

## Teachers Providing Social and Emotional Support: A Study of Advisor Role Enactment in Small High Schools

by Kate L. Phillippo – 2010

**Background/Context:** *This study investigates the teacher's role in the student advisory process, which to date has generated limited research literature. Teachers who serve as student advisors assume a role that extends beyond the more traditional instructional role, and includes implied or explicit expectations to provide student advisees with academic and nonacademic support. Part of this nonacademic support role involves providing social and emotional support to students. This study particularly focuses on the advisor role and advisory programs in small high schools, where other social-emotional supports for students (e.g., counseling) are often limited. The small high school model places a premium on strong student-teacher relationships, rendering advisory programs a central structure for this school model. Organizational theory that distinguishes role complexity from organizational complexity further frames the study, which explores the complex teacher-advisor role in an organizational setting that has intentionally decreased the number of differentiated professional roles.*

**Research Question:** *How do teachers in small high schools enact their advisor roles, specifically their roles relative to the social and emotional support of students?*

**Participants:** *Teachers assigned the role of advisor in three small public high schools.*

**Research Design:** *This study is a qualitative study with a theoretical framework based on Giddens' structuration theory.*

**Conclusions:** *Advisors were found to possess identifiable characteristics that impacted how they enacted their roles, and ultimately, provided support and guidance to their students. These characteristics concerned advisors' background knowledge, relevant experience, skills and guiding principles about advising. Teacher education, either in preservice or professional development settings, contributed minimally to the personal resources and schemas, or guiding principles, that teachers used as they enacted the advisor role. Advisors with lower levels of personal resources, and less developed role schemas, tended to struggle more with the role, while advisors bringing more of these assets to their work experienced greater comfort and effectiveness with it. Implications are discussed for the small schools*

*effectiveness with it. Implications are discussed for the small schools movement, teachers' potential to provide social and emotional support to their students, and role complexity within organizations.*

## INTRODUCTION AND STUDY OBJECTIVES

Educational research literature has long chronicled and contemplated the complex tasks and demands included in the teacher's role (e.g., Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2007; Bartlett, 2004; Bidwell, 1965; Coser, 1975; Ingersoll, 2003; Jackson, 1990; Valli & Buese, 2007). Beyond their instructional responsibilities, teachers across the nation are often expected to engage in leadership activities, collaborate with parents, accommodate a range of different learners including English language learners and special education students, and develop curriculum. We can add to this list the expectation—whether implicit or explicit—to provide social and emotional support to students. This support, which receives occasional mention in educational research literature (e.g., Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Ryan, Gheen, & Midgley, 1998), could consist of assisting a student during a time of distress or crisis, addressing a student's personal matters such as immigration status, family strife or pregnancy, or taking steps to help a student remedy problems like absenteeism or in-school conflict. Is this additional work something that teachers can, will, or should do? If so, how do teachers enact social-emotional support roles? This study investigates these very questions.

A wealth of research tells us that teacher support can boost students' academic engagement and achievement (see Davis, 2003, for a thorough summary of this research), promote help-seeking behavior (Farmer, 2008), buffer the negative effects of living in high-crime communities (Bowen & Bowen, 1999), and prevent dropout (Croninger & Lee, 2001). In our own experiences, those recounted in research literature (e.g., Valenzuela, 1999) or in the popular media (e.g., the television series *The Wire*, the film *Dangerous Minds*), we can identify individual educators who develop relationships with students and indeed provide support like that which a counselor or social worker might offer. Teachers generally provide social-emotional support on a pro bono (Ingersoll, 2003) basis, where, even if they view this work as essential to their craft, it remains a voluntary activity. In this era of high demand for student performance, as well as the documented but largely unmet need for social-emotional support services in schools (Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2006; National Research Council, 2004), pressure on teachers to provide social and emotional support appears to be mounting.

In order to better understand what happens when teachers assume social-emotional support responsibilities, I have studied teachers in three small public high schools. The small high school model provides an ideal setting in which to explore teachers' roles in providing social and emotional support. With this model, schools have a degree of "organizational, fiscal and

structural independence” (Cotton, 2001, p. 7) from district and/or state control not common in traditional high schools. Schools following this model deliberately enroll a smaller number of students (usually up to 400) compared to the average American high school enrollments.

Close student-teacher relationships are a fundamental part of the small school model (Ayers, 2000; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Meier, 1995). This model’s design turns the traditional distribution of educator tasks—where counselors, social workers, and psychologists address student social-emotional needs and teachers concentrate on subject-area instruction—on its figurative ear. Small schools less often employ mental health professionals (Lawrence et al., 2006), and teachers usually serve as student advisors, overseeing a group of students’ academic progress and responding to any emergent obstacles. In such situations, the teacher’s responsibility to provide student support is no longer pro bono but, rather, formalized and assigned to all teachers.

The transformed, broadened teacher role in small high schools gives rise to an organizational dilemma that merits further attention. Small high schools appear to have traded *organizational complexity*, characterized in traditional U.S. high schools by highly differentiated structures and numerous, distinct employee roles, for *role complexity*, where there exist fewer types of roles, but those remaining contain many more responsibilities and tasks (Scott & Davis, 2007). Teachers who must address their students’ social and emotional matters fulfill complex roles in the absence of professional preparation (Koller & Bertel, 2006) or specialized personnel (e.g., mental health professionals) who could share the workload and/or offer guidance to teachers.

Complex teacher roles involving social-emotional support could lead to either innovation as promised, or to a worsening of conditions for students and teachers. Teachers might feel ineffective in, unprepared for, or overwhelmed by this role (Bartlett, 2004; Ingersoll, 2003), or they might refuse to engage in this sort of work, claiming that it is not their job (Noddings, 2005; Sarason, 1996). Students, relying on teachers to provide support, might receive either poor-quality or no needed intervention (Lipman, 1997). In small schools that serve low-income youth of color, complex teacher roles unfold amidst a student population that disproportionately experiences adversity and stressful life events such as depression and exposure to community violence, as well as family disruptions such as immigration-related separation and foster care placement (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2006; Evans, 2004; National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information, 2005; Riolo, Nguyen, Greden, & King, 2005). The demand for social and emotional support in such schools is likely to be high, persistent, and essential to student success (Rosenfeld, Richman, Bowen, & Wynns, 2006).

This study gathers and presents information on how and whether teachers in

small schools are able to fulfill the important and daunting responsibility of providing social and emotional support to their students. This paper proceeds as follows. First, I will briefly discuss teachers' role dimensions in traditional and small schools. I will then describe this study's conceptual framework, which is based on structuration theory (Giddens, 1984; Sewell, 1992, 2005). Next, I will discuss the empirical study I conducted: its research questions, design, and methods, and then its primary findings. Finally, I consider implications for small schools, for the assignment of social and emotional support responsibilities to teachers, and for the use of complex roles.

## TEACHER ROLE DIMENSIONS IN TRADITIONAL AND SMALL SCHOOLS

Literature on the teaching profession suggests that teachers' roles are typically limited to classroom instruction. Teachers tend to practice in isolation from their colleagues, focused primarily, if not exclusively, on the activities and individuals within their own classrooms (Behre, Astor, & Meyer, 2001; Little, 1990; Lortie, 2002). Social-emotional support is more often provided by specialists, as U.S. schools have highly differentiated professional roles that divide the labor of supporting and caring for students from the labor of instructing them (Grant, 1988; Newmann, 1981; Sarason, 1996). While Roeser and Midgley (1997) found that most teachers see the social and emotional support of students as somehow part of their role, they also learned that teachers view these responsibilities as a burden. Those who manage to incorporate support responsibilities are considered exceptional and unusual, as is highlighted by Bidwell's (1965) observation on the paradoxical expectations that teachers have personal bonds with students while also carrying out an impersonal, bureaucratic position.

The tendency to separate and restrict educators' professional roles is less prominent, even rejected, in small high schools. This model emphasizes personalism, or sustained interpersonal interactions between students and teachers. It also depends on a particularly complex teacher role, which absorbs some of the counseling and intervention roles traditionally reserved for support specialists like school social workers. Darling-Hammond (1997) argues for the human relationship benefits of expanded teacher roles. "They (teachers) become more effective because the more ways in which they know their students—over several years as counselors as well as teachers, for example—the more they can adapt instruction to meet student needs" (p. 195). Teachers provide such supports through regular contact with students and their parents, responses to students' problem situations, and in more formalized student advisory periods. In these advisory periods, students and teachers interact regularly for the purpose of providing individualized academic and social support and, at times, additional educational enrichment such as college readiness activities and school community-building (Cushman, 1990; Gewertz, 2007; Meier, 1995; Raywid & Oshiyama, 2000). Advisory periods appear to be central to small schools' efforts to provide a personalized learning environment.

The small school model emphasizes personal relationships between students and teachers, minimizes the commitment of resources to non-teaching positions, and often targets students of color served by lower-performing districts (Ayers, 2000; Cotton, 2001; Fine, 2005). By virtue of the conditions of teaching in small high schools, combined with the increased prevalence of social-emotional stress among low-income students of color (see above), teachers in small-by-design high schools are more likely to learn about challenges to their students' progress, such as family disruption, victimization, pregnancy, and homelessness. Teachers in small schools are also more likely—due to expectations for personalism, advisory responsibilities, and the limited presence of mental health professionals in small schools—to be the ones who assist and support students.

Teachers' work providing social and emotional support to their students is, according to this study's sample and broader research literature (e.g., Koller & Bertel, 2006), unfamiliar territory for most educators, the majority of whom receive minimal training in responding to student matters such as child abuse, mental illness or substance abuse. It is therefore possible that the advisor/social-emotional support role puts teachers in a position where they may experience reduced efficacy due to limited preparation. Given findings that link teacher efficacy to professional commitment (Ware & Kitsantas, 2007) and student achievement (Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy, 2000), and link reduced efficacy to educator burnout (Maslach, 1999), it is essential that we explore the phenomenon of advising in small high schools. In so doing, we can better understand how this plan for personalizing young people's education is unfolding and how it might effect teachers, and, in turn, their students.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

It would be easy to take a two-dimensional look at teachers' social-emotional support practice and make simple conclusions about it. Do teachers do well or poorly at this work? Do they like or dislike it? Should this practice continue or not? Such conclusions, however, would add little to our understanding of what happens to teachers when their roles expand into unfamiliar territory. Further, we would miss out on the unique opportunity to understand the mechanics and outcomes of role complexity. In order to examine the reality rather than simply the *idea* of the teacher's role providing social and emotional support, I have adapted a conceptual framework that supports an investigation of educators' ideas and efforts in the context of day-to-day practice.

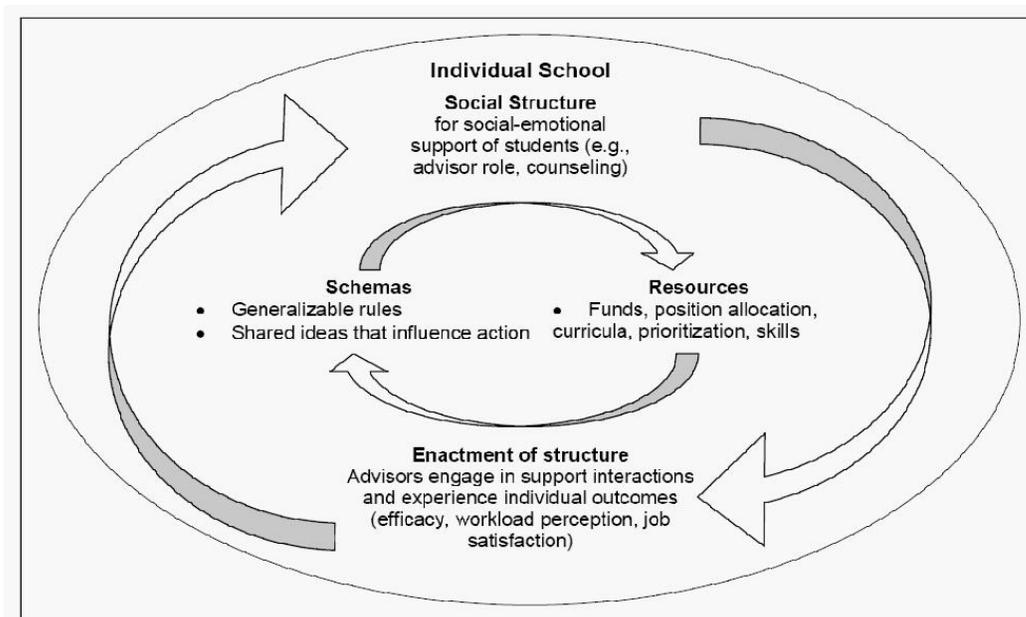
This study is grounded Giddens' structuration theory (Giddens, 1984), later refined and developed by Sewell (1992 & 2005).<sup>1</sup> This theory helps us to picture how advisors' ideas, skills and experiences combine and, together, unfold through their actions. In this model, structures such as teacher roles set the stage for, and also harness, individuals' behavior. At the same time, Sewell argues, individuals' acts can either reproduce or alter these very

structures. Sewell claims that structures consist of *schemas* and *resources*. Schemas, or “cultural assumptions, taken-for-granted rules and generalizable procedures that underlie social life” (Callero, 1994), guide individuals’ behavior, both their thoughts and their actions. Resources might consist of funds, workspace, equipment, worker position allocation, time, or skill (Cohen, Raudenbush, & Ball, 2003).

The relationship between resources and schemas is mutually influencing. Resources bring schemas to life, making the enactment of these ideas possible. As a part of the process of creating and enacting advisor roles, which begin as schemas or ideas, a school would make use of organizational resources, such as curricula, department members’ skills and experience, and/or funded teaching positions. Since resources and schemas vary from school to school, and from teacher to teacher, there are infinite ways in which the teacher’s social and emotional support role might get enacted and modified.

For the purpose of this study, I extend Giddens’ and Sewell’s concepts, which apply more smoothly to macro-social and organizational units, to the individual organization member. The theory of structure contrasts with traditional role theory (summarized succinctly by Turner, 1985), which conceives of the individual role of occupant as one who carries out role norms and expectations. More recent interpretations of role theory challenge this understanding of roles, insisting instead that individuals are not mere “cultural dopes” (Garfinkel, 1967), mindlessly carrying out their roles as designed.

### Illustration 1. Conceptual framework



In addition to assuming, or “taking” roles, people are thought to “make” and use roles as well. Individuals use roles as platforms, or resources, for establishing unique positions (Baker & Faulkner, 1991; Winship & Mandel, 1983). Roles can also legitimate individuals’ actions, and make those actions seem reasonable and understandable (Callero, 1994). Structuration theory fits well with this more nuanced line of reasoning, and enables us to examine the components of advisors’ social-emotional support roles as they are simultaneously developed and enacted.

Teachers bring their own personal schemas and resources to their work with students, whether this work is social-emotional support or one of the many other activities of teaching. As any teaching task will have outcomes, the tasks I consider in this paper will also have theirs. I posit that as teachers advise students and engage with them in social-emotional support interactions. These interactions’ outcomes reflect teachers’ responses to particularly complex professional roles. These outcomes—which might include a sense of efficacy, workload perception, and job satisfaction—are all salient to the topic of social and emotional support in small high schools, where teachers’ roles have been reconfigured and extended beyond traditional tasks of instruction. These outcomes—like all teaching outcomes—ultimately influence the overarching structures and the school system itself, through phenomena such as student engagement in learning, teacher attrition, and practice innovation.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study examines how teachers enact their expanded, complex roles as advisors. My conceptual framework generates the following questions:

- How do teachers in small high schools enact their advisor roles, specifically their roles relative to the social and emotional support of students?
- Are there ways in which individual teachers’ own role resources and schemas (as described above) impact their advisor role enactment?

These questions, largely unanswered due to limited data and analytic literature on teachers’ advisory or social-emotional support roles (for an exception, see Allen, Nichols, Tocci, Hochman, & Gross, 2006), can best be addressed by an open-ended, exploratory study. The results that I report in this paper are part of an ongoing case study that investigates and analyzes teachers’ social and emotional support roles in small high schools.

## DATA SOURCES AND COLLECTION

I collected this paper’s data at three small public high schools in California: Martin Luther King Academy, Los Robles High School, and Western

Preparatory Academy.<sup>2</sup> The three schools shared key demographic characteristics (at least 40% low-income, at least 65% nonwhite, less than 400 students). Each has an advisory program where classroom teachers serve as advisors. These programs vary in theme and scope, with some promoting academics and college readiness and others more focused on school bonding and building students’ life skills. Social-emotional support had a varying degree of emphasis—from limited to high—among the schools’ advisory programs. These schools also vary in the nature of support available to students and their teachers. School characteristics are illustrated in Table 1.

Speaking generally of advisory programs at the three participating sites, advisors and advisees meet together on a regular basis (from 80 to 245 minutes per week) in a classroom setting. To differing degrees, advisors monitor advisees’ academic performance, attendance, and behavior. Activities observed during advisory classes include supervised independent work time, group discussions of current events within and outside of the school, teacher-led sessions

**Table 1. School and Advisory Program Characteristics**

	King	Los Robles	Western
Advisory program emphasis	College awareness and application, progress towards graduation (credits, grades), cultural diversity education	Homework completion, college awareness and application, individual guidance re: academics, behavior and attendance	Community-building, project completion, individual guidance, homework completion, college awareness and application, oversight of service learning internships (11th/12th grades only)
Advisory program emphasis on social-emotional support	Limited	High	Moderate
Formal advisory curriculum	Curriculum binder for each grade level	None	Recommended activities planned and by coordinator
Minutes for advisory period per week	80	245	160 (9th-10th grades) 190 (11th-12th grades)
Other support available to teachers	Monthly voluntary teacher meetings	Periodic advisory planning time at	Sub-school “home” (2) that

available to advisors	teacher meeting focused on advisory work	planning time at staff meeting	"houses" (3) that cluster students by content area teachers and advisors; house teachers meet twice weekly and discuss shared students
Social-emotional support services available to students at school	Onsite health and mental health clinic; guidance counselor (full-time)	Two mental health practitioners (part-time), Medical van with social work services (2 days per month)	Administrator with mental health training (provided services to less than 5% of the school's population)

promoting college readiness and awareness, and individual student-teacher discussions about academic and personal matters while the rest of the group was otherwise occupied. The larger research project that produced this data also considers the impact of school-level variables such as those described above. While I will comment briefly on my observations of these variables where they appear pertinent, such considerations lie beyond the central scope of this paper.

Data sources for this study include approximately two months of intensive field observation at each site—of classrooms, staff meetings and campus life—and interviews. I conducted two to three semi-structured interviews, approximately 75 minutes in total length, with 44 classroom teachers who also served as advisors across the three sites. In these interviews, I gathered information in order to understand what informed, guided, and supported the social and emotional support that schools and teachers provided to students. These questions sought information on participants' understanding and performance of their own roles, as well as their perceptions of peer and administrator expectations of their work as advisors. I also inquired about factors that enhanced and detracted from participants' work as advisors, and participants' senses of efficacy, workload, and job satisfaction. I conducted a pilot study for this research, which included 18 teacher interviews. This pilot site is part of my final sample of three school sites.

## ANALYTIC METHODS

Data analysis began with a combination of reviewing preliminary findings with participants, exploratory readings of field notes and interview transcripts, and analytic memo-writing (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). These informal analyses revealed differences among advisors in what Sewell (1992, 2005) calls human resources (e.g., skills, experience, collegial support). Participants also held a range of schemas for their roles as advisors and providers of social-emotional

range of schemas for their roles as advisors and providers of social-emotional support. These preliminary impressions informed an initial list of codes, which included types of human resources (e.g., life experience, teaching experience, connection with colleagues) school social-emotional support resources (e.g., formal counseling), and schemas for advisory and social-emotional support (e.g., undeveloped, developed). I then analyzed interview data and field notes using HyperResearch software.

During the early stages of the coding process, I refined and expanded my code list, and then re-coded all transcripts accordingly. Since data from the second and third research sites further nuanced my understanding of advisor role enactment, I again revised my coding scheme and applied it to data from all three sites. Coded data informed the development of a multi-item scale for relevant schemas and resources, which I then used to calculate an individual composite score for each domain (results follow in Tables 2 and 3).

## RESULTS

Teachers at King, Los Robles, and Western demonstrated differing levels of resources and schemas relative to their roles advising and providing social-emotional support to their students. Below, I describe findings that emerged from the data, which help to develop and validate this paper's theory about the role played by individual teachers' schemas and resources (Johnson, 1997). Following this discussion, I examine how teachers' schemas and resources intersect to generate four distinct ways in which advisors enact their roles.

## RESOURCES

When participants described that which helped them do the work of supporting students, they almost exclusively named what Sewell calls human resources. Salient dimensions of human resources are outlined in Table 2. While the number of years spent teaching is an obvious and notable factor, other resources (e.g., having had another career prior to teaching, experience working with low-income youth of color, having parented or cared for a dependent adult) also contributed to participants' overall "package" of relevant resources. I found that these resources informed advisors' base skills and perspective as they responded to their students' life circumstances. Along with the stresses we might consider expectable among adolescents, participants reported student experiences such as being held up at gunpoint while at work, separation from parents due to incarceration and immigration, suicide attempts, the loss of friends and family members to community violence, acute mental health issues, and ongoing substance use.

**Table 2. Individual Resources that Informed Teachers' Work as Advisors (N = 44)**

Individual Resources	Score Range	Composite Score Mean (SD)
1. Years of teaching experience, including current year (1: 1-2 years; 2: 3-4 years; 3: 5+ years)	1-3	
2. Work experience outside of current position, including non-teaching work (1: 1-2 years; 2: 3-4 years; 3: 5+ years)	1-3	
3. Experience working with children (not classroom instruction; 0: none; 1: brief/limited experience; 2: moderate experience; 3: significant experience)	0-3	
4. Experience working with low-income youth of color, including current work (1: 1-2 years; 2: 3-4 years; 3: 5+ years)	1-3	14.89 (4.23)
5. Constructive experiences with significantly challenging personal circumstances (0: none; 1: single, time-limited experience; 2: moderate experience with some impact on previous and current life; 3: significant experience with significant impact on previous and current life)	0-3	
6. Experience parenting or caring for an dependent child or adult (0: none; 1: limited (e.g., nanny position, short term care for relative); 2: at least 1 year providing care; 3: parenting or long-term care for dependent)	0-3	
7. Support for teaching practice at workplace (colleagues, administrators, workplace mentor) (1: limited support; 2: moderate support; 3: high support)	1-3	
8. Support for teaching practice outside of workplace (e.g., family, friends, non-workplace mentor; 1: limited support; 2: moderate support; 3: high support)	1-3	
9. Formal education (coursework, professional learning experiences; 0: none; 1: 1 short-term learning experience; 2: 1 academic course or 2-3 short term learning experiences; 3: 2+ academic courses, 4+ short-term learning experiences)	0-3	
Possible range of total points	5-27	

While older teachers were more likely to possess a larger number of personal resources, several participants in their 20s reported significant personal resources as well. Luke,<sup>3</sup> a 25-year-old teacher in his fourth year of teaching, reports a combination of human resources. These include previous and current work as a team sport coach, a family member who is a secondary educator and provides significant mentoring, familiarity with youth of color from his own experience growing up in a socioeconomically diverse community, youth worker and supervisory experience gained at a local parks and recreation department, and his experience with an ongoing workplace

conflict over concerns that he had been hired for political reasons. He found that this difficult experience informs his current work with advisees:

The kids are so worried about the outside world and what they think—and I understand because I was the same way. Now I realize that if I can help these kids focus on themselves, do what it is they know they need to do, everything will fall into place ... It's all about perspective and it's really hard—even when I was teaching at the high school I taught at, I would deal with people—I could tell by the way they looked at me—like, you only got that job because of who you are.

By contrast, lower-resource teachers tended to have a shortage of personal resources, which seemed to leave them feeling less than ready to take on the complex responsibilities of advising young people. They described feeling inadequately prepared to talk with students or parents about situations like signs of depression or complicated family circumstances, due to a lack of familiarity with these issues, with the experience of parenting, and/or with their students' cultural practices and norms. One teacher with more limited human resources described her situation:

I stay away from home issues. I don't feel like I have the right judgment as to when to intervene, when it's not appropriate to intervene. I'm uncomfortable with that, partially because I'm so young. I worry about being in judgment of parents.

Teachers with lower levels of personal resources less often reported a clear connection to social support resources for themselves and their students. Luisa, a 24-year-old teacher in her first year, when asked who helped her to address situations where students were showing signs of distress, said the following:

In really, really dire situations then a student is referred to an administrator, for example, the student who was drunk and threw up in my class. Generally, in less dire situations I don't see that there is a particular person the student is referred to, say their advisor, and in my case then they are coming to someone who I feel like wants to support them but doesn't have all the tools to give them all the support they need.

Luisa described a situation where she dead-ended in her efforts to address non-urgent, but still concerning, student situations. She was not familiar with formal or informal resources, and did not advocate for assistance that she herself could not provide.

When describing student situations that ranged from students crying in class to serious crises, teachers with lower levels of resources generally recognized limitations in their abilities to recognize and/or respond to student social and emotional needs. Advisors in this situation were appreciative of formal social-emotional services when they were available (at

appreciative of formal social-emotional services when they were available (at Los Robles and King). At Western, where these services were extremely limited and not available to the vast majority of students, most advisors reported frustration at not having adequate help to deal with student support needs that lay beyond their skill sets.

Even though teachers with higher reported levels of personal resources had a greater familiarity with student matters that might require their attention, they overwhelmingly preferred to refer students with complicated social-emotional situations to mental health professionals when the option was available. At Western, where in-school mental health services were so limited, this group of teachers bemoaned the shortage but appeared less rattled and distressed by it.

Higher-resource teachers expressed a sense of comfort with having conversations with students (including non-advisees) in which they learned about their students' lives, identified behavior patterns, and connected students with support resources in or out of school. Lee, a 4th-year teacher with a variety of life and professional experiences preceding her teaching career, described the following series of conversations with a student:

She wasn't doing well in school, was having a lot of attitude, and got involved with one of my students who we knew was in a gang and was already to starting to cause problems in school. I had known her from coaching her and had spent a lot of time with her. Her mom left her when she was young. She was being raised by her dad, he was working many jobs and she had to take care of the younger siblings and was a total sweetheart. But she would just get really angry and had this weird attitude that just didn't match. I knew that history so I talked to her a lot and I would pull her in and say what is going on, do you know you're dating a gang member, what do you think about that?

A particularly salient dimension of human resources among this sample is having a career prior to teaching. It is fair to acknowledge that years dedicated to a prior career also represent years of life lived, and increased individual participants' likelihood of possessing other resources, such as caregiving experience, challenging personal circumstances, and mentors. In this sample of 44 teachers serving as advisors, I identified 10 who came to teaching from fields such as engineering, law, public health, sales, advertising, scientific research, and publishing. Advisors with this particular role resource told me that in previous careers they had developed different skills—such as problem solving, negotiation, persuasion, and the ability to cope with short-term frustrations—that helped them to do the work of advising and providing support.

A role resource subdomain with relatively weak impact was formal training, such as undergraduate studies, teacher preservice programs, or professional

learning experiences. Upon my first review of interview transcripts, I overlooked this category, since participants predominantly described their educational experiences as inadequate. Upon closer review, I found that 45% of the study's participants reported some educational experience that was relevant to their work providing social-emotional support to their students. Still, these responses averaged quite low (.77 out of a possible 3 points), with only three advisors—one with a bachelor's degree in social work and a master's degree in education, another with a master's degree in out of school education, and a third with a law degree and a master's degree in education—reporting a high level of educational preparation for the overall advisory role. It is noteworthy that of the two of these exceptional participants who followed traditional pathways of preservice teacher education, both did so as part of a second career. A strong majority of advisors in this sample reported that they had either limited or no training that supported their role of recognizing and responding to social and emotional matters among their students.

## SCHEMAS

In keeping with Giddens' and Sewell's descriptions of schemas, I identified distinct rules, ideas, and procedures in this study's interview data. These schemas ranged from undeveloped to well developed. Interestingly, these schemas concerned not only social-emotional support, but were conceived of more broadly. In most cases, congruence existed between the quality of teachers' schemas for providing social-emotional support and for conducting advisory class. Table 3 outlines the criteria I used for identifying and evaluating participants' schemas for advising and providing social-emotional support. This study's data indicate that there is, however developed or undeveloped, an underlying vision for providing social-emotional support and for advising students. This vision, then, serves as an anchor for other, more specialized aspects of the role schema: the how-to aspects (how to conduct an advisory period, how to respond to emergent student needs), as well as role boundaries. All of these elements together illustrate teachers' schemas for providing social-emotional support.

**Table 3: Individual Schemas that Inform Teachers' Work as Advisors (N = 44)**

Schemas (undeveloped, somewhat developed, well-developed)	Score Range	Composite Score Mean (SD)
1. Vision for providing social-emotional support to students	1-3	
2. Vision for advising students	1-3	
3. Ideas of one's own about how to conduct advisory period	1-3	12.07 (3.78)
4. Sense of how to respond to emergent student	1-3	

4. Sense of how to respond to emergent student situations	1-3
5. Role boundaries that concern student needs	1-3
6. Role boundaries that concern one's own professional needs	1-3
Possible range of total points	6-18

Advisors with well-developed role schemas had a clear purpose that undergirded their work as advisors. This purpose was not always explicitly social-emotional in nature, but provided a clear structure to their work and interactions with advisees, as these diverse examples illustrate:

I'd say largely, in advisory [class], I want my students to be more serious about school. I'm trying to get them to look at their habits, what they actually do, and connect it to their performance.

My main role is to get to know them. I want them to get to college and I am going to help them get to college. I think they have to trust me or else it's not going to work. My main role beyond that is to get them into college, if that's what they want, and then everything else falls under that.

I am the Sherpa guide. It's up to me to coach them to get to where they want to go.

I want my kids to want to come in here because they know they are loved and cared about, by me and their fellow advisees ... What I see advisory as providing is the personal, social, interpersonal stuff that goes along with learning information. What do you do then as a person who now has all this information—how do you speak about it, share it, apply it, question it?

By contrast, advisors with less-developed role schemas often claimed they felt unsure about what they were expected to accomplish with their advisees, voiced a limited personal sense of why they were advising students, and expressed frustration at being assigned a class where the purpose was not particularly developed. Whether or not advisors had access to a guiding curriculum from their school, advisory class with this group of advisors was much more likely to include unstructured free time in which advisors and advisees interacted minimally. Any absence of curriculum—due to it not existing (at Los Robles), temporary gaps in programming (at Western), or materials missing from a curriculum binder (at King)—was particularly noted by advisors with less-developed role schemas. Participants in this situation at Los Robles often described the lack of guidance and/or resources as a frustrating “sink or swim” experience.

When faced with similar circumstances, advisors with stronger schemas at all three schools would likewise express frustration, but also tended to develop their own frameworks and plans. Frida, an experienced teacher with strong role schemas, now in her current position, described her response to her

role schemas, new in her current position, described her response to her school's advisory program:

I went out and talked to a lot of teachers, like, "What do you do in advisory?" I took a kind of informal poll to get some ideas. Everybody told me something different. So that's why I decided to do my own thing. I thought, okay, I see where this is going, I need to decide what I want advisory to be.

Teachers with more developed advisory and social-emotional support schemas seemed to weather the discomforts and strains that accompanied their work mentoring students. They voiced comfort with the conflicts inherent to their work, such as holding students accountable for their behavior while also supporting them. These teachers usually had a clear sense of procedures to follow for conducting advisory classes and for addressing students' social-emotional needs. Additionally, they expressed an acceptance of not knowing exactly how to respond to emergent situations. Instead, they responded in a spontaneous manner that demonstrated attentiveness to the student and a general sense of how to proceed, even when they lacked specific knowledge of the issue at hand. Rex, a teacher in his mid-twenties, illustrated this point in describing his response to a student disclosing her pregnancy to him. Despite an admitted lack of knowledge about educating pregnant students, he described a thought-out, playful response to her disclosure.

She told me before she told her parents. And so, I talked to her, "We'll do everything we possibly can to make sure that you're healthy, you can continue your life." Eventually it came down to getting the resources she would need. I had no idea what she would need! I'm a young teacher, I knew there was going to be a lot that I wasn't prepared for. This one went a little bit above all that, but there wasn't anything that really shocked me or made me feel inept. I felt like I was learning on the job. I was growing.

Advisors with less developed schemas for their work appeared less sure of how to respond to emergent student needs, and expressed a dislike of being in this state. Their response to student situations—such as inappropriate behavior, disclosure of personal crises, or academic disengagement—was often one of distancing from the student. This might occur through an immediate referral to a counselor or administrator rather than responding to the student in the moment, not pursuing the student's comments, or framing the situation as a behavioral or disciplinary situation rather than a social-emotional one.

Two teachers' responses to the same student reflect differing schemas for providing social and emotional support. Beth, a respected veteran teacher who recently began advising, recounted a frustrating series of incidents with a student who had experienced significant family disruption and whose in-school behavior had deteriorated. The student, whom she viewed as highly intelligent, suddenly began to act out at school, skip classes, and in a few instances behaved in uncharacteristically disrespectful ways towards Beth.

Eventually, Beth, who had previously praised this student for her resiliency, became frustrated and asked to have the student removed from her class.

Maria, another teacher with strong schemas for her social-emotional support role, mentioned this same student to me as well. She learned from the student that she had been the victim of a violent crime just before her behavior deteriorated. Based on this knowledge, which Maria gained when the student sought her out during a personal crisis, she was able to discuss the incidents with the student and then connect her with assistance. Differing frameworks for receiving and interpreting this student's behavior seemed to make a significant difference in ultimately responding to her. While Beth disengaged from the student, deeming her behavior out of her teaching range, Maria identified and responded to the same student's needs, based on her clear sense of how to go about the work of supporting students.

The above example also evokes the notion of role boundaries—what is included in the unwritten job description for advisors. Stronger-schema participants described role boundaries that were well developed and related to their overarching purpose for advising and/or providing social-emotional support. Role boundaries were not necessarily broad or narrow for advisors with more developed role schemas—interviews found evidence of both. Rather, the boundaries that this group of advisors set on their roles had a rationale that connected their personal vision for their role to the needs of their students, and, at times, to their own professional needs. Loretta, a founding teacher at her school, expressed this notion as she described her view of what students needed and how she felt teachers ought to meet these needs:

I think that students at this school need really clear, high expectations and limits. What they don't need is another parent. And anybody who starts to think they're in a parent role is going to go out of their mind and needs to stop immediately.

Advisors with less-developed role schemas often set boundaries on their advisor roles for purposes of self-protection: guarding their time, avoiding areas of perceived incompetence, or limiting experiences that could be emotionally overwhelming. Jerri, who'd been teaching for six years, told me that she intentionally avoided information about social or emotional matters in students' lives.

I try to focus mainly on academics and Socratic discussions, developing critical thinking, not investigating students' lives ... It helps me to not be overwhelmed by my own emotional responses to the students' lives.

Most advisors with stronger schemas set clear, firm boundaries on their time, energy, and sense of responsibility for the ultimate success or failure of their students. The boundaries they set were thought out, and concerned the

quality of their overall teaching and needs they saw among their students. Rather than avoid potentially overwhelming situations altogether, these teachers seemed to frame potentially overwhelming situations according to their approaches, and then responded as they thought they best could, even if at times this response was intentionally limited or delayed. If they felt they lacked the specific competence that a student situation seemed to call for, they did not avoid the situation altogether, but rather focused on what they could do in the advisory role while they determined who could meet the student's need.

Interestingly, the attrition rate for advisors with weaker role schemas was higher in this study's pilot sample (at Los Robles), regardless of years of teaching experience or the presence of other human resources. Of the four participating teachers who resigned from Los Robles during the pilot study school year, all had less-developed schemas. Two additional teachers (both at Western) in the sample resigned; one had well-developed schemas for advising and one did not.

#### ROLE ENACTMENT

Sewell proposes that resources and schemas can influence one another in an infinite number of possible combinations. Based on this proposition and observed trends in this study's data, I have developed a four-quadrant framework in order to interpret the ways in which teachers in this sample enacted their advisor roles. Table 4 illustrates this framework, which represents an intersection of schemas and resources as described above. For the sake of language brevity and consistency, I have substituted the phrases "low schema" and "high schema" for, respectively, "undeveloped schema" and "well-developed schema." This quadrant framework is typological, and clusters individuals for the purpose of explaining shared characteristics among, as well as differences between, groups of teachers (Bidwell, Frank, & Quiroz, 1997; Weiss, 1994).

**Table 4: Teachers' Enactment of Advisor Roles: Mean Scores for Individual Teacher Characteristics, Sorted by Quadrant\* (N = 44)**

	Low Schema (advisory and social-emotional support of students)	High Schema (advisory and social-emotional support of students)
Low Resource	Quadrant A N = 13 Mean Resource Score: 10.38 (2.63) Mean Schema Score: 9 (1.23) Mean Age: 27.31 (3.07) Mean Years Teaching Experience: 4.15 (2.79)	Quadrant B N = 7 Mean Resource Score: 13 (1.41) Mean Schema Score: 15 (1.73) Mean Age: 26.29 (1.38) Mean Years Teaching Experience: 2.86 (.69)

	Quadrant C	Quadrant D
High Resource	N = 11	N = 13
	Mean Resource Score: 16.09 (1.22)	Mean Resource Score: 19.38 (2.79)
	Mean Schema Score: 8.9 (1.58)	Mean Schema Score: 16.23 (1.36)
	Mean Age: 35.81 (11.18)	Mean Age: 39.31 (11.01)
	Mean Years Teaching Experience: 9.64 (8.78)	Mean Years Teaching Experience: 7.08 (5.52)

\*Standard deviation in parentheses.

The data that inform this conceptualization are individual participants' resource and schema total scores. I established a threshold for each score, with schema scores below 12 out of 18 considered "low schema," and scores 12 and above considered "high schema." Likewise, individuals with a score of 14 or less points out of a total 27 were considered "low resource," while those scoring 15 or above were considered "high resource." I assigned individuals to a quadrant that corresponded to both their schema total score and their resource total score.<sup>4</sup>

I included quadrant means for teacher age and years of teaching experience in order to show differences and similarities across the four quadrants. These averages highlight similarities in rows and columns, even among people whom we might think of as different. Average age, for example, is very comparable for lower resource teachers in quadrants A and B, while the difference in schema scores for these two quadrants is striking. Similarly, it appears that years of teaching experience do not necessarily imply well-developed ideas about how to provide social and emotional support to advisees. Advisors in quadrant C, who have the highest average years of teaching experience, also have the lowest mean schema score. T-test analyses revealed no statistically significant difference in mean age or years of experience between low- and high-schema participants. In other words, neither age nor years of experience predicted the presence of well-developed schemas for advising and providing social-emotional support to students.

A scatterplot analysis of participants' combined resource and schema scores confirmed that advisors from each of the sample's three schools were distributed across all four quadrants. Western has the only notably uneven distribution of advisors across quadrants, with only one in quadrant B. Two other quadrant C advisors at Western had marginal resource and schema scores and appeared more similar to quadrant B teachers in several aspects of their interview and classroom observation data. These teachers had atypically positive experiences for their respective quadrants. I discuss these two informative cases below.

Combinations of resources and schemas are unique for each advisor, yet there are particular characteristics that appear common among advisors in each quadrant. Below, I describe each of the quadrants and illustrate with a

case example for each.

#### *Quadrant A: Low resource/low schema*

Not surprisingly, younger teachers new to the profession often lacked both personal resources and schemas that might have helped them do the work of advising. This group of teachers, however, also included more experienced teachers (with as many as eight years in the field) who nonetheless had limited personal resources and schemas. Advisors in quadrant A tended to describe both advisory class and their social-emotional support roles as stressful.

Sheila, in her third year of teaching, illustrates this group of teachers well. She reported limited work experience prior to this position, and described a lack of connection to resources in the school that could support her students in areas where she had limited expertise (e.g., child protective services reporting). Enthusiastic about her subject-area teaching, Sheila described and demonstrated (during observations) a sense of comfort and preparedness for her teaching work. She withstood surprises and challenges in the classroom with poise, and offered extra help to students during her lunch hour.

In contrast, Sheila described herself as “stressed” about the day-to-day planning of her advisory class, as well as the advisory-related responsibilities assigned to her at her school. She articulately described the school’s sense of why advisory existed, but did not voice a personal sense of how or why she performed this aspect of her job. She expressed a desire for more guidance as to how to conduct activities in her advisory class. About her social-emotional support responsibilities, she said, “I don’t feel that I’m the best person to be helping them with all this stuff.” When she found that the school’s administrators were sending one of her most problematic advisees to her for guidance and supervision during her free period, she began leaving campus for that period.

Sheila went on to say that she found it frustrating to do so poorly at something she knew was important to her colleagues and to her students’ academic performance and overall well-being. While not all quadrant A teachers felt so negatively about the advisory role, most reported feeling less than competent to do the job of addressing students’ social and emotional issues. A lack of clear access to individuals or programs that could help with this work was particularly hard on Sheila and other quadrant A advisors, leaving them on their own to intervene in areas where they felt their skills were limited. Not surprisingly, resources and schemas at the organizational level were a great help to these individuals. An absence of these organizational structures was felt just as strongly. While teachers in quadrant A often expended a great amount of effort to help individual advisees, they often felt unclear as to whether their actions fit their role responsibilities. Quadrant A advisors at all three schools often described

themselves as underperforming their job due to actions they had not taken, yet they often did not know what was expected of them. This uncertainty, in turn, had potential to contribute to limited or negative perceptions of their own efficacy, role overload and/or burnout.

Sheila was unsure whether she would continue teaching at her current school. She said that her responsibility as an advisor tipped her towards leaving. “If I didn’t have advisory, I’d definitely come back for sure, 100%. I’d take a pay cut!” she elaborated.

### *Quadrant B: Low resource/high schema*

Quadrant B advisors were, in many ways, dream hires. With little experience under their belts, they tended to perform well as both teachers and as advisors. Students drifted towards them, as was evidenced in my sample by advisees, subject area students, alumni, and occasionally young people at school who had never been their students, seeking these teachers out for conversation and advice. In marked contrast to quadrant A advisors, these teachers described and demonstrated a clear, guiding view of the advisory program, whether or not it matched the school’s stated purpose for it. While being relatively new to their schools and to the profession, they capably sought out and engaged necessary supports for themselves and their students. If unsure about how to proceed with a particular student situation, they readily and comfortably engaged senior colleagues for the purpose of obtaining advice or occasional direct involvement with the student.

Certainly, this group of advisors did not gain their skills in a vacuum. While they tended to be short on life experience, as illustrated by work history, relatively young age and limited family responsibilities, they capitalized well on what they had. Jim, a 3rd-year teacher, had entered the field straight out of college through Teach for America, and then continued teaching while he earned a master’s degree at night. Having never held another full-time job other than teaching, he spoke calmly and clearly about his work as an advisor, even while acknowledging that his advisory class contained a particularly challenging group of younger students.

Although Jim acknowledged that the multiple demands of the job sometimes led to his deprioritizing advisory class, he reported that he was developing a consistent structure for advisory class through different planned activities. Some required him to design lessons; others involved activities as simple as group read-alouds. He appreciated the availability of ideas from his school’s curriculum for advising, but found them insufficient for his students, and so developed his own plan for his advisory.

Jim also described ways in which he would learn from students about their lives, and in turn connect students with needed resources—either colleagues around the building, or more formal social support services. Likewise, Jim reported gathering information to increase his own understanding of his

reported gathering information to increase his own understanding of his students from colleagues and support providers. “Knowing the background of one kid whose parents were both murdered—whenever I see him, I just think, wow, this kid is really fragile.” This information, Jim elaborated, helped him know how to avoid volatile situations and determine which of his students needed which types of academic and social support.

Quadrant B teachers across all three schools voiced a strong sense of being overwhelmed with the range of student-related and organizational responsibilities, many of which they took on themselves or were assigned, due to peer and supervisor perceptions of their competence. When their schools lacked necessary resources or schemas, these individuals often filled in the gaps themselves, for students and occasionally for colleagues, as Jim did by creating his own advisory curriculum when he found his school’s to be insufficient. Turnover intention, as well as turnover, was common among quadrant B teachers. Three of the seven teachers in this quadrant initiated discussions with me about their potential to enroll in doctoral programs, compared to 1 teacher in the rest of the sample of 44 teachers. Five indicated their intention of moving on to different jobs within the next two to five years, and one resigned midyear to take a non-teaching position.

#### *Quadrant C: High resource/low schema*

Advisors with abundant personal resources and less-developed schemas for providing social-emotional support were the most diverse group in terms of age (ranging from 25 to 62 years) and years of teaching experience (3 to 30 years). Many were new to the advisor role, either due to joining a school with an advisory program in place or due to the introduction of this responsibility into their existing jobs (as was the case at King). While we might anticipate that a richness of life and work experience would enhance advisory work for this group, it generally did not. Instead, most quadrant C teachers questioned the rationale for advisory, felt unsure whether they were doing an adequate job, acknowledged investing minimal energy in advisory, and/or found the experience frustrating. As I explored this surprising finding, I found that this group of advisors had less-developed schemas for doing the work of advising and addressing students’ social-emotional needs. A combination of resistance to the idea (and workload implications) of advisory and a lack of familiarity with advisory was notable among teachers in this quadrant.

It appears that the impact of weak school schemas and resources was felt strongly by quadrant C teachers. When left on their own to negotiate the demands of advising and providing social-emotional support to their students, these individuals often resorted to their own experiences. These experiences could prove useful, but more often did not map well to the demands of the advisor role.

Marcela illustrates this complex group well. A teacher of multiple subjects for over 15 years, she became an advisor as a result of changing jobs. Along

with her teaching experience, she brought a wealth of experience to her work, including immigrating to the United States as a child, having grown up in poverty, and years of teaching experience with low-income youth of color. While Marcela felt very confident in her teaching abilities, she did not feel able to keep up with the volume or complexity of demands that came along with advising. She described discomfort in addressing a situation where a female advisee had a boyfriend whom she (Marcela) considered questionable. Marcela held several discussions with her student, and then appeared to feel trapped regarding her ability to act on the information that the student shared with her.

I can't get in the middle. I can't say anything ... This student has a lot of trust in me and that is important because I was able to get her a counselor. So that's why I haven't said anything to her mom. I don't think it's my place.

Marcela had taken significant steps in learning about this student and developing a trusting relationship, but, aside from referring her to a counselor, said she felt helpless as to what to do next. She knew what was not her place, but did not seem to have a sense of what her place *was*.

When she described drawing boundaries in her work with advisees, Marcela invoked frustration and role overload:

There are many times where I just don't follow up with phone calls (to parents). I just don't have the time and sometimes hope that things will go away. There are times where I just give up, where I've had one too many conversations with a student, trying to motivate him, what makes him tick ... but those honest conversations can only go so far. If you want to stay home, stay home. That's what I end up with.

Among her colleagues, Marcela's struggle with an overwhelming number of tasks and responsibilities was not at all unique. In her case, a lack of connection to colleagues or student services at the school—which appeared to be due to her status as a recently arrived teacher—seemed to cut her off from resources that might have eased this burden. Despite her years of experience and sense of confidence teaching in her subject area, she did not have a strong sense of how to access support for herself or her students. Procedures for accessing resources at her school were communicated to teachers informally, leaving individuals such as Marcela unaware of them.

Marcela's combination of broad teaching knowledge, limited schemas for advisory and social-emotional support work, and frustration with the role exemplify the dilemma of the quadrant C teacher. With teachers in this group, there appears to be a misalignment of resources and schemas, with resources outweighing schemas and having no figurative place to “go” in these teachers' work.

### *Quadrant C: Two atypical cases*

The portrait I paint of quadrant C teachers is somewhat bleak, yet three atypical cases within this quadrant highlight how specific schemas and resources—at individual and organizational levels—can contribute to a different sort of role enactment. All three of the atypical quadrant C advisors were in their first year at Western Preparatory Academy, subsequent to short teaching careers in other schools. Each was under the age of 30, and had a significant degree of experience working with low-income youth of color, and also with children, through non-teaching work such as childcare and recreational programming. None had formally advised students prior to their current positions. Early in the school year, each told me of their lack of familiarity with advising. Like other teachers in quadrant C, they were in the process of figuring out how they would advise students. Maya, one of the atypical quadrant C teachers, described her work as an advisor early in the school year:

Honestly I think that I would probably not be as good at coming up [with advisory activities] on the fly or even ahead of time every day, serving this ultimate goal [of advisory] because it's not something I'm familiar with. I don't know what works but I'm learning.

The “but” in this statement illustrates what makes Maya and her two colleagues atypical quadrant C teachers—in addition to unique experiences that prepared them for the work of advising students, they had unusually strong support from their immediate peers.

At Western, all advisors had access to advisory activities planned by a designated coordinator. Beyond these activities, however, lay a key resource: a team of peers that collaborated extensively with one another. These three teachers taught within a sub-school “house” at Western that included other teachers with a high degree of social-emotional support experience (including a special education resource teacher with extensive knowledge of adolescent social-emotional issues and a lead teacher with significant experience in the human services sector). House teacher meetings, which took place twice a week, enabled these advisors to discuss individual advisees, as well as curricular issues, with a group of colleagues who taught the same students. These teachers described their teaching team as skilled, flexible, and supportive regarding their work with advisees. Maya explains,

My team has very much helped me to realize how well I'm doing, because I didn't feel like I was doing very well. I felt like there was this other person who understood her much more than I did and that I'm just grasping at straws. They're real encouraging, and they also give me any kind of information that will help me to frame my conversations with my students.

While not all low schema teachers at Western fared as well in terms of their comfort with the advisory role and their assessment of their own

comfort with the advisory role and their assessment of their own performance, these three individuals described their advisor role in positive terms. In contrast to a number of advisors at Western who had expressed discomfort or frustration with the role, Maya saw it as a boost to her ability to teach.

I think the best advice that I would give is to get over the fact that you should be intimately involved (*with your students*), because you are going to be. I mean, you don't have to be, and then you have a lot less power as a teacher to, because you're going to be less flexible, and that will actually lead you to being able to think faster on your feet with a given person.

In many ways, these atypical quadrant C advisors more strongly resembled quadrant B (low resource/high schema) participants in their resource-efficient response to advisory. They made use of whatever in their personal and organizational toolboxes might help them in their work. They sought out guidance when they felt they lacked adequate skills or preparation for their advisory responsibilities. Further, they appeared to benefit from shared schemas for advisory at the school and team levels. These atypical quadrant C teachers appeared to activate their own background and skills, or personal resources, with the help of organizational resources and schemas that supported advisory. The data suggest that these individuals, as a result, had unusually positive responses to their social-emotional support role, given their starting points as advisors.

#### *Quadrant D: High resource/high schema*

Advisors belonging to this group showed a thought-out stance regarding both advisory (which at times conflicted with their schools' expectations for advisors) and the social-emotional support of their students. They made use of a range of life experiences in order to both engage with students and focus their work on what they felt they could competently do to support their students. Their role boundaries were intentional, appeared easy to articulate, and focused largely on the developmental and learning needs of their students.

Mitch, a teacher for six years, voiced a clear sense of who he was as an advisor and what he felt would best support his students. He described his general approach to talking with students when he had concerns about how they were doing academically:

You go down the road. If they don't follow you, you don't keep going. If they do, you do. Then, because I went in to solve the academic problem, I find out that what's gotten in the way is some sort of issue outside of school. My presumption is that if I can help them with that, although my job is to help them in school, if this is an impediment, if I remove it, they will do better. So I roll up my sleeves and go into the muddy waters.

Mitch described a variety of experiences that built his skills and perspective—receiving formal and informal mentoring, working as a camp counselor throughout his youth, overcoming alcohol addiction in his young adult years and then providing volunteer support to others in similar situations, and parenting while working. He knew his colleagues well, and either sought out or avoided their advice, based on his impressions of their work: “If I want what they have, I do what they do. If somebody has an easy way about them, I want to know, ‘What do they do?’ If I don’t want what they have, I don’t ask them.”

Additionally, Mitch often circumvented formal systems for referring students for counseling. He made “live” referrals to counselors, rather than filling out forms, as he felt this was a way in which he could best communicate the student’s need, assure confidentiality of student information, and collaboratively develop a plan for intervention with the counselor. Mitch also made connections between students and teachers he knew, where he felt that the other teacher might be a better source of support for the student. In these instances, he developed in-school “connections,” adaptable to different students, which supported his own work as an advisor.

Based on his knowledge of school systems, politics and personalities, Mitch skillfully navigated often unspoken rules and protocols for referring students for support services. While he had a well-developed role schema, as well as resources that helped him with both his vision and his enactment of it, Mitch acknowledged that his knowledge about many types of student crisis situations was limited. He relished inquiries by his colleagues about how to address emergent situations, however. Mitch welcomed these inquiries as an opportunity to model his inquiry-based approach to challenging student situations. “It’s great, because then I can say, ‘I have no idea what to do.’ Let’s think out loud about this, so it gives me a chance to make explicit my process.” While he did not have exact knowledge, his stance guided his role enactment in a way that came across as comfortable to him.

Like many quadrant D advisors, Mitch did not perceive his lack of situation-specific knowledge or of success with individual advisees as a sign of his incompetence. Instead, he viewed his work, and the fruits of his labor, through the lenses of his role schemas and life experience. As a result, he did not describe himself as ineffective. Mitch instead saw himself as engaged in a process with his advisees and the school community by which he contributed everything he could, and accepted that he was only one influence on his students.

Quadrant D advisors showed a strong alignment between resources and schemas, with each reinforcing and extending the other. The result I saw across three schools was a group of teachers who felt comfortable not only enacting the assigned role, but also using it as a resource for developing their own unique position as advisor (Baker & Faulkner, 1991; Callero, 1994).

From this position, they were more able to enact their individual vision for the work of advising and providing social-emotional support. Whether or not relevant organizational resources and/or schemas were present, these advisors conducted their classes and individual advisory relationships with comfort and skill. A lack of highly developed schemas for advisory across all three schools enabled relative autonomy of practice among quadrant D teachers.

## CONCLUSION

This paper adds to a very limited pool of analytic research on the advisory process in secondary schools. It has made initial steps towards an understanding of how teachers negotiate the demands of their complex roles, in this case of advising and providing social and emotional support to students. Data from interviews with 44 teachers who served as advisors reveal that personal resources and schemas for their work are associated with distinct role enactments. These findings suggest that advisors possess identifiable characteristics that impact how they enact their role, and, ultimately, how they support their students.

I found that different groups of advisors had different experiences with the role of providing social and emotional support to their students. Advisors with limited role resources (e.g., on- and off-the job experience, skills, and support) struggled to enact the role in a way that they found satisfactory, and reported negative assessments of their own efficacy and of the advisory experience in general.

Advisors who brought experience, support and other resources to the position, however, did not necessarily enjoy a clear path to the effective, seamless management of their role demands. Negative experiences of the role were also evident among advisors who possessed role resources but who also had a less developed sense of how to provide guidance and social and emotional support to students. Weaker social-emotional support schemas seemed to develop due to factors such as a lack of advisory experience, guidance as to how to enact the role, or interest in assuming this complex role.

Those who emerged as the most comfortable with the social-emotional support role had, at a minimum, stronger schemas for this work. This group included teachers with a very limited amount of life and professional experience; strong schemas appeared to help them activate whatever role resources they had at their disposal. A combination of developed schemas and higher levels of personal resources seemed not only to help advisors do the work effectively and clearly, but also to help immunize them against becoming overwhelmed by the intensity and volume of demands placed on them.

Not a single participant suggested that teachers or advisors should assume

not a single participant suggested that teachers or advisors should assume the role of school-based mental health professionals; in fact, many expressed concern that the expansion of their roles might signal a “dumping” of mental health responsibilities onto them. Still, a fair number of participants complemented their schools’ ability to identify and respond to student social and emotional matters that arose in the classroom context. These individuals often said that advising increased their job satisfaction and commitment to students, and claimed that their ability to teach their students well relied upon their well-rounded knowledge of them. The assets conferred by the complex teacher-advisor role, however, appeared to be paired with a significant potential to engender teacher job dissatisfaction, role overload, and burnout (emotional exhaustion, a reduced sense of personal accomplishment, and detachment from students (Maslach, 1999)). Such phenomena seemed more pronounced when teachers perceived a lack of structure and support for their advisory responsibilities.

Limitations to this study must be acknowledged as well. Clearly, this study drew data from a limited sample of teachers and schools in one state. Other state, local, or school contexts might frame salient issues in student support differently. Second, this study considered a specific aspect of the advisory role—providing social and emotional support. For this reason, questions and answers tended to focus on this aspect of advising students. Advisory periods included a wealth of other activities that, while not explored directly in this study, are essential to students’ development, such as supervised independent work time, identification of and application to college, career exploration, and community-building.

## IMPLICATIONS AND POTENTIAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE FIELD

My hope is that these results will contribute not only to the small schools movement, but, more broadly, to those considering the potential role of teachers in providing social and emotional support to their students, and also to those interested in role complexity within organizations.

Leaders of small schools might use the knowledge reported in this paper to identify potentially strong advisors among employees or job candidates. To date, little is known about the nature or quality of advisors’ work. By contrast, current scholarship on teachers’ pedagogical practices (summarized by Bransford, Darling-Hammond, & LePage, 2005) explicitly describes the skills and approaches that contribute to high-quality teaching. This paper brings a similar approach to the understanding of teachers’ work in the area of the social-emotional support of students, and uses empirical evidence and theory to guide analysis and conclusions.

Given that this study focuses exclusively on the social-emotional support role assumed by teachers who worked as advisors in small high schools, the role resources and schemas that I have discussed might be considered particularly relevant to the social-emotional support role that advisors often fill. Small

school teaching position candidates who can articulate or demonstrate evidence of a vision for conducting an advisory class and for supporting their students would be the most likely to experience efficacy and self-perceived success as advisors. Those with significant support and experience—both on the job and in their personal lives—show potential to do well in the advisor role, particularly if they can combine these resources with well-developed ideas of how to support and mentor their advisees.

Potential downsides to teacher role complexity in the small school emerged in this study, and merit consideration. A range of teachers voiced perceptions of their own inefficacy as advisors and sources of social-emotional support for their advisees. Participants made these comments in organizational contexts characterized by heavy, complex role loads and advisory schemas that were, for the most part, still works in progress. Teachers trained to work in schools that divide the work of teaching from the work of providing social-emotional support may find themselves expected to take on responsibilities not familiar to them, such as supporting students in crisis or addressing major disciplinary infractions. Architects of the small schools movement have eloquently defined and framed the teacher's role in providing social-emotional support, which appears to be largely assigned to the advisor. In its daily enactment, however, this role remains in a state of development and refinement.

Beyond potential contributions to small schools lie implications for scholars of education and educators in a wider range of schools, as they consider how or whether teachers should assume social-emotional support responsibilities. This research illuminates the mixed results of placing teachers in a social-emotional support role alongside their already-demanding instructional role. Benefits, such as skill and task diversity, and increased knowledge of and responsiveness to students, come paired with drawbacks. These include frustration, role overload (Byrne, 1994), negative efficacy experiences, and detachment from students. These less-than-optimal responses to the advisory role—which were more apparent among teachers with less developed schemas for advisory—strongly suggest that expanded roles can in certain circumstances contribute to teacher burnout, job dissatisfaction, or decreased commitment. Higher turnover rates in this study's pilot sample among teachers with less-developed schemas for their advisory role suggest that organizational efforts to help advisors develop stronger schemas for their work might buffer teachers from negative efficacy experiences and, I assume, any associated negative impact on teacher commitment or retention.

An additional implication of my findings for educators in non-small school contexts is that peer support seems to boost teachers' capacity to fulfill unfamiliar roles. The "house" arrangement at Western presents a strong example of this type of peer support. House teacher meetings' student-focused discussions appeared to provide teacher participants with informal, job-embedded professional development opportunities (Borko, 2004). Advisors with lower levels of individual resources had opportunities to learn from

nearing their colleagues address student situations, as well as to receive direct support and guidance from their peers. Within-house colleague teachers, who worked with the same group of students, also provided reassurance (“I realized I wasn’t the only person struggling with my advisee”), offered technical support (e.g., calling an advisee’s parent whom they already knew), and suggested strategies for ongoing work with advisees. This finding about the contribution of colleague support adds to the field’s knowledge about the impact of teacher learning communities upon teachers, their practice, and ultimately, their students’ achievement (e.g., McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006).

In addition to these implications for educators in practice, this study applies structuration theory (Giddens, 1984; Sewell, 1992, 2005) to the analytically untouched area of teachers’ social-emotional support role enactment. I have extended Sewell’s theory, which considers structures on the level of social units such as communities and organizations, to the domains of individual resources and schemas. This aspect of my research strives to expand what conventional and recent role theory can contribute to the field of education. This theoretical adaptation brings a focus to our thinking about how individuals, particularly those who have limited formal training or guidance about how to fulfill complex roles, draw upon their own skills, experiences, and ideas to do their day-to-day work. Given the pressing and often critical nature of teachers’ work in the area of student support, it commands a thorough examination that one hopes will lead to more nuanced research and learning in the future.

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### *Notes*

1. The author wishes to acknowledge the significant contributions that Ann Jaquith made to the development of this conceptual framework, particularly the conceptualization of resources in schools.
2. These school names are pseudonyms.
3. Due to the highly sensitive nature of the information that participants disclosed in interviews, I have altered identifying information, including gender for some participants.
4. In order to confirm differences in resource and schema scores among individuals from each quadrant, I conducted analyses of variance by quadrant of resource and schema scores. These analyses found statistically significant differences ( $p = 0.0000$ ) between quadrants for both resource and schema total scores. These analyses, however, are limited in their utility due to the sample’s small size, the nonrandom sampling of participants, and quadrant assignment that itself is based on their resource and schema scores.

assignments that require based on their resources and learning objectives.

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