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School-Based Social Justice: The Achieving Success Identity Pathways Program

It is imperative that school counselors become actively engaged in promoting school success for all students. For youth from low-income and diverse backgrounds, future career opportunities are predicated on achieving educational success. Therefore, school counselors become agents for social justice when creating, implementing, and supporting school-based interventions designed to promote school success, especially culturally relevant interventions that target youth from low-income and diverse backgrounds. This article describes the Ecological Developmental Cognitive Framework designed to inform the development of curricula that improve school success for all youth. The Achieving Success Identity Pathways is described as an example of curricula derived from this framework and a program that incorporates the four main components of the ASCA National Model®.

Our nation's occupational landscape has changed in significant ways since the National Defense Education Act of 1958. Forty years ago, youth could drop out of high school and enter any number of factory occupations offering livable wages. With a decline in manufacturing occupations, a high school education and two years of college are increasingly becoming a necessary prerequisite for someone to be able to successfully compete for jobs in the United States. A recent report from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2004) projected that while 42% of the new job growth through the year 2010 will require some form of college or postsecondary education, the largest generator of employment opportunities will continue to be the service-producing sector. Typical jobs within the service-producing sector have few educational requirements, offer low wages to employees, and are less likely to provide quality health insurance benefits than are jobs in other employment sectors. It is these jobs that will be available to youth and young adults without significant additional training beyond high school.

Further, job opportunities for youth with no high school diploma continue to be problematic, as these

students are approximately four times more likely to be unemployed than college graduates (Hotchkiss & Borrow, 1996; National Center for Education Statistics, 2002). In the years immediately following high school dropout, only 11% of youth are able to earn enough to remain out of poverty (Halperin, 1998). For low-income and diverse youth, quality-of-life outcomes (e.g., gainful employment, legal status, health status and well-being, and exposure to violence; Lerner, 1995) are poorest when combined with school failure. Not only are youth from low-income and diverse backgrounds three times more likely to leave high school prior to gaining a degree, but growing up in poverty is the strongest predictor of unemployment (National Research Council, 1993).

We concur with Prilleltensky (1997), Comas-Díaz (2000), Freire (1970), and Adler (1964) that counseling methods and practice must be designed to liberate disenfranchised members of our society from oppression. School dropout rates in many urban schools, especially for youth from low-income and diverse backgrounds, guarantee to repeat cycles of poverty unless interventions are designed that create academic success pathways. While the sources of and forces maintaining oppression are multifaceted, schools are a natural place to challenge and mediate its pernicious effects. Every American is guaranteed the opportunity to go through the educational system. It is the one institution that is intended to care for every child.

Recognizing the changing needs of our nation's youth, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2005) developed a national model for school counseling programs that is designed to provide guidance to school counselors as they work toward supporting the school and life success of all youth. The ASCA National Model includes four main components: the theoretical foundation underlying the profession, a management system for the school counseling program, a services delivery system, and accountability methods (ASCA, 2005).

It is through the seamless integration of these four program components that school counselors will have the tools, support, guidance, and data they need to make a difference in the lives of youth.

As helping professionals, school counselors possess the expertise needed to deal with the emotional and psychological challenges that may put their students at added risk for academic difficulties (Walsh, Howard, & Buckley, 1999). By approaching one's work from a social justice perspective, school counselors in effect attempt to liberate low-income and diverse youth from generations of oppression. It is through creating, implementing, and supporting school-based interventions that are designed to promote academic success and facilitate academic and life transitions that school counselors can assist students to overcome the pervasive effects of social and economic disenfranchisement (ASCA, 2005; Herr & Niles, 1998; Solberg & Howard, 2000).

We would argue that the process of promoting social justice for low-income and disenfranchised youth includes what Field and Baker (2004) have described as an "empowered frame of reference." They stated, "School counselors who advocate also teach self-advocacy skills to students to foster an empowered frame of reference which students can use to leap future hurdles or challenges, whether they be academic, emotional, social, and/or environmentally based (e.g., discrimination)" (p. 57). Yet, when Field and Baker interviewed practicing school counselors regarding the definition and essential features of school-based advocacy, this aspect of advocacy was absent from their responses.

Promoting a more just academic and social environment and teaching an empowered frame of reference can appear to be daunting tasks to busy school counselors with large caseloads and many professional responsibilities. Having a framework and curriculum to guide these efforts can make this become a more realistic goal. This article offers a framework for social justice in schools that is consistent with the ASCA National Model and describes a program that is designed to support school counselors' efforts to both promote a more just academic context and teach youth to use an empowered frame of reference.

FRAMEWORK FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE IN SCHOOLS

For youth from low-income and diverse backgrounds, the challenges that exist within their everyday lives provide a constant stream of messages regarding society's evaluations of them. These evaluations can become internalized by youth as dispositional expectations that subsequently shape and guide behavior, feelings, and attitudes. The

Ecological Developmental Cognitive Framework (Solberg & Howard, 2000; see Table 1) integrates developmental cognitive theory (Guidano, 1987), developmental contextualism (Ford & Lerner, 1992), and ecological systems models (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Viewed from this framework, youth develop self-definitions, roles, and expectations within a multi-embedded social context. These contextual influences include macro-, exo-, and micro-systemic levels (Bronfenbrenner) and collectively shape youth's core definitions of self and world.

For youth from low-income and diverse backgrounds, macrosystemic forces include the sociocultural history of a given racial/ethnic group, religious affiliation, history of racism and bigotry, and society messages regarding racism. Embedded within the macrosystem are exosystemic forces that include the youth's socioeconomic status, community resources, general safety in the community, incidents of overt racism and bigotry, written and visual media portrayals, and quality of housing. Microsystemic forces include parent attachment styles, language, cultural identity expressed within the family, parent involvement in the youth's life, and peer relationships (Table 1).

These contextual forces shape one's core beliefs about self and world—beliefs that then operate as internal dispositions to guide the formation and maintenance of one's conceptions of self (Guidano, 1987). These core beliefs operate as emotional templates to define one's self within everyday interactions. Unless these templates are altered, youth develop patterns of thinking, emoting, and responding called "behavior episode schemata" (Ford & Lerner, 1992) that can either enhance or hinder their academic pursuits.

We would argue that youth from low-income and diverse backgrounds fail in school and society because oppression existing in the youth's macrosystemic and exosystemic contexts (e.g., history of their racial/ethnic group, society beliefs regarding race, economic status, experience with racism/bigotry, media portrayals, and discriminatory housing practices) creates life experiences that result in internalized dispositions that maintain this oppression (Solberg & Howard, 2000). As a result of growing up within an oppressive social context, youth build a set of beliefs about themselves that are organized around core definitions of distrust, betrayal, danger, hopelessness, anger, loss, inadequacy, and social injustice. These core beliefs serve as predispositions and expectancies that influence their behavior across all social contexts, including school. Without intervention strategies to counter such predispositions that maintain oppression, youth who have internalized oppressive messages likely will continue to fail in school.

**For low-income and
diverse youth,
quality-of-life
outcomes are
poorest when
combined with
school failure.**

Table 1. The Ecological Developmental Cognitive Framework

Model/ Theory	Description	Examples
Ecological systems model	Three contextual forces that affect human development include macrosystemic, exosystem, and microsystem forces.	
	Macrosystemic forces operate at a distal level in shaping one's self.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Cultural history.•U.S. history, Puritan values that guide society.•Current society-held beliefs regarding diversity issues.
	Exosystemic forces are embedded within the macrosystem level and operate more directly on the youth through available home and community resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Socioeconomic status.•Housing quality.•Parents' work environment.•School quality.•Community safety.•Media portrayals.•Community racism.
	Microsystemic forces are embedded within both the macrosystemic and exosystemic forces and operate most directly on youth through experiences with family and peers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Parent attachment.•Language.•Cultural identity.•Parent participation in youth's life.•Peer relationships.
Developmental cognitive therapy	Core beliefs sensitize one to evaluate cues in one's social interactions that are consistent with those beliefs and to minimize the importance of inconsistent cues.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Core beliefs of being "incapable" serve as expectations for failure in school.•Core beliefs of being mistreated in a racist culture serve as expectations of being mistreated.
Developmental systems theory	As dispositions become reinforced, they become behavior episode schemata that shape the role and role performance of one within a given social interaction. Unless interventions occur, the youth will continue this pattern of behavior into work and personal relationships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Youth who expect to fail in school and define school as aversive will develop patterns of problem behavior associated with truancy, disruption, lack of preparation, and absenteeism.

Challenging these predispositions is a critical aspect of teaching an “empowered frame of reference.” It requires school counselors to believe that change is possible regardless of a student’s past experiences or current dispositions (Earle, 1990; Howard, Barton, Walsh, & Lerner, 1999). Indeed, youth who fail in high school often have a long history of failure stretching back to elementary school. Rather than giving up, school counselors must find

ways to understand failure through accurate assessment and diagnosis of the challenges facing these youth. School counselors can improve the impact of interventions by validating the challenges to success that youth face at the macro, exo, and microsystemic levels of their daily experience. When youth understand that they have been heard and their difficulties acknowledged, it becomes easier for them to overcome these obstacles. By creating educational expe-

periences at school that communicate trust, support, safety, hope, power, control, peace, wholeness, competence, and justice, we can assist youth to rewrite their core beliefs about themselves and the world in which they live.

As evidenced by the Field and Baker (2004) study, for some school counselors, the practice of social advocacy may feel beyond their abilities. On the contrary, we believe that given their training in relational skills, school counselors are well prepared to assist schools in fostering stronger connections between teachers and students and to develop group-level interventions for the classroom setting that help struggling students become more invested in their own success. We believe that school counselors have unique skills and will make an indispensable contribution to the success of the school when they conduct classroom-level interventions and implement innovative prevention programming. Indeed, the ASCA National Model (2005) has as one of its goals that school counselors will focus on prevention activities in addition to the responsive services they provide and will take leadership roles in systems changes within the school. To illustrate potential ways that school counselors can promote social justice, we would like to use the example of a program implemented in an urban high school.

ACHIEVING SUCCESS IDENTITY PATHWAYS

The Achieving Success Identity Pathways (ASIP; formally titled the Academic Success Identity Plan) is a curriculum that school counselors can use to challenge all students to improve academically (Solberg, Close, & Metz, 2002; Solberg et al., 1998). The goal of the ASIP curriculum is to help youth build “success identities” and the skills needed to make effective school to work to life transitions. ASIP constructs include the importance of “learning how to learn” (i.e., building self-confidence), effectively managing stress and time, building effective relationships with peers and authority figures (i.e., teachers and employers), and establishing and completing one’s academic and occupational goals. asip is informed by relevant research in academic (e.g., Zimmerman, 1995; Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Ponz, 1992) and vocational self-efficacy (e.g., Betz & Hackett, 1981; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994), motivation (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 1985), and social support (e.g., Wentzel, 1998; Wickrama, Lorenz, & Conger, 1997), as well as best practices in vocational education (e.g., Brown & Ryan Krane, 2000) and group theory (e.g., Yalom, 1995). This body of research and the theories integrated in the Ecological Developmental Cognitive Framework described above constitute

the theoretical foundation of the program.

As presently implemented, there are several parts to the management system (ASCA, 2005) that supports the ongoing implementation of the ASIP program. Monthly meetings of the student services staff provide an avenue to coordinate the program’s curricula and intervention efforts with those of other school staff members and to gather any critical feedback and support required. Periodic meetings with “academy” groups of teachers allow program staff to shape the ASIP activities so as to complement the current classroom curricula. The semester schedules are developed with the classroom teachers at the beginning of the school year so that all school staff can anticipate when particular curricula will be offered. Finally, student attendance is taken at each classroom session and logged into an Excel spreadsheet database.

Currently, the curriculum is being used with high school students, but it is written at the fourth-grade level for use in elementary and middle school settings. The schools with which we are currently working implement the program in the 9th- and 10-grade classrooms, which include monolingual, bilingual, and special education classes. English, Spanish, and Italian versions of the program are available. There are four main curricula to the ASIP program: “Hear My Story,” “ASIP Navigator,” “Charting Your Course,” and “Action Theater” (see Table 2).

“Hear My Story”

ASIP begins by using a curriculum titled “Hear My Story” that offers an avenue for youth to describe their lives in a safe, validating environment. Through class discussion, students are helped to identify the important people, events, and experiences that have shaped their development and sense of personal identity, and then they are invited to write about these influential factors. The personal accounts are written first according to themes currently being used by the classroom teacher. For example, a class that was studying the autobiography of Anne Frank had students write their personal narratives as autobiographies. In another class that was studying poetry, students were instructed to use their life as the subject matter for writing their own poem. The school counselor coadministers this curriculum with the teacher and plays a central role in creating a safe and validating environment for the youth.

The Hear My Story curriculum can be a powerful set of activities in that it can offer a glimpse of how youth are oriented to the world. Many of the stories told by students relate to themes of danger, anger, injustice, and so forth—themes that are very much present in their daily lives and that exert considerable influence over the way these youth view the

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Table 2. The Achieving Success Identity Pathways Curricula

ASIP		
Curriculum	Description	Goals
Hear My Story	Creates the opportunity for school counselors and teachers to learn about youth's life and experiences that relate to their core beliefs about their self and their world.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create a stronger relationship between educators and students.• Students learn that their life experiences do have a place in school.• Provide school counselors with an understanding of the range of issues that may serve as barriers to the youth's academic success.
ASIP Navigator	Provides an individualized assessment and workbook for youth.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Allow youth to define for themselves the range of issues that may serve as barriers to their success.• Help youth become invested in their own academic success.• Create a classroom dialogue around academic success barriers.• Allow youth to hear teacher and school counselor experiences in school.
Charting Your Course	Focuses youth on setting and achieving concrete academic goals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide further exploration of the challenges that youth face in achieving academic success.• Help youth establish achievable short-term goals.• Help teachers attend to student efforts in achieving success.
Action Theater	Explores the quality of social interactions that result in problem behavior.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Youth learn how problem behavior is influenced by both their dispositions and the social context.• Youth explore alternative behavior strategies that avoid conflict and promote positive social interactions.• Youth learn how the social context shapes their behavior.

world around them. While on occasion students will share vivid stories of living in a community filled with violence, family lives torn apart by drugs and alcohol, or living arrangements that vary day to day, it is important to remember that these are the challenges many low-income youth regularly face. If we as adults do not have the courage to hear the stories of low-income youth, how can we expect youth to find the courage necessary to overcome these challenges and succeed in school and life? The intention of this curriculum is to convey to the youth that school is a place where their lives are considered important, that adults in school can be trusted to provide help and encouragement, that peers and educators can become a part of those lives, and that they are no longer alone in facing their challenges. In theory, once students, teachers, and school counselors have shared their “stories” with one another, their interactions in the classroom have the potential to be improved, as they all have a more complete

appreciation for the others' experiences.

As mentioned earlier, the Ecological Developmental Cognitive Framework (Solberg & Howard, 2000) argues that many low-income and diverse youth possess self-definitions characterized by distrust, betrayal, danger, hopelessness, anger, loss, inadequacy, and social injustice. School serves as an influential social context that can either reinforce or challenge these cognitive dispositions. Hear My Story offers a means for eliciting and challenging these core beliefs. The activity is intended both to validate that for these youth the world is often a dangerous place filled with social injustice and to create a new way of perceiving the school setting through the sharing of these experiences in the classroom. By definition, the classroom in which the Hear My Story curriculum is implemented cannot fit the core beliefs of danger and injustice, for this curriculum could not have taken place in such an environment. This paradox allows the opportunity for

youth to perceive this one classroom as being a harbor of safety, respect, and trust, potentially resulting in a positive change in their daily experiences. It means that somewhere in the world alternative realities do exist that are different from the ones they live every day. When youth experience this shift, the school counselor and teacher now possess the leverage to communicate the importance of educational success as a pathway to life success. Youth have the opportunity to perceive the school counselor and teacher as supportive adults who believe in their ability to succeed.

“ASIP Navigator”

Whereas Hear My Story can be used to create a context that challenges youth to invest in education, the second curriculum uses the ASIP constructs to help students define the challenges they face in succeeding in school. Youth receive an individualized assessment, the “ASIP Navigator,” which uses bar graphs to compare their individual ratings on a school survey to other students at their school who are deemed “successful.” The ratings correspond to youth’s core beliefs about academic confidence, academic stress, connections with peers, connections with teachers, family support, health, persistence intentions, and exposure to violence. Students are taught how to interpret their results so that it is not the school counselor or teacher defining their challenges, but the students themselves. School counselors, with the aid of the classroom teacher, lead a discussion for each of these construct areas. Students are invited to share their thoughts and experiences with one another.

The ASIP Navigator also includes a personal workbook that allows youth to elaborate on each of the ASIP construct areas. The ASIP Navigator can be used to assist youth to define the challenges they face in improving their academic performance. By comparing their dispositions to a successful comparison group, the youth can effectively identify and perceive discrepancies. For some youth, inadequacy is an issue as indicated by low confidence ratings. For others, stress and health, connections within support systems, and persistence intentions are central themes. The goal of the ASIP Navigator is for the *youth* to identify and define their own challenges.

The Ecological Developmental Cognitive Framework argues that core beliefs shape how one defines one’s ability to learn and succeed in school. Students expecting to fail remain sensitive to classroom cues that confirm this belief. When youth receive feedback from the school environment regarding what they need to do to improve, change is more likely to occur. The ASIP Navigator confronts youth with a picture of how their ratings on each of the constructs compare with those of suc-

cessful youth. It creates a range of options for defining how to improve academic success. By youth defining for themselves the challenges they face, their core beliefs regarding past failure can be confronted.

The ASIP Navigator curriculum provides the social context—the classroom environment—and activities that help youth become involved in defining the problem. The solutions, however, are provided in the classroom and school environment by offering experiences that help youth overcome those challenges. For example, academic confidence, or self-efficacy, increases when the classroom teacher and school counselor help youth experience success through mastery experiences, offer role models to demonstrate how to successfully complete academic tasks, encourage youth to succeed, and decrease the anxiety associated with learning (Bandura, 1986; Zimmerman, 1995). Students who identify health as an issue need school counselors to work with them on issues such as anger management, eating problems, and depression and to help them receive the treatment necessary for other physical issues. Connections with peers are improved when classroom and extracurricular activities facilitate such connections. In sum, while the ASIP Navigator helps youth get invested in their own academic success, it is up to the school context to respond to the needs identified by the youth and to design classroom and school counseling experiences to facilitate academic success.

“Charting Your Course”

According to the Ecological Developmental Cognitive Framework, both the educators and students need to become equal partners in improving academic outcomes. While the learning context must create the opportunity for change and academic improvement, the student must be invested in his or her own success. The “Charting Your Course” curriculum can be used to keep youth invested in their own success by teaching them how to successfully set and meet short-term academic and life goals. Like the ASIP Navigator, this is a workbook-based curriculum that can be delivered in the classroom, in small groups, or even on an individual basis. The activities in the workbook ask youth to define their personal meaning of success and to identify and rank order the barriers they perceive as hindering their efforts to be successful. Youth identify one academic subject they wish to improve as well as the concrete steps they will take in order to make those improvements. They are asked to brainstorm potential challenges to reaching their academic goals and to identify the resources both within the school and in their home/community that they can use to support their efforts and to overcome any potential challenges.

The goal of the ASIP curriculum is to help youth build “success identities” and the skills needed to make effective school to work to life transitions.

At present we have evidence that student participation in the ASIP program contributes to important improvements in three markers of academic performance as well as three markers of school behavior.

School counselors facilitate a discussion for each of the topic areas. Students are invited to share their experiences and ideas with others and to learn from one another. Doing so allows youth to identify strategies, challenges, and/or resources that they may not have thought of on their own, and the opportunity to recognize that they are not alone in experiencing academic challenges. The workbook concludes with a “success contract” that youth complete by stating their academic goal, detailing the steps they have decided to take to improve their academic performance, and identifying a school staff member (typically the school counselor or a classroom teacher) with whom they would like to share their plan and their progress. Thus, while the Charting Your Course curriculum encourages the youth to make positive changes, it is up to the identified staff member to monitor and communicate with the youth when changes are made. By providing acknowledgement when agreed-upon behavior is performed, school professionals assist students to break out of cycles of helplessness and hopelessness.

Taken together, the ASIP Navigator and Charting Your Course curricula incorporate four of the five critical ingredients of effective career interventions as identified through meta-analytic procedures by Brown and Ryan Krane (2000). That is, students receive individualized feedback and engage in meaningful, written exercises; they have opportunities to learn through modeling and vicarious experiences; and attention is paid to assisting students in building and securing support from their family, teachers, and peers for their academic and career goals. When these ASIP curricula are followed with career education activities that impart knowledge of the world of work, then all five of the Brown and Ryan Krane critical ingredients have been included.

At the same time, conducting the Hear My Story, ASIP Navigator, and Charting Your Course curricula in a group setting allows school counselors to capitalize upon the power of group experience. It has long been acknowledged that the group modality exposes group members to certain therapeutic factors that aid in the process of change (Yalom, 1995). Specifically, the use of the ASIP curricula in classroom-based settings provides students with a sense of universality, that they are not the only ones who struggle academically at times; imparts a sense of hope that if other classmates have faced similar challenges and have persevered, then change is possible for one’s self; and allows for the process of vicarious learning to occur. Further, the power of the group modality with students has been clearly demonstrated in a number of studies, including those of at-risk youth (e.g., Zinck & Littrell, 2000) and studies that examine the effectiveness of the use of groups both to enhance learning (e.g., Campbell & Myrick,

1990) and to promote healthy academic self-concepts (Bauer, Sapp, & Johnson, 2000).

“Action Theater”

Youth often do not perceive how their nonverbal cues shape interactions with educators, peers, and family. ASIP includes a fourth structured curriculum titled “Action Theater” (Evanow & Solberg, 1999, 2000) that can be used to help youth understand how both their behavior and the social context contribute to and shape problematic outcomes. Action theater was developed from Boal’s (1995) “Rainbow of Desire” theater work that was originally derived as a method to help articulate Freire’s (1970) tenets on the nature of oppression. This curriculum provides a classroom-based avenue through which youth can become aware of and examine complex interpersonal dynamics and conflicts.

The curriculum unfolds in three stages. First, a series of “sculpting” activities are used to demonstrate to the youth the power of nonverbal communication and to sensitize them to the implicit messages present in many of their day-to-day interactions in the classroom, with peers, and at home. Next, youth identify common life scenarios and create role-plays to demonstrate the ways in which these scenarios unfold and get resolved. With the support of the school counselor and classroom teacher, two or three youth conduct the role-play and then other youth join in to provide alternative strategies for successfully managing and resolving the issues identified in the role-play. The role-plays that are created can facilitate youth’s efforts to recognize the reciprocal and complex nature of interactions; that is, they have the opportunity to witness how their behavior affects others as well as how others’ behavior affects their own. The curriculum culminates with youth engaging in live improvisation role-plays through which they can practice new ways of responding to problematic social and interpersonal interactions.

As explained above, Action Theater is intended to help youth recognize the ways that their nonverbal and verbal behaviors contribute to the interpersonal outcomes they experience, both positive and negative in nature. Using the youth’s own role-plays, the school counselor and classroom teacher are able to explain that when one responds out of anger and without thought, one has, in effect, allowed others to shape and control one’s responses and has given up the right of self-determination. Action Theater provides youth the opportunity to act through new ways of responding and to learn how to manage their behavior in a manner that increases the likelihood of desired outcomes. This intensive theater process can be conducted either in the classroom in conjunction with Hear My Story or as a pullout

group for youth identified as having anger management or social skills issues.

This curriculum originally was created to assist low-income youth and youth from diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds in becoming aware of the oppression they experience daily, both oppression that exists in the environment and how their behavior contributes to these experiences. By teaching youth to understand how the social context shapes their behaviors and to recognize both the explicit and implicit ways that this occurs, school counselors can assist youth to develop an empowered frame of reference (Field & Baker, 2004). Once youth have attained this frame of reference, they then have the ability to choose, with both intentionality and reflectiveness, how to respond in ways that are self-affirming and consistent with their sense of fairness and justice.

Program Evaluation

As the ASCA National Model (2005) makes clear, counselor accountability and program evaluation efforts are key components of any school counseling program. Thus, the ASIP program engages in ongoing data collection, program evaluation, and results dissemination. To date, the ASIP curriculum has been implemented with more than 2,500 9th- and 10th-grade high school students. A case management method is used to catalog which curricula a student receives. In many urban public schools, low attendance and high suspension rates make such programming difficult unless careful records are kept. Database spreadsheets allow staff to easily document the type and date of curricula received. This type of record-keeping also provides more effective evaluation of the curricular efforts, as the database spreadsheet allows for an evaluation of the relationship between type and amount of curricula received and various academic outcomes.

Using this evaluation strategy, a 2001 study was conducted to examine the impact on student outcomes of level of exposure to ASIP curricula (Solberg, 2001). ASIP curricula were implemented in the second and third marking periods of the semester. Attendance and grades from the first marking period were used as covariates, to control for their effects on later performance. With a sample of 131 ninth-grade students who were offered ASIP curricula during class time twice per month, it was found that overall exposure to the program was related to higher grades, more classes passed, more credits earned, and higher attendance rates. The effect of ASIP on these outcomes increased with the youth's increased exposure to ASIP curricula. Specifically, youth who engaged in five to six ASIP classroom activities experienced on average a 33% improvement in classes passed (an increase from 60%

of classes passed before intervention to 83% passed after intervention) and a 36% increase in credits earned (2.05 credits earned before intervention and 2.9 earned after intervention). Youth who experienced seven to eight ASIP classroom activities demonstrated an average improvement of 52% in end of semester grades (GPA of 1.38 prior to intervention and GPA of 2.1 after intervention) and an improvement of 137% in attendance rates, as measured by number of class periods missed (decrease from 64 to 27 class periods missed in the final marking period of the semester) (Solberg).

In that same year, a larger study was conducted (Solberg, Carlstrom, & Kowalchuk, 2001) that examined the impact of various levels of exposure to ASIP curricula on student outcomes longitudinally. In a sample of 661 high school students in an urban, low-income community, it was found that students who had three or more exposures to the curricula not only received higher end of semester grades, but continued to demonstrate higher grades 2 years later. More specifically, for this group of students, the average GPA was 1.6 prior to intervention. For students who engaged in ASIP activities three or more times, their average semester GPA rose to 2.7 at the end of the marking period immediately following their participation in the ASIP program. One-year post-ASIP exposure, their average GPA fell to 2.4, and then it remained at this level 2 years post-ASIP exposure.

In addition to the evaluations that have examined the effects of ASIP curricula in general, two studies have examined curriculum-specific effects. The Solberg 2001 evaluation described above found that the ASIP Navigator contributed to improvements in the number of credits earned and the percent of classes passed, while Action Theater contributed to improvements in attendance. At the same time, however, no single curriculum contributed uniquely to semester GPA; rather, the combination of curricula was found to contribute to improvements in this outcome. Evanow and Solberg (2000) also studied the specific effects of the Action Theater curriculum for students who were identified as having anger management issues. After completing once-a-week sessions for 8 weeks, students experienced reductions in both the number of school suspensions they received as well as the severity of these suspensions. Specifically, the number of suspensions experienced by these participants was reduced by at least 65% (e.g., 3.7 to 1.22 suspensions), while the severity of participant suspensions was reduced by 20% (e.g., infractions after intervention were more likely to be for being late to class vs. more serious infractions such as truancy, verbal confrontations with others, or other more severe issues).

Thus, at present we have evidence that student

participation in the ASIP program contributes to important improvements in three markers of academic performance (i.e., grades, credits earned, and classes passed) as well as three markers of school behavior (i.e., attendance, number of suspensions, and severity of suspensions). While some curriculum-specific effects have been found, it appears as though engagement in a combination of program curricula for at least five sessions yields the best and most lasting effects.

Limitations and Future Directions

As with any program of evaluation, our work to date has its limitations. Perhaps most obvious is our inability, at present, to assert that ASIP *caused* the observed improvements in student academic and behavior outcomes. In order to do this, one would need to have a parallel control group that was experiencing the same educational activities as the intervention group with which to compare student outcomes. However, we, as researchers and educators, do not feel that this is an ethical strategy. That is, if we believe, and have some evidence for this belief, that the ASIP program contributes to positive changes for youth during the critical transition into high school, it would not be appropriate to disallow one group from having access to and engaging in the program. An alternative strategy, and the one that we have employed, is to obtain a baseline measure of student performance prior to intervention (that is, grades and attendance from the first marking period) and then to control for this baseline performance in our analyses. In doing so, we are factoring out the effect of the students' typical grades and ways of behaving. Any improvements found, then, can be attributed to interventions that occur above and beyond the students' typical experiences. While this method is not as "powerful" as utilizing a control group—that is, it does not allow us to assert that ASIP caused the changes—it is a more ethical alternative and one that allows us to assert with confidence that ASIP activities *contributed* in important ways to the improvements observed.

While we do have evaluation data to suggest that engagement in ASIP activities contributes to positive outcomes for youth, our explanations for how this occurs are as yet based in theory. For example, while Action Theater has been found to be related to reductions in the number of suspensions a youth receives and the severity of those suspensions, the mechanisms by which this occurs remain unclear. We have hypothesized that the curriculum assists youth to become more aware of interpersonal dynamics, the ways that others can shape one's responses, and alternate, more desirable ways of responding. Logically, such awareness could lead to better ways of managing conflict with school personnel and,

thus, fewer suspensions, but this hypothesis has not been specifically examined to date. Future research efforts could focus on establishing ways to test the assumptions and theoretical explanations underlying the program.

SUMMARY

In sum, it is our contention that school counselors can become engaged in social justice efforts by creating interventions designed to promote academic success pathways and to teach an "empowered frame of reference" (Field & Baker, 2004). The Ecological Developmental Cognitive Framework offers a means of understanding how oppression affects the development of youth from low-income and diverse backgrounds, while the ASIP program offers a structured set of curricula that can be used by school counselors to help youth become engaged in their own academic success, to improve teacher-student relationships, and to manage oppressive messages and influences in youth's lives.

This program is consistent with the ASCA National Model (2005) in that it is rooted in an explicit theoretical foundation, includes a system to manage the program, delivers a set of classroom-based curricula that is available to all students, and incorporates evaluation strategies into its regular practice. The evaluations conducted to date of the ASIP program indicate significant and meaningful changes in youth's academic performance and behavior management. Future evaluations will continue to explore both the combined and individual effects of each of the program's curricula as well as the theoretical tenets underlying them. ■

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