to exist (National Education Association [NEA], 2008). To illustrate, the ELL academic performance analysis on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) showed that only 29 percent of the ELL students in eighth grade reached proficiency or above in reading, comparing to 73 percent of non-

scores of the Self-Esteem Index (familial acceptance, academic competence, and personal security) were associated with higher achievement scores but not peer popularity. However, less literature examines the self-esteem of the ELL student population in relation to academic achievement. Despite the limited research, professional school counselors can support academic achievement through culturally appropriate school counseling interventions, such as group counseling, to address

In another example, school counselors integrated poetry into group counseling interventions, which created a supportive environment for the students to share delicate issues as well as learn and practice their English skills (Asner-Self & Feyissa, 2002).

Other potential benefits for ESL students participating in groups include: learning problem-solving skills (Dipeolu, Kang, & Cooper, 2007), experiencing an environment where their concerns can be normalized and their feelings of isolation can be moderated (Baca & Koss-Chiokino, 1997), exploring ethnic identity development (Malott, Paone, Humphreys, & Martinez, 2010) and enlarging their social network in schools (Villalba, 2003). Despite this small yet growing body of evidence, more research on group counseling interventions with ESL students needs to be conducted to provide additional evidence to further support its effectiveness (Burnham et al., 2009; Roysircar et al., 2005; Shi & Steen, 2010). The purpose of the current study is to use the Achieving Success Everyday (ASE) group model to improve ESL students’ self-esteem and academic performance, as well as to explore the effectiveness of the group intervention.

THE PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS AGED 5-12 WHO SPEAK A LANGUAGE OTHER THAN ENGLISH AT HOME HAS DOUBLED SINCE 1980.

ELL students (NEA, 2008). Therefore, it is important for U.S. schools to make concerted efforts to close achievement gaps for ELL students in order to promote their academic achievement (Perez & Holmes, 2010).

In addition to academic achievement, self-esteem is another widely studied variable in educational research for students from the general population. For instance, some literature supports that high self-esteem partly explains students’ school performance (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003; Dalgas-Pelish, 2006; Roberts, 2002; Schellenberg & Grothaus, 2009; Task Force on the Family, 2003; Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004). Researchers also found the relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement could be reciprocal, meaning students’ academic achievement could improve self-esteem (Liu, Kaplan, & Risser, 1992; Rosenberg, Schooler, & Schoenbach, 1989; Ross & Broh, 2000). Schellenberg and Grothaus (2009) provided an example of using group intervention to improve both the self-esteem and academic achievement of African American male students. Researchers found that some of the dimensions of self-esteem had stronger correlations with academic achievement. For example, Daniel and King (1995) found that three subscale

ELL students’ academic and personal/social development (Dahir & Stone, 2003).

Group Interventions with ESL Students

Group counseling is an important delivery mechanism espoused by *The ASCA National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs* (ASCA, 2012). School counselors can use groups to attend to students’ academic, personal/social, and career development (Gerrity & DeLucia-Waack, 2007; Paisley & Milsom, 2007; Schellenberg & Grothaus, 2009). Several authors have also advocated for using group work with ESL students (Asner-Self & Feyissa, 2002; Villalba, 2003), and group interventions have been demonstrated to be a creative and effective way to serve ESL students (Asner-Self & Feyissa, 2002; Burnham et al., 2009; Galletta-Bruno, 1995; Hagan, 2004; Roysircar et al., 2005). For example, group counseling was included in a comprehensive drop-out prevention program that successfully increased the number of Spanish-speaking students who remained in high school (Galletta-Bruno, 1995). Additionally, small groups were successful at improving ESL students’ language acquisition and the display of appropriate classroom behaviors (Shi & Steen, 2010).

DESCRIPTION OF THE ASE GROUP MODEL

The Achieving Success Everyday (ASE) group model was created to provide a framework for developing groups that aim to address students’ personal/social and academic development in school settings (Steen, 2007). The model is intended to be semi-structured yet the protocol is flexible enough for group leaders to make adjustments to what might emerge during their group sessions. The ASE group model also integrates both a psycho-educational and counseling approach, which allows opportunities for group leaders to teach specific skills (psycho-educational) and process personal/social issues (counseling). Six

phases, which are not sequential in nature, make up the ASE group model: (a) assessment (screening members, collecting data, and developing an agenda), (b) review (developing group expectations, individual/group goals, norms, etc.), (c) acquaintance (getting to know each other), (d) challenge (confronting students' inconsistencies), (e) empowerment (providing information and teaching skills), and (f) support (closing the group with suggestions on identifying internal/external assets beyond the group and celebrating accomplishments).

METHOD

This study aimed to describe how the ASE group model could be applied with ESL populations and to explore the effectiveness of the ASE group model on ESL students' self-esteem and academic performance. The authors collected preliminary data before and after the group interventions and used it to determine the group model's effectiveness. The goals, group members and leaders, procedures, and instruments are described below.

Goals

This group counseling intervention had three major goals. The first goal was to provide ESL students a safe environment outside of their regular classrooms to allow them to interact with other peers and adults. The second goal was to enhance ESL students' self-esteem through group activities, and the third goal was to improve ESL students' academic performance. The goals were created as a collaborative effort of both the group leaders and a consultant who is an expert in group counseling in school settings.

Group Members

The authors used the following criteria to recruit the participants in the group. First, students had to be enrolled in the ESL program for at least one year by the time they were invited to participate in the group. Second, they had to be enrolled in the free-or-reduced lunch

A HUGE ACHIEVEMENT GAP BETWEEN ESL STUDENTS AND THEIR NON-ESL COUNTERPARTS CONTINUES TO EXIST.

program at the time they were invited to participate in the group because the funding for this study provided the stipulation to serve ESL students from low-income backgrounds. Third, both the students and their parents had to agree to their participation by returning the consent forms with signatures to the school counselor.

Sixteen ESL students participated in the groups for this study. Seven were sixth-graders, three were seventh-graders and six were eighth-graders. All of the participants in this study were Hispanics from South American countries and had been living in the U.S. for more than five years. Nine participants were females and seven were males. The baseline GPA of the participants in the study ranged from 1.71 to 3.00 on a four-point scale (1 = D; 2 = C; 3 = B; 4 = A). The average GPA prior to the group counseling intervention was approximately 2.5.

Group Leaders

The 16 ESL students were split and assigned into two groups, one led by a White female school counselor employed at the middle school where the groups were conducted, and the other led by an Asian female doctoral candidate attending a local counselor education program. Both group leaders were in their early 30s and had a master's degree in school counseling. The school counselor had extensive experience in leading groups with different student populations in that particular middle school. The doctoral student had experience conducting groups with ESL students, other students of color, and those from low socio-economic backgrounds at the secondary level in other schools.

The group leaders were provided a copy of the ASE group model by the author of the model, who also served as a consultant to this study and is the second author of this article. The consultant provided a training session

before the groups started. The consultant, previously a school counselor, has considerable experience in training school counselors to implement group interventions and in running groups with children and adolescents. The training session included reviewing the ASE group model in detail, watching video clips illustrating the phases of the ASE group model, and exploring strategies on integrating psycho-educational and counseling approaches in groups in school settings.

Procedures

The authors invited approximately 60 students enrolled in both the ESL program and free-or-reduced lunch program at the middle school to participate in the group intervention. Sixteen students participated in the program; others were unable to participate due to schedule conflicts and students' personal reasons (e.g., parents did not return the informed consent forms, transportation issues). The groups met for an hour after school once a week for five weeks.

The group intervention based on the ASE group model was created by the group leaders. Once the groups began, the two group leaders met before and after each group session to discuss the group process and share reflections about the group experience. Before the group started, at least one time during the sessions, and after the last group session, the group leaders met with the consultant to discuss the entire group process and reflect on areas that went well and aspects that need to be improved in the future. See the Appendix for an example session the leaders created based on the ASE group model and contact the first author for the entire program.

Instruments

Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory-School Form (CSEI-SF). The effectiveness of the group intervention on

SMALL GROUPS WERE SUCCESSFUL AT IMPROVING ESL STUDENTS' LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND THE DISPLAY OF APPROPRIATE CLASSROOM BEHAVIORS.

students' self-esteem was measured using the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory-School Form (CSEI-SF). The CSEI-SF is a 50-item self-rated instrument and has been used extensively to measure children and adolescents' "attitudes towards the self in social, academic, family and personal areas of experience" (Coopersmith, 2002, p. 1). The instrument takes about 10 minutes for children as young as 8 years old to complete. However, considering the participants in this study spoke English as a second language, the group leaders read aloud each item on the instrument and explained the meanings of certain words when necessary. The participants in this study took about 40 minutes to complete the instrument.

All items in the instrument were declarative statements about self; for example, "I often feel upset in school; I often wish I were someone else; I am pretty happy." Answers were either "like me" or "unlike me." Items were scored 1 if students marked "unlike me" to the negative statements and "like me" to the positive statements. Items were scored 0 if students marked "like me" to the negative statements and "unlike me" to the positive statements. A total score (raw score) was produced by adding up all four subscales: General, Social self-peers, Home-parents and School-academic. Standardized scores were calculated by multiplying the total raw score, which ranged from 0-100. According to Coopersmith (2002), the internal consistency coefficient ranged between .80 to .92 across a diverse sample of youngsters (e.g., ethnicity and social economic status).

Grade Point Average (GPA). The impact of the group intervention on academic performance was measured by comparing the total GPA for math, language arts, science and social studies pre- and post-group intervention.

The pre-group GPAs were collected at the end of the third quarter and the post-group GPAs were collected at the end of the fourth quarter in the same semester. In the school district where this study was conducted, a quarter lasted about nine weeks and one academic year consisted of four quarters.

RESULTS

The authors analyzed the data using PASW Statistics 18. First, pre- and post-group scores of the participants' GPAs were compared in order to determine the effectiveness of the group intervention on ESL students' academic performance. A paired-sample *t* test was conducted to obtain the differences between the pre- and post-group GPAs. No statistically significant difference was found between the pre-group GPA ($M=2.47$, $SD=0.32$) and the post-group GPA ($M=2.63$, $SD=0.65$). However, as shown in Table 1, when looking at individual students' GPA change, 75% of the participants ($n=12$) had a higher GPA after the group and for 25% of the participants ($n=4$), the GPA went down. Individual students' GPA changes and percentage of change in GPA were also calculated using a formula provided by Schellenberg and Grothaus (2009). On average, the GPA of the participants in the group increased by 10.5%.

The authors compared pre- and post-group scores on the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory-School Form (CSEI-SF) to examine the effectiveness of the group intervention on ESL students' self-esteem. A paired-sample *t* test was conducted to check the differences before and after the group participation. The test results showed a statistically significant difference between the pre-group self-esteem scores

($M=54.88$, $SD=13.12$) and post-group self-esteem scores ($M=66.13$, $SD=11.06$), $t(15)=-6.11$, $p<.001$.

Participants' scores on the four subscales in the CSEI-SF were examined through paired-sample *t* tests. Statistically significant differences between pre- and post-group scores were found in three subscales of the CSEI-SF: General, $t(15)=-6.35$, $p<.001$; Social self-peers, $t(15)=-2.66$, $p<.05$; and Home-parents, $t(15)=-4.79$, $p<.001$. There was no statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-group scores on the subscale School-academic. See Table 2 for the descriptive statistics of the CSEI-SF subscale scores.

DISCUSSION

Previous research had demonstrated that group counseling is a feasible strategy to provide additional support for ESL students in a school setting (Shi & Steen, 2010; Villalba, 2003). This study described using the ASE group model to promote self-esteem and academic performance of ESL students.

Significant improvements were found in ESL students' self-esteem after participating in the group intervention. Specifically, the participants obtained significant gains in three subsections of the self-esteem measurement: General, Social self-peers, and Home-parents. The students had better attitudes towards the self in general and in social and home domains when interacting with peers and parents. A higher global self-esteem might have enhanced how the participants felt about themselves in their experience with parents and peers both at home and school. The personal/social component of the ASE group model allowed ESL students to interact with peers and share their feelings and life stories (Asner-Self & Feyissa, 2002; Shi & Steen, 2010; Villalba, 2003), which might have contributed to enhancing students' self-esteem in social and home domains.

The group intervention did not significantly improve ESL students' academic performance. However, improvement in GPA for 12 of the participants may be attributed to participating in the group. The individual students' GPA growth found in this study could be explained by their elevated self-esteem because previous research supported the reciprocal relation between self-esteem and academic achievement (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003; Dalgas-Pelish, 2006; Roberts, 2002; Task Force on the Family, 2003; Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004). Although the academic component of the ASE group model offered ESL students some opportunities to practice their English and to learn new social skills in an interactive learning environment, the group intervention itself did not directly address students' academic concerns or provide remedial support in any of the core subjects. This finding is not surprising since group interventions are more likely to make a difference in students' personal/social domain but not necessarily in grades or test scores (Brown & Trusty, 2005).

One of the goals of this study was to explore the effectiveness of the ASE group model with the ESL population. The study's findings indicated that the ASE group model did enhance the global self-esteem as well as the self-esteem in home and social domains for the ESL students who participated in this study. However, the group interventions using the ASE group model did not significantly improve the academic self-esteem and the GPA of the ESL students. Considering the fact that the GPA was examined only a short period of time after the group ended, expecting a statistically significant improvement in GPA was not quite realistic.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND RESEARCH

This study provides preliminary evidence that the ASE group model

TABLE 1. INDIVIDUAL STUDENTS' GPA CHANGE AND PERCENTAGES OF CHANGE IN GPA

Student ID	Pre-group GPA	Post-group GPA	GPA Change	Difference (%)
1	2.00	2.50	.50	25.0
2	3.00	3.20	.20	6.7
3	2.42	2.80	.38	15.7
4	2.57	2.60	.03	1.2
5	2.57	2.71	.14	5.4
6	2.14	1.60	-.54	-25.2
7	2.29	3.00	.71	31.0
8	2.71	2.40	-.31	-11.4
9	2.33	3.00	.67	28.8
10	2.83	3.60	.77	27.2
11	1.71	3.00	1.29	75.4
12	2.71	2.43	-.28	-10.3
13	2.71	2.80	.09	3.3
14	2.43	2.60	.17	7.0
15	2.50	3.00	.50	20.0
16	2.57	2.50	-.07	-2.7
Mean	2.47	2.73	.26	10.5

TABLE 2. SUMMARY OF MEAN AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS OF CSEI-SF TOTAL AND SUBSCALE SCORES

Subscales & Total	M (SD)		p
	Pre	Post	
1. General	13.31 (3.81)	16.06 (3.89)	<.001
2. Social Self-Peers	5.75 (1.61)	6.75 (1.00)	<.05
3. Home-Parents	4.31 (1.35)	5.69 (1.01)	<.001
4. School-Academic	3.94 (1.29)	4.56 (1.75)	.106
Total Score	54.88 (13.12)	66.13 (2.77)	<.001

Note. *n* = 16

can have significant impact on ESL students' self-esteem and may have an impact on GPA. Based on the results found in the present study, the following implications may assist professional school counselors in implementing similar groups.

First, school counselors may want to

consider using the ASE group model when working with ESL students. The ASE group model allowed school counselors to conduct semi-structured groups that had some flexibility for students to process their feelings in groups. This structure of the group seemed to benefit the ESL students.

The participants' self-esteem improved, which may be a result of learning more about themselves as well as sharing their personal thoughts and feelings with the group (e.g., regarding flexibility and cultural appropriateness, etc).

Second, school counselors should consider the cultural appropriateness of the model when serving ESL students. In the present study, the ASE group model was culturally appropriate for the population of ESL students.

ALL OF THE PARTICIPANTS IN THIS STUDY WERE HISPANICS FROM SOUTH AMERICAN COUNTRIES AND HAD BEEN LIVING IN THE U.S. FOR MORE THAN FIVE YEARS.

The group leaders in this study made a concerted effort to pay special attention to integrating culturally appropriate activities in the group process. For example, in an activity called "Self-Identity," the group leaders encouraged the participants to share the meaning of their names within the context of their Hispanic culture and family background. This may have given students opportunities to explore and demonstrate their uniqueness. The group leaders intentionally made connections with students' cultural background whenever appropriate in the group activities.

Third, when adopting the ASE group model with the objective of improving the academic performance of ESL students, school counselors should follow students' GPAs or test scores for a longer period of time than in this study because GPA is considered to be a distant outcome to measure. An alternative method would be for school counselors to modify the ASE group model by directly addressing related academic issues (e.g., testing-taking strategies and techniques, test anxieties, specific difficulties related with different subjects).

The authors offer several suggestions for school counselors who might be interested in implementing the ASE group model with ESL students. (a)

Attend to issues of cultural competence by being mindful of the cultural differences between the group leaders and students (Holcomb-McCoy, 2005). (b) Adapt the language used in the assessment tools to be age appropriate and to match students' reading comprehension level. (c) Increase the involvement of ESL students' parents in students' school life (e.g., keep parents informed of their children's progress in groups, encourage students or teachers to share students' experience

at school with parents). (d) Examine the effectiveness of the ASE group model by using qualitative methodology to augment the quantitative strategies in order to present a full picture of what may be occurring (e.g., document the students' reflections on their group experience, interview teachers, administrators and parents about the changes they see in their students' behavior or school performance).

LIMITATIONS

Several limitations impacted this study. This first limitation was the number of students in the group. With a small number of participants, drawing conclusions is difficult about whether the ASE group model will work in the same way with other ESL students in different schools. The second limitation is in regard to the measurement issue. The overall GPA variable remains a distal outcome, and researchers may have difficulty capturing its gains within a short period of time (e.g., in this study, nine weeks). The third limitation involves the lack of a control group. This in turn may limit the validity of the results found in this study. The pre-existing differences among the study participants might explain the self-esteem differences

found pre- and post-intervention. The validity of the results also might be influenced by the history factor or maturation of the participants. Participating students' out-of-group experience (e.g., full-time school attendance or positive influence from teachers, peers and parents) rather than the group intervention may have contributed to their improvement in self-esteem.

CONCLUSION

This article describes the ASE group model and how it could be used with ESL students. The authors collected some preliminary data to investigate the effectiveness of the group interventions and the results showed significant improvement in participants' self-esteem. However, cautions should be taken when interpreting the results due to the limitations involved in the research design. More rigorously designed research needs to be conducted to demonstrate the impact of ASE group interventions on ESL students. Such research could also inform professional school counselors' practice in serving the ESL population in U.S. schools. ■

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APPENDIX ASE GROUP MODEL EXAMPLE SESSION PLAN

Session One—Assessment/Review Phase

Topic: Introduction and Group Rule Setting

Objectives: To establish group rules; to get to know each other.

Materials: Pre-group assessment, clipboard, paper, markers, crayons, and colored pencils

Introduction/Review:

- Students completed the pre-group assessment (Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory-School Form).
- Warm-up Activity: “Train Wreck,” which allows students the opportunity to share personal information and get to know each other better.
- Questions for students to discuss: (1) What they thought were reasons they were attending the group; (2) whether they had attended any groups before; (3) what the impressions of groups are.

Personal/Social Component:

- The group leader facilitated a discussion on ground rules.
- Among the group rules, the importance of confidentiality was explored. The group leader used simple words to explain the meaning of confidentiality (e.g., keeping secrets, not telling others what is said in group, etc.).
- Students were encouraged to share their group experience with their parents and teachers. A list of generic responses was generated with the help of the group leader for students to ward off classmates’ inquiries about their attending the groups.

Academic Component:

- Self-identity Activity: students created a name poster and shared the meanings of their names. First, students wrote their names in the center of a piece of paper. Next, students decorated the poster with pictures, symbols or words that may illustrate ideas associated with their names. For example: origins, pronunciation in their native language, significance, nicknames, background stories, and cultural meanings behind their names are factors that may be explored. After the posters were created, the group leader facilitated a discussion through which the students could recognize the special traditions and cultural values of each other, as well as learn the differences and similarities between different cultures from which their peers came.
- The group leader taught the students the definition of “self-identity” and discussed why it was important to build a positive self-identity.

Closing:

- The group leader encouraged students to talk about what they learned from this session.
- The group leader encouraged students to look up the definition of “goals” and come up with some personal goals and academic goals and bring them back to the next session to share with the group.