DEVELOPING STUDENT VOICE AND PARTICIPATORY PEDAGOGY:
A COLLABORATIVE STUDY OF AN EVOLVING
HIGH SCHOOL ADVISORY PROGRAM

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DEDICATION

For Henry and Anna

May you always find the strength and courage to voice your truth.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I begin by thanking my students—past, present, and future. I entered the teaching profession because I wanted to feel that I was making a positive difference in the lives of others. While I hope that I have, I also recognize that I have been the recipient of the gift of exceptional students who have taught, are teaching, and will undoubtedly continue to teach me in extraordinary ways. Thank you for your trust, your patience, your honesty, your humor, your gratitude, and your kindness.

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ABSTRACT

DEVELOPING STUDENT VOICE AND PARTICIPATORY PEDAGOGY: A COLLABORATIVE STUDY OF AN EVOLVING HIGH SCHOOL ADVISORY PROGRAM

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The development of student voice is included under the social and emotional learning (SEL) umbrella and is the focus of this practitioner action research study with a youth cooperative co-inquiry component. The research was designed to develop a thorough understanding of student and faculty perceptions of the prioritization of student voice for the creation and implementation of advising curriculum that is relevant and useful to students, and the supports for and inhibitors to the development and practice of student voice through the school’s advising program.

In this study, student voice is defined as the articulation (through words and behaviors) of one’s sense of self (which includes one’s identity, one’s truth—including ideas, perspectives, and beliefs—and one’s values). Student focus groups, faculty interviews, fieldnote journal entries, and archival data were collected and analyzed. Findings include the need for (1) a clear, shared vision that includes student and faculty voices, (2) strong and authentic mentor-mentee relationships, (3) distributed leadership, (4) ongoing faculty training and support, and (5) a dependable structure for regular and ongoing feedback. The implications of these findings for practice and research involve
the relationship between a strong, distributed leadership model and the creation of authentic spaces for student voice.
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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

As an educator, a parent, and an advocate of lifelong growth and learning, I believe in the power of mindful reflection for the alignment of one’s sense of self with one’s choices and actions. Further, it has been my experience that intentional practice of the skills and habits needed to understand and articulate our unique perspectives as well as to listen actively, critically, and compassionately to the unique perspectives of others, enables us to develop capacity as individuals and thoughtful change agents.

Now completing my twenty-fifth year as an educator, my perspective is that the adults (parents, teachers, and administrators) in school communities could and should be more intentional in providing opportunities for students to develop their voices and sense of agency. However, to do so is to relinquish more control of curriculum and programming to students, a proposition which may feel overwhelming to those who most likely experienced teacher-centered learning models and/or those who rely heavily on extrinsic rewards (ranging from standardized test scores to elite college admissions) as measures of success.

Defining the terms “student voice” and “student agency” is an essential starting place for this work. I use the term student voice to refer to the articulation (through words and behaviors) of one’s sense of self (which includes one’s identity, one’s truth—including ideas, perspectives, and beliefs—and one’s values). If we are to be forever learning and developing as individuals, our understanding of ourselves needs to be a fluid and unending process. I define student agency as a mindfulness and intentionality to align one’s choices and actions with one’s sense of self; this often requires moral courage.
as is the case with self-advocacy and confrontation of injustice, inequity, and unfairness). Zimmerman’s (2015) definition of student agency, “the concept that students should be in control of their educational decisions rather than following a prescribed path determined by others,” resonates with my own understanding that agency involves student empowerment and the relinquishment of some teacher and/or administrator control within the school context. I am also intrigued by Nakkula’s (2013) research with students characterized by nonlinear academic success. These “Crooked-A students remind us that when attitudes, action, and authentic voice result in human agency, success can look different from our classic conceptions rooted in straight-A biases” (Nakkula, 2013, p.63).

**Background and Context**

The Emery/Weiner School is an independent, co-educational Jewish Day School in Houston, Texas. Founded in 1978, as The I. Weiner Jewish Secondary School (which served grades 6-8), the school expanded its scope with the establishment of Emery High School in 2001. With the integration of a 6th-12th grade curriculum, these institutions were jointly renamed The Emery/Weiner School (EWS). Currently, the upper school division (that is, grades 9-12 which has a total enrollment of 311 students) is the largest per capita Jewish community high school in the nation (The Houston School Source, n.d.). Accredited by the Independent Schools Association of the Southwest (ISAS), a subsidiary of the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS), The EWS Mission is “to educate and develop students whose intellect, moral character, and Jewish identity provide a lifelong foundation for personal growth, commitment to the Jewish
people and *Tikkun Olam* – improving the world in which we live.” The values of being kind, honest, and hard-working are evident in the daily practice of students, faculty, and staff. In addition, the school community embraces and strives to model the Ten Commitments which highlight the values of respect, diversity, engagement, growth, forgiveness, self, wellness, trust, sportsmanship, and duty—at least half of which are directly relevant to student voice and agency.

The School’s Mission, Values, and Ten Commitments are visible as written statements everywhere from online and print publications to more artistic displays on the walls of the school buildings. They are also lived out in practice in a most impressive manner. Perhaps this is part of what is now formally referred to as “The Emery Difference.” Since the combined middle and upper school’s beginning in 2001, people throughout the school and the larger local community have spoken of EWS as providing a different schooling experience than the norm we have come to expect within both the public and private school realms. Several years ago, the founding and acting Head of School decided to define that difference as he understood it. His explication of The Emery Difference (which follows) is now distributed to and discussed amongst new faculty and staff as well as prospective students and families when they join or consider joining the EWS Community.

*The Difference*, Defined:

1) A culture characterized by joy, humor, high energy, informality, and occasional irreverence—all of which help effectuate a seriousness of ethical and academic purpose.

2) A profound sense of connectedness and community, among and between students and faculty—regardless of individual differences.

3) An approach to religious and spiritual instruction that exemplifies vigorous pluralism and embraces *machloket*—respectful disagreement.
4) A philosophy of education that balances progressive and traditional approaches, and recognizes that “college prep” and “community school” are not mutually-exclusive.
5) A student-centered environment that promotes personal development, and yet also seeks to inculcate awareness of and commitment to others, including the outside world. (Stuart Dow, unpublished, copy received on August 2, 2016)

To conclude, our Head of School, is “most proud of the impact we have on our students. Beyond helping develop their minds, we are helping instill a profound sense of self in our kids – a “self” that’s been pushed, pulled, nurtured & challenged so that our graduates leave with a confidence they’ll carry for a lifetime” (Dow, n.d.).

Advisory/Chavaya. One of the responsibilities I was given when I was first hired to serve as Director of Student Life (a newly created administrative position) at EWS was curriculum development for and oversight of the 10th grade advisory program (termed Chavaya in Hebrew, meaning “pleasant experience”). The Dean of Students and two faculty members (who also serve as department chairs) would each be creating the 9th, 11th, and 12th grade curricula for Chavaya, respectively. The plan during the 2016-2017 school year was for the four of us to create and implement advising programming wherein each grade level experience was distinct from the others and involved a framework that could be used again with relatively minor tweaks, depending on the specific, changing needs of the students.

Presently, each Chavaya group consists of about 12-16 students (the mentees) and one faculty member (the mentor). Each group is grade-level specific and students graduate to a new mentor and a different mix of peers at the beginning of each new school year.
The *Chavaya* curriculum is intended to educate and develop students outside of the formal classroom setting. The overarching objective is both citizenship education and personal development. The School commits to providing information on topics ranging from time management and goal-setting, leadership and *Tikkun Olam* (Hebrew for “repairing the world” which is the school’s community service program), to drugs and alcohol, bullying, and acceptance (Upper School Student Handbook 2016-2017, p. 37).

The grade-level specific themes are the following: (1) acceptance and acclimation during the 9th grade, (2) social responsibility during the 10th grade, (3) empathy and action during the 11th grade, and (4) tradition and transition during the 12th grade year.

Since joining EWS in August of 2016, I have learned more about the history of the upper school advisory program. While in existence since the creation of the upper school division in 2001, the upper school advisory program struggled throughout the first decade. During the 2011-2012 academic year, a consultant was hired to meet with students, faculty, administrators, and parents to learn more about the strengths and struggles of the existing advisory system. The findings—based on observations as well as surveys and focus group meetings with students, faculty, and a small sample of parents—highlighted the importance of clarifying the goal of the advisory program as well as the role and responsibilities of the advisor. The consultant concluded his report with the following synthesis statement:

Being an effective advisor challenges adults to place students (not themselves) at the center of the educational experience. Advisory at EWS is portrayed (rightfully so) to students, parents, and faculty as a program that utilizes a student-centered pedagogical model. In my limited time at EWS, however, I saw a disconnect between this portrayal and everyday classroom practice. Advisory provides a framework whereby those steeped in the teacher-centered pedagogical style have the opportunity to “try on” a more student-centered approach. This doesn’t happen, however, without adequate training, support, and practice (Barrett, 2012, p.6).
During the spring of 2014, faculty and administrators created a school climate committee which was tasked with facilitating the development of a comprehensive plan regarding student life (including advisory, student leadership, community service, and experiential learning). Later, during the summer of 2014, a subset of faculty and administrators (not students) participated in a retreat where they created a student life mission to foster learning, service, and leadership that is mindful of health and wellness as well as character development based on Jewish ideals. *Chavaya*—the new and improved advising program—was to be one part of student life programming and it was unveiled to faculty in August 2014.

In spite of the consultant’s conclusions in 2012, the only marked difference between the “new” *Chavaya* and the “old” Advisory was that there were now themes assigned to each grade level (mentioned above) and the plan was for the advising curricula to relate to the grade-level theme. No additional training was provided and a clarity of goals and expectations was still lacking. Not surprisingly, student and faculty buy-in remained an issue and, by the end of the second year of *Chavaya*, support for the programming was waning. That said, the decision was made at the conclusion of the 2015-2016 school year to redouble efforts to create a successful upper school advising program and that was our collective charge going into the 2016-2017 school year.

The EWS culture is one that empowers students, instilling in them a sense of responsibility not only for their school community, but also for the community at large. This student-centered culture is evidenced in everything from the extensive list of student-created and student-led clubs to the enforced expectation that students
communicate directly and respectfully with teachers when they have questions or concerns about the student-driven processes for course selection and school governance. The result is a learning partnership in which students feel a sense of ownership in the institution and develop a profound sense of self and moral self-reliance.

Despite these strengths, the upper school’s advising program has struggled to establish its footing within this student-centered school culture. My interest in understanding the reasons for these past and present struggles from both student and faculty perspectives led me to the development of the following research question and sub-questions which will guide my action research study.

**Research questions.** 1. How do upper school students and their faculty mentors perceive and experience the development and practice of student voice through the school’s advising program? 2. What are supports for the development and practice of student voice within the advisory context (as perceived by upper school students and by their faculty mentors)? 3. What are deterrents/inhibitors to the development and practice of student voice within the advisory context (as perceived by upper school students and by their faculty mentors)? 4. In what ways is my work as an educational leader affected by my inquiry?

**Rationale and Significance**

**Authenticity, vulnerability, and the centrality of the student-teacher relationship.** I remember vividly my first reading of William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and the powerful lines related to self-awareness and authenticity—“This above all: to thine own self be true, And it must follow, as the night the day, Thou canst not then be false to
any (wo)man” (Act I, Scene III). These are words to which I have returned with great regularity over the course of my life, especially as I attempt to identify my own voice in the cacophony that frequently surrounds me. Developing an understanding of who we are and what we value is a lifelong process that is constantly evolving. I believe it is our moral responsibility as educators to create safe, inviting spaces for even the youngest of children to better understand their cultural backgrounds, personal strengths and challenges, and ethical values. How do we, as teachers and school leaders, accomplish this? The following is my effort to answer this question in accordance with my own educational philosophy.

First, we must be cognizant of the importance of the teacher-student relationship and its impact on student achievement (Fielding, 2004; Cervone & Cushman, 2014; Baroutsis, McGregor & Mills, 2016; Kuriloff, Andrus & Jacobs, 2017). It is crucial that teachers recognize the unique talents of their students and expect the same attribute from their colleagues. When the latter is not the case, ethical educators will engage their administrators, peers, and students in honest, direct conversations about the importance of recognizing and actively appreciating difference. In so doing, they will model inclusivity both personally and professionally for students and colleagues.

Second, we must move away from a common teacher need to feel in control of every aspect of the teaching and learning that occurs in one’s classroom. Ideally, both the teaching and the learning that occurs within our classrooms and schools is multidirectional—from teacher to student, from student to teacher, and between and amongst students and teachers (Cook-Sather, 2002). Therefore, teachers must practice
seeing themselves as learners which requires humbly embracing their own sense of vulnerability. This could be especially challenging since acknowledging the expertise of student narratives may be perceived as conflicting with the teacher as expert and keeper of knowledge model that many of us grew up with and have become acculturated to believe (Jordan, 2008).

Additionally, teachers (supported by administrators who understand the importance of both strong teacher-student relationships and the intentional valuing of diversity) need to be adequately trained to nurture safe, trusting student-teacher relationships. They should also be affirmed for establishing the norms and expectations of honesty, empathy, and mutual respect within the classroom and school contexts (Mitra, 2007). Students and teachers benefit from learning and practicing the skills of active listening, appreciating the perspectives of one another as understood through the sharing of personal narratives.

**Story of the question.** My interest in the creation and implementation of intentional programming that enables a student to develop a sense of self and to understand the values that inform her/his behaviors and decisions emanates from my own educational narrative wherein the safe space for voice and agency was sorely lacking. When I began my education, my parents asked that I work hard and do my best and they referred to school as my job. While there was never an articulated expectation from my parents concerning my grades in school, I intuited from a very early age that I should always strive for a straight A report card. Such a grade report was the cause for a celebratory dinner and positive attention from my parents.
On the one hand, from a very young age, I learned to value diligence and I was driven to put my best foot forward on any task that I undertook. On the other hand, I learned to crave the positive attention I received when I was successful at pleasing others and oftentimes this craving took precedence over an authentic desire to learn for learning’s sake. I became skilled at figuring out what each teacher wanted from me and then putting all my effort into giving that to her/him (whether genuine learning occurred along the way or not). Failure felt shameful and was to be avoided at all costs; I made it my goal to strive for perfection in all that I did.

I began kindergarten at about the exact same age that I have my first memory of having been sexually assaulted by my paternal grandfather. Today, I believe this fact is quite significant when I reflect upon past life choices, present realities, and future aspirations. As a people-pleaser, I wanted to avoid conflict at all costs. In the black and white world of my early childhood, I was unable to reconcile feeling love and admiration for a kind, entertaining grandfather with feeling high levels of anxiety, confusion, and shame when I was left alone with a man that I trusted (or, that I felt I was supposed to trust). I felt personally at fault for both my grandfather’s behavior and my resulting feelings of shame. Since I associated shame with failure, I made the choice to carry knowledge of the abuse alone, wary of the conflict that would undoubtedly result if I were to tell my parents about what happened when I was left alone with my grandfather (not to mention not being sure as to my own guilt or innocence in the matter).

Thankfully, as a young teenager, the sexual abuse ceased, or I became more adept at evading it. However, my feelings of shame and confusion as well as my tendency
towards perfectionism did not. On the surface, I had everything going for me. I was a white girl from a well-respected family who lived in an affluent neighborhood. I was successful academically, having been placed on the “Academically Abled (AA)” track for math and reading in late elementary school and later the Pre-International Baccalaureate (Pre-IB) and International Baccalaureate (IB) Programs in middle and high school, respectively. My parents were actively involved in the Parent Teacher Association (PTA), in advocating for their daughter, and in supporting teachers and administrators. That said, they also made a yearly choice to indicate on the appropriate school form that they allowed for a teacher or administrator to use corporal punishment with me whenever it was deemed necessary and without first needing to contact them. That repeated decision (in which my parents granted permission to unknown others to invade my personal space without a need to first learn my perspective related to any hypothetical disciplinary scenario) hurt me deeply then and is painful for me to remember today. The impact of these lived experiences has left me with an even stronger resolve to advocate for those who are not given the space, time, or audience to find their voice.

As previously mentioned, I have had personal and school experiences wherein I felt healthy boundaries were crossed and I had no voice in it. I firmly believe that my current commitment to enabling children and young adults to find their voice and to practice asserting it with the goal of respectful self-agency is a direct result of my own past struggles in these areas. My experiences in administrative, teaching, and advising roles have afforded me many opportunities to advocate for my student charges. The topics of these difficult and necessary conversations have included the permissibility of
sexual harassing language in an unsupervised student area, the public humiliation of a female 10th grader by a male 12th grader who included references to the former’s sexual exploits in a film that he created and showed to the entire high school community, the verbal and emotional abuse of a 12th grade advisee by a teacher, and the refusal to allow for the fair and equal treatment of our school’s equivalent of the Gay-Straight Alliance. I fully recognize and acknowledge that my bias is in favor of those who lack a space for self-advocacy within either the institution or society at large.

Ideally, schools are creating systems geared towards social and emotional learning (SEL) that prioritize identity work and that encourage students to think critically about inequities in hopes that they will become agents of positive change. Just as any academic content area, SEL requires regular practice and reflection. Weissberg and Cascarino (2013) speak to the urgency of schools’ coupling academic learning with social-emotional learning since doing so “helps create more engaging schools and prepares students for the challenges of the world” (p.8). The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) explains that SEL “involves the processes through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions” (CASEL, 2013). These skills are vital for success in schools, at work, and in life. It is in everyone’s best interest to develop SEL programming of the same rigor as traditional academic coursework.
During the past decade, one of my professional responsibilities was to serve as an advisor to a group of about ten upper school students at St. John’s School (SJS), another independent day school in Houston, Texas. The role and the relationships that I developed outside of and/or in addition to those developed within the classroom context stand out for me as a true highlight from my 25 years of experience as an educator. I worked with a total of three different advisory groups over my 10-year period at SJS, advising each of the first two groups from their freshman (9th grade) through their senior (12th grade) year. Then, most recently, I inherited a group of rising sophomores (10th graders) with whom I worked for their sophomore (10th grade) and junior (11th grade) years before handing them off to a colleague when I made the decision to leave SJS and to begin working at EWS for the 2016-2017 school year. Getting to know each of my former advisees over the course of their high school career was powerful and the fact that I remain in regular contact with the majority of the 30 advisees I have had is a testament to that claim.

An unpublished 12-page guide for the SJS advisory program stated that its purpose was to serve as “the primary vehicle for creating a more personalized learning environment where students’ educational experience is overseen by a caring, vigilant adult.” Additional cited purposes—academic and social support, the practice of interpersonal (social and emotional) skills, and engagement with and contribution to the school community—also overlap with those mentioned in the research literature about advisory programs which are discussed further below (Van Ryzin, 2010; Johnson 2009). Aside from the guide which was distributed as an attachment to an email and rarely if
ever referred to again, there was very little training for the advising role and my performance was never formally evaluated by a peer, an administrator, or a student. As a former peer counselor during my years as an undergraduate and as a mother of a son and a daughter, I arrived at the advisor role already quite comfortable with active listening and the creation of safe spaces wherein advisees might feel more inclined to share developing ideas and perspectives.

My classroom was my advisees’ first stop at the beginning of a long school day and it was my hope that they would perceive it as a comfortable space where they could be themselves while simultaneously being respectful of and caring towards others. With each passing year, I became more and more convinced that many of the skills I learned, developed, and practiced alongside my advisees—role playing a difficult conversation that one advisee intended to have subsequently with a coach or parent, listening and being there when another advisee lost all of his possessions in a fire, and celebrating when yet another advisee learned of her early acceptance into the college of her dreams—were some of the skills that mattered most in life.

I was humbled by the depth of caring and compassion I observed during my experience as an advisor. I was also saddened and perplexed when I learned about some other advisors and advisees who were not satisfied with their respective experiences. Mentioned reasons included lack of training, unclear expectations, and the perception that the entire program was a big waste of time. I learned of these experiences from both student and faculty perspectives during casual conversations and I always wondered how widespread they were. Would improved advisory programming (including ongoing
training and improved communication and evaluation systems) solve the problem? Were students more inclined to rely on a classroom teacher for support and guidance related to social and emotional needs and, consequently, the advisor-advisee relationship felt forced? Some of these same questions guided my thinking as I prepared to study student and teacher perceptions and experiences of the development of one’s sense of self and the practice of one’s sense of agency (frequently referred to as one’s voice in research literature)—within the advisory program in my new school context.

Investing time and energy to develop a better understanding of the school community I had recently joined and wished to serve well was critical. I challenged myself to engage with different perspectives and to make the time to grapple with them collectively. To do so was to adopt what Boler and Zembylas (2003) refer to as a pedagogy of discomfort which “recognizes and problematizes the deeply embedded emotional dimensions that frame and shape daily habits, routines, and unconscious complicity with hegemony” (p.111).

The most recent iteration of advisory at EWS—referred to as Chavaya (“pleasant experience”)—emphasizes learning, leadership, and service. Students are expected to learn by experience and to lead themselves and others with integrity. They are to serve through Tikkun Olam (the Hebrew for “repairing the world” which is also the name of the school’s community service program). Additionally, each student is actively encouraged to demonstrate kindness, honesty, and hard-work, to model healthy choices, and to find her/his voice. These goals and expectations (related to individual development, service to others, and social-emotional learning) fall under the umbrella of character education.
(Berkowitz & Bier, 2004) and are intended to permeate all aspects of school climate and culture.

The purpose of my research was to learn about student and faculty perceptions and experiences related to student voice within one specific program at EWS-- Chavaya. My inquiry began with an analysis of existing research related to the evolution of social-emotional learning (SEL) and its effective inclusion in school curricula generally. I then turned my attention to the characteristics of evidence-based advisory programs which were designed to foster SEL. I was interested in what existing research claimed about successful advisory programs as well as how the success of these programs was measured. If advisory programs’ effectiveness was not convincing based on existing research findings, my inquiry would seek to identify alternative ways to ensure that schools provide, and students receive the SEL that has been linked to both academic achievement and character development.

All too often an educator’s perceived need for control creates a barrier to authentic student participation in the learning process. This is likely linked to teacher and administrator expectations related to teacher identity and professionalism. Here I see a need for teachers (supported and encouraged by their school administrators) to practice creating learning environments wherein students have genuine voice and choice in the education process. After all, students are the experts when it comes to their own schooling experiences and an unwillingness to acknowledge this reality likely results in negative consequences (e.g. student disengagement and disinterest) that might otherwise be avoided.
Striving to honor the importance of student voice, I designed a study that would enable me work alongside students during both the data collection and data analysis processes. The result is a co-created study that situates students at the center of inquiry, discovery, learning, and growth. My aim was always to speak with students rather than for or about them (Fielding, 2004). Just as within the classroom context, this student-centered approach required intentional forethought, planning, and training to successfully problematize existing power relations in the school while simultaneously listening and working together for positive change.
Chapter 2: Review of Related Literature

This practitioner inquiry provided an opportunity to learn more about student and faculty perceptions and experiences of the development and practice of student voice within my independent school context. Prior to explaining the design and methodology of my own qualitative research study, I turned to the existing academic literature that guided my conceptual framework. Specifically, I explored Social Emotional Learning (of which student voice is a component) and student advisory programs that have demonstrated successful SEL implementation. Next, I looked closely at the independent school context which purports to recognize the central importance of the student-teacher relationship while often struggling to relinquish adult-centered programs and practices. In an effort to have my own research study model the genuine engagement of student perspectives, I concluded with an analysis of the research related to cooperative co-inquiry.

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and its Successful Implementation

Studies abound linking SEL to social skill development, positive self-image, mental health, prosocial behavior, reduced antisocial behavior and substance abuse, and improved academic achievement (Bergmark, 2008; Durlak et al., 2007; Markow & Pieteres, 2009; National Research Council, 2012; Sklad, Diekstra, De Ritter, Ben & Gravesteijn, 2012; Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013). Nevertheless, many education stakeholders appear (through both their language and behavior) unconvinced of the importance of social-emotional skills.

Mike Rose (2013) and David Conley (2013) write about the fallacy of our terminology when we use the word “cognitive” to refer exclusively to content knowledge (primarily reading and mathematics) that is measured by standardized tests and
“noncognitive” is left to refer to knowledge that involves beliefs, attitudes, and feelings. Rose (2013) dissuades us from adopting a “pinched notion of cognition and a reductive dichotomy,” urging us instead to “reclaim the full meaning of cognition—one that is robust and intellectual, intimately connected to character and social development, and directed toward the creation of a better world” (Rose, 2013). Conley echoes Rose’s argument that “noncognitive” inaccurately describes what is a “more complex form of cognition” and he urges educators to abandon its usage in favor of “metacognitive” since social-emotional abilities involve “the mind’s ability to reflect on how effectively it is handling the learning process as it is doing so” (Conley, 2013).

The idea of situating the development and practice of metacognitive social-emotional skills in schools dates back to Bandura’s (1977) social learning theory which demonstrates that people learn from one another through observation, imitation, and modeling. The concept that interpersonal and intrapersonal competencies could be taught and learned was transformative. Later, Goleman’s (1995) Emotional Intelligence (EI) work built upon Bandura’s earlier findings when he determined that we all have the capacity to develop our emotional skills and improve our Emotion Quotient (EQ) with practice and the adoption of what Dweck (2006) subsequently termed a “growth mindset.” After all, when students are convinced that their consistent hard work can have a positive impact on the outcome they are more likely to persevere, aware that “persistence will increase proficiency” (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012, p.31).

Despite the aforementioned theories and research studies which overwhelmingly support the benefits of investing time and resources in SEL programming within our
schools (both for its correlation with academic achievement and its link to optimal preparation for work and life), less than a handful of states (Illinois, Kansas, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia) have adopted SEL standards at the secondary level (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning State Scan Scorecard Project, 2016). Potentially this is the case because teachers and school leaders have very little personal experience with SEL and the student-centered approach it necessitates.

Weissberg and Cascarino (2012) write that “Nearly all teachers believe social and emotional skills are teachable… Yet the same teachers also said they need strong support from district and school leaders to effectively implement and promote SEL” (p.11). Bergmark (2008) concurs when she states that “all parties in a school community must have the conviction that character education can enhance academic learning if put into action in their school” (p.276).

The meta-analysis of Sklad, Diekstra, De Ritter and Ben (2012) yielded data from “75 studies of universal school-based programs published from 1995 to 2008” and revealed that SEL was most effective for students when implementation involved well defined goals, strong focus and explicit guidelines, thorough training and quality control, feedback on interventions, and consistent staffing (p.906). The two most often reported outcomes across social, emotional, and/or behavioral programs were “an increase in social-emotional skills and a reduction in antisocial behavior” (Sklad, Diekstra, De Ritter and Ben, 2012, p.899).

Even more recently, in direct communication and collaboration with students about motivation and mastery, Kathleen Cushman (2014) compiled a checklist entitled
the “Gr8 8” which are “eight conditions that make students want to engage with learning” (p.18).

These conditions include: (1) the creation of a safe and caring learning environment, (2) the work/material matters, (3) tasks are hands-on, collaborative, and fun, drawing in even the reluctant students, (4) tasks are ‘hard but doable’ and students’ thinking is stretched, (5) teachers act as coaches, demonstrating new skills, providing support and encouragement, and helping them learn from their mistakes, (6) needing to use the new skill or knowledge, which allows students to consolidate and clarify their own understanding, (7) building in time for reflection on the learning process, and (8) planning the next steps for learning (Cushman, 2014, pp.19-22).

If we want to create safe, supportive learning environments, teachers and school leaders must work intentionally and collaboratively for the daily co-construction of learning alongside students. This may require a flattening of the traditional classroom hierarchy where the teacher is the expert.

Abandoning the “sage-on-the-stage” analogy, teachers should embrace the “guide-on-the-side” approach which demands that teachers invest the time and energy to get to know their students’ “beliefs, their anxieties, and their backgrounds and customizing approaches that are responsive to each” (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012, p.32). However, this may be easier said (or, written) than done. Many educators have been taught that classroom management is synonymous with top-down control of one’s students.

With a history of and tendency towards silencing student voices, there is likely a need to be deliberate in our collective efforts to authorize student voices. This may require that teachers and administrators rethink their relationship to power and control, their ability to practice active listening, and their willingness to embrace vulnerability
alongside their student charges. Emily Style’s (1998) conceptualization of curriculum as window and mirror is relevant in addressing these issues.

If the student is understood as occupying a dwelling of self, education needs to enable the student to look through window frames in order to see the reality of others and into mirrors in order to see her/his own reality reflected. Knowledge of both types of framing is basic to a balanced education which is committed to affirming the essential dialectic between the self and the world (Style, 1998, p.150).

There is a strong likelihood that this reconceptualization of pedagogy will prove challenging when the content is unfamiliar and/or uncomfortable, as is likely the case with SEL for most educators. Consistent, ongoing professional development and support as well as clear goals and expectations would, therefore, be critical for the success of SEL programming.

**Evidence-Based Advisory Frameworks that Successfully Support SEL**

Advisory programs emerged in the mid-1980s as a part of a secondary school reform movement which aimed “to remake junior high schools into a more successful educational experience for students” (McClure, Yonezawa & Jones, 2010). SEL had been shown to taper off from primary to secondary school and this transition “correlates with a decrease in the quality/supportiveness of teacher-student relationships” (Van Ryzin, 2010, p. 132). Addressing this issue is one of the main goals of advisory. Since research had demonstrated that strong child-adult relationships were especially beneficial during adolescence when students were more inclined to face social and emotional stresses on a regular basis, the hope was that the add-on role of teacher as advisor would fill the need of a trusted, caring adult for her/his student advisees.
Today, advisory programs remain a staple of the secondary school experience with diversity in their offerings and effectiveness. Johnson (2009) writes that the most commonly cited purposes of advisories are “counseling, academic advising and monitoring, community building, social/peer identity development, social/group skills interaction, recreational activities, all-school meetings and ‘check-in,’ discussion and conflict resolution, and school trip planning/debriefing” (p.2). But, what happens if other school programming meets the previously mentioned purposes of advisories and classroom teachers, coaches, and other school staff are already serving as students’ go-to adults within the school community? Further, what happens if/when the advisor either does not self-perceive or is not perceived by the student(s) as capable of serving in the advising capacity?

In the first scenario (wherein school programming outside of the advisory system is already achieving the goals designed for that school’s advisory program), advisory might be counterproductive and a waste of time. Noddings (1992) cautions against the potential for less authentic relationships that may result from a formalization of the advisor-advisee relationship. A strong advocate of the importance of caring in the teacher-student relationship, she maintains that caring may be more genuine when it occurs in informal and improvised encounters between teachers and their students (Noddings, 1992). Similarly, Darling-Hammond (1997) argues for the human relationship benefits of expanded teacher roles that do not necessitate the advisor title.

Phillippo (2010) distinguishes teacher and advisor roles and defines personalism as “sustained interpersonal interactions between students and teachers,” and suggests that
there is an absence of professional preparation for advising duties (p. 2261). McClure, Yonezawa, and Jones (2010) use a similar term, personalization, to refer to the students’ “connection to school and adults in school” and argue that “the relationships among advisory period, personalization, and academic outcomes are not as straightforward as was previously thought” (pp. 1-3). They contend that a formalized advisory system may have been useful as a first step towards the development of more positive, personalized secondary school cultures when such reform efforts originated in the mid-1980s. The authors conclude that the ultimate goal should be to “move personalization approaches into the core of schooling… Schools able to integrate strategies of caring into their daily work and overall school climate, as opposed to annexing it within an advisory period, may be more successful” (McClure, Yonezawa, & Jones, 2010, p. 12).

In the second scenario, the advisor lacks the confidence and/or capacity to serve students as an effective advisor. Lack of confidence may stem from inadequate training and practice. Lack of capacity may be a result of the advisor’s own social and emotional learning deficiencies. Phillippo’s (2010) study of advisor role enactment in three small California high schools determined that there was a correlation between serving comfortably in a social-emotional support role and demonstrating “stronger schemas for this work” (p.2286). She borrows Callero’s (1994) explanation of schemas as “cultural assumptions, taken-for-granted rules and generalizable procedures that underlie social life” (p. 233). Additionally, “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” (Phillippo, 2010, p.
If that is the case, and assuming that job satisfaction and commitment to students are outcomes desired by a wide variety of school stakeholders, is it possible to teach the skills required for teachers to develop greater confidence and competence in advising and/or social-emotional support roles?

If, as argued by Griffin, Eury, and Gaffney (2015), advisory is “a space for students to feel comfortable, included, and valued,” then traditional teacher-student relationships will need to be re-imagined (p. 17). To begin with, the advisor and students should work together to establish norms “of participation, caring, inclusiveness, and shared leadership” which highlight the “importance of active listening and mutual respect” (Mitra, 2005, pp. 542-543). Ideally, advisors are taught the importance of striking a balance between offering support to and letting go of advisees, providing students “the space to assume meaningful roles and responsibilities” and “to begin to share authority in the group” (Mitra, 2005, pp. 520 & 533).

Assuming that students need opportunities to develop a sense of self (by asking questions and critically examining their values and beliefs) and that students also need a context for the practice of their sense of agency, effective advisors will need to encourage risk-taking and the development of social-emotional skills. In doing so, they will need to know that mistakes are part of both their own and their advisees’ ongoing learning processes. The advisor role requires a strong foundation of self-awareness and social-emotional skills as well as adaptability and an understanding and acceptance of the idea that “each mentor-mentee relationship is unique, requiring a unique approach” (Griffin, Eury, & Gaffney, 2015, p. 21).
In my experience, the presumption that teachers already have the self-awareness and the social-emotional skills required of an effective advisor is ignorant at best. Existing research demonstrates the correlation between personalization and academic success as well as improved adolescent behavior, adjustment, and relationships. If personalization is a genuine goal of schools, then high-quality, ongoing professional learning opportunities related to SEL should become the norm for all teachers (Grossman & Tierney, 1998; Karcher, Davis, & Powell, 2002; LoSciuto, Rajala, Townsend, & Taylor, 1996; McPartland & Nettles, 1991; Rhodes, Grossman, & Resch, 2000; Rhodes, Haight, & Briggs, 1999; Rhodes, Reddy, & Grossman, 2005; Tierney, Grossman, & Resch, 1995).

Several existing studies (Cervone & Cushman, 2014; Cushman, 1990; Johnson, 2009; Mitra, 2005; and Phillippo, 2010) mention the need for ongoing training and the allocation of valuable resources (including time as well as buy-in and empowerment from school administration) for effective and sustainable advisory programs. An advisory context characterized by distributed leadership where students are teaching partners represents a departure from the traditional teacher-student roles. While some teachers will adopt effective advising skills more readily and naturally than others, it is incumbent upon school leaders to communicate expectations clearly and to provide the necessary training for teachers to accept their expanded roles and responsibilities with confidence and aptitude rather than reluctant resistance.

Once advisory programs are in place in a school, it becomes important to evaluate them regularly from multiple perspectives. Namely, researchers agree that asking
teachers and students about their perceptions of advising programs and making modifications to the programs based on those perceptions is critically important (Makkonen, 2004). That was precisely my goal for this research study and I chose to incorporate elements of Cooperative-Inquiry into the study’s methodology because it afforded my student cooperative co-inquiry team and me the opportunity to engage student voice in the study of the same.

**Adultism and Control as Barriers to Student Voice**

One century ago, John Dewey (1916) encouraged adults to learn from the values and perspectives of their younger student charges. Phelan (1998) also advocates for the educational validity of the youth experience. As suggested above, the legitimization and genuine engagement of student voice requires adult educators (that is, those with more traditional and perceived power within the school context) to solicit student input and value the student perspective, in all its diversity. Phelan and her fellow researchers learned that, “Rather than finding it hard to talk with youths, we often experienced difficulty getting away. In almost all cases, students expressed a desire to share their thoughts, discuss their views, and examine their own reality as they rendered descriptions of events, circumstances, and relationships” (Phelan, Davidson, & Yu, 1998).

These researchers found that it is crucial for teachers to be fully present and engaged in the active learning of their students, creating safe spaces for risk-taking, critical and creative thinking, and appreciation of diversity. To do so is to recognize that “only diversity makes change and progress” (Dewey, 1916). In my experience, teacher commitment to creating student-centered learning spaces requires an understanding of the
threat of adultism and the need to relinquish control to our student charges to work towards a common goal of student voice and the agency it implies.

Bell (1995) explains that adultism refers to attitudes, behaviors, beliefs, and ideas that are based upon the notion that adults are better than young people; therefore, they are entitled to make decisions for young people without the latter’s consent. Conner, Ober, & Brown (2016) write of the insidious nature of what they term the “rollercoaster of adultism” which involves youth’s exposure to adultist beliefs and practices, internalization of adultism, and perpetuation of external practices of adultism (pp.13-14). It appears that the traditional teacher-centered schooling experience is rife with adultism. And, if left unchecked and unchallenged, this becomes the teaching and learning model that many educators revert to, especially since it was often the schooling experience of the educator herself/himself.

Understanding and confronting our adultist tendencies may enable educators to progress upwards through Hart’s (1994) and Fletcher’s (2011) “ladder of youth voice” (see Figure 1). The bottom rungs of the ladder (manipulation, decoration, and tokenism) do not involve authentic youth voice. Rungs four and five (wherein youth inform adults and youth are consulted by adults) allow the space for youth to share their perspectives with adults (an improvement over the bottom rungs, but still not youth-centered). Finally, at rung six, adultism is challenged with youth and adults sharing authority. If we press on to rungs seven and eight, youth will have the opportunity to experience and practice the leadership and independence that are goals for students by graduation (Hart, 1994; Fletcher, 2011).
Now equipped with an understanding of the evidence-based positive link between SEL, student behavior, and academic performance (Sklad, Diekstra, De Ritter, & Gravesteijn, 2012) as well as some of the barriers to the development and practice of student voice (Conner, Ober, & Brown, 2016), we turn our attention to a reflective and participatory action research method that informed my study design. Specifically, I included a cooperative co-inquiry dimension to my study with the goal of providing the space for students to exercise their voice to learn about and make informed, data-based recommendations for the improvement of The EWS’s Chavaya program.

**Cooperative Co-Inquiry: Challenges and Benefits**

My research interest involved student voice at both the individual and the organizational levels. At the individual level (and, as mentioned previously in my introduction), I used the term student voice to refer to the articulation (through words and
behaviors) of one’s sense of self (which includes one’s identity, one’s truth—including ideas, perspectives, and beliefs—and one’s values). Student and faculty perceptions regarding the inclusion of learning geared towards students’ development of their individual and diverse voices within the advisory context are part of what I studied alongside a student cooperative co-inquiry team.

In order to effectively study individual-level student voice, I incorporated research methodologies that relied upon active student participation (typically termed student or pupil voice in existing research literature) in both the data collection and data analysis phases of my study. At the organizational level, student voice refers to student participation in action research efforts which may result in educational change within said organization (in my case, within the upper school division of EWS).

A belief in and active commitment to pupil voice extends back to at least the 1890s and experienced a resurgence in the 1980s. The work of Jean Rudduck preceded the United Nation’s Convention on the Rights of a Child (1989) which included a statement that all children have the right to say what they think in all matters affecting them and to have their views taken seriously (Rudduck & Fielding, 2006; Unicef, 1989). For almost three decades, there has been an increase in the body of research (e.g., DeFur & Korinek, 2010; Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2016; Lodge, 2005; Mitra, 2009; Robinson & Taylor, 2007) that highlights “the importance of attending to student voice when seeking to understand or to improve participation, teaching, and learning in schools” (Kane & Chimwayange, 2014, p.54). As a side note, Somalia, South Sudan, and the United States are the only countries that have not ratified the UN treaty.
Interestingly, a great deal of student voice research comes from outside of the United States—specifically, from the UK, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada. Notable exceptions include the student voice research of Cook-Sather and Mitra as well as Fine’s and Cushman’s respective practice and advocacy of Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR). Nevertheless, “the role of student voice in educational change is underutilized and therefore understudied” (Mitra, 2009, p.428). My reading and analysis of studies conducted by the aforementioned researchers and others (Baroutsis, McGregor & Mills, 2016; Kehoe, 2015; Robinson & Taylor, 2007; Thiessen, 2006; Welikala & Atkin, 2014) informed my conceptualization of the risks and benefits of my Cooperative Co-Inquiry research methodology. Additionally, likely challenges could become growth opportunities for all involved (Cammarota & Fine, 2010; Reason, 1999).

The importance of authenticity and investment came to mind when I reflected upon the risks and benefits involved in youth-adult research partnerships. A benefit can quickly become a risk when devoid of genuine caring. For example, active listening is a crucial component of YPAR and Co-operative Inquiry (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Reason, 1999). Kane & Chimwayange (2014) refer to an “emerging dialogue” when students are truly involved and engaged in reform work and when educators and educational leaders learn “to speak by listening” (Freire, 1998, p.104). Lodge (2005) explains that dialogue requires engagement in conversations that build on each other’s ideas, an open-mindedness to new ideas and thinking, and honesty (p. 134). The alternative is a manipulative perversion of the act of listening and it happens all too frequently when teachers revert to the familiar and comfortable status quo which insists
that the educator is the expert. “Authorizing student perspectives means ensuring that there are legitimate and valued spaces within which students can speak, re-tuning our ears so that we can hear what they say, and redirecting our actions in response to what we hear” (Cook-Sather, 2002, p.4).

Open communication and authentic dialogue pave the way for student-teacher relationships that are built on a foundation of mutual trust and respect. The maintenance of such strong, mutually beneficial relationships requires ongoing work from both parties—students and teachers. A vocalized recognition that participation and inclusivity are collective goals and should precede the confrontation of inequities related to power and control. There will likely be times when students are not inclined to offer honest critique of practice, intuiting that their organizational status may then be at risk (Kehoe, 2015). Likewise, teachers will likely need to learn to accept a sense of vulnerability, demanding (of themselves and their colleagues) a receptivity to critical student feedback and resisting a defensive posture (Jordan, 2008; Mockler & Groundwater-Smith, 2014). Both students and teachers should remain hypervigilant when it comes to power differentials, challenging their preconceived notions about who has authority on education (Cook-Sather, 2002).

When the aforementioned issues are neglected, student-teacher partnerships may run the risk of undergoing an erosion of trust and respect and may lead to cynicism and learned helplessness—two risks that significantly undermine efforts to develop and practice voice. Finally, collaborative efforts to voice diverse perspectives and to actively listen to the same are just the beginning. “It is what happens with the information, what
is done with it, that is also of great importance” (Baroutsis, McGregor & Mills, 2016, p.127). Student-teacher cooperative co-inquiry collaborations are most powerful when they create spaces for students to develop “confidence in their own voice and an ability to make a difference in their community” (Baroutsis, McGregor & Mills, 2016, p.124). In other words, when their sense of self—student voice—necessitates their socially responsible activism—their agency.
Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

As I reflect on existing research studies and their findings’ interplay with my own experience as an advisor, a teacher, and an administrator, I begin the explanation of my methodology with a brief discussion of the theoretical frameworks-- cooperative co-inquiry, social constructivism, and communities of practice-- that continue to resonate with my practice (Reason, 1999; Vygotsky, 1962; Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Cooperative co-inquiry, social constructivism, and communities of practice are distinct theoretical frameworks with the common belief that learning and growth happen in community. Each framework highlights the central role of shared reflection on experience as a conduit for the co-construction of knowledge. Reason (1999) makes the following claim:

knowing will be more valid—richer, deeper, more true to life and more useful—… if our knowing is grounded in our experience, expressed through our stories and images, understood through ideas which make sense to us, and expressed in worthwhile action in our lives” (p.211).

This claim supports Vygotsky’s earlier sociocultural theory and the idea that language is the main tool of thought (Vygotsky, 1962). In other words, learning occurs through the voicing of our respective narratives in shared contexts. Finally, communities of practice are defined as “groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p. 4).

My intention was to be mindful of these frameworks during the research design as well as the data collection and data analysis phases of my qualitative study. Namely, my hope was to transcend a hierarchical concept of knowledge, embracing instead a
collective, co-created understanding of my school community’s current practice and our vision for improved practice. That way, we (students, teachers, and I) were able to turn our collective efforts to creating and implementing a growth-minded plan for meaningful, forward-thinking change that honored all voices in an ongoing process. The ultimate goal was to co-create a collaborative system of students and teachers who relied on individual and collective analysis, synthesis, and evaluation to better understand how others were thinking while simultaneously striving to make sense of the issue.

One of my professional responsibilities as Director of Student Life was to create an advising curriculum that garnered the support and active engagement of student mentees and teacher mentors. However, in November of 2016, after the sudden resignation of the recently hired upper school division head at EWS, my position and responsibilities shifted. My job title became Interim Dean of Students and I was no longer directly responsible for the creation and implementation of the Chavaya curriculum. Nonetheless, my interest in the EWS advising program continued as did my desire to study the same alongside 12th grade student co-researchers who have had four years of experience as either advisees (during their 9th grade year) or mentees (following the transition to Chavaya during their 10th, 11th, and now 12th grade years). Therefore, I conducted a qualitative practitioner action research study with a youth participatory cooperative co-inquiry component.

Our collective goal was to better understand student perceptions and experiences of the development and practice of student voice through the school’s advising program. Further, my cooperative co-inquiry team and I sought to better understand student
perceptions of the supports for and inhibitors to the development and practice of student voice within the advisory context and the upper school community more broadly. Later, I conducted interviews of a subset of faculty members with advising/mentoring responsibilities to glean their perceptions of the same. In the end, this research study was a rich opportunity to learn from student and faculty perceptions and insights in an effort to develop, practice, and reflect upon student voice and its continued and widening role in our school community.

**Research Design**

My first three research questions demonstrate my interest in student and faculty perceptions and experiences of both supports for and inhibitors to the development and practice of student voice within the Advisory/Chavaya context. I worked to problematize my own definitions and conceptualizations of student voice by learning directly from student research participants and members of my student cooperative co-inquiry team about their definitions and conceptualizations of the same. The cooperative co-inquiry process allowed for engagement in collaborative reflection as the students participated in a modified descriptive review process which I facilitated, observed, and recorded for later analysis (Carini, 2001; Carini & Himley, 2009). Finally, I created codes that aim to capture the themes that have emerged both during the student cooperative co-inquiry team’s analysis process as well as my own analysis of two layers of student data alongside faculty interview data.

The development and practice of student voice require student-centered (as opposed to teacher-centered) approaches to growth and learning. In 2012, the consultant
hired by EWS to study the effectiveness of its advisory program concluded that the
typical advisory experience at EWS was teacher-centered and he recommended clearly
articulated advisory goals, ongoing advising training, and improved materials/resources
for advisors (Barrett, 2012). The consultant’s findings are consistent with existing
research on the challenges to effective advisory programs—namely, no clear purpose,
teachers’ comfort with or perceived need for power and control within the classroom
setting, a lack of confidence and/or training in SEL for teachers who are being asked to
fill advisor roles, and few resources for guidance or time for the development of
improved resources (Cervone & Cushman, 2014; Cushman, 1990; Johnson, 2009; Mitra,
2005; and Phillippo, 2010).

My final question involves the impact of my own reflective inquiry on my
practice. As Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) astutely claim, “inquiry as stance redefines
leaders as learners and thus blurs the boundaries between leaders and followers, between
those framing the problems and those implementing the changes in response to those
problems” (p.123). The transcendence of traditional hierarchical frameworks and
mindsets aligned with my choice to include a student cooperative co-inquiry dimension to
this qualitative practitioner study. This approach encouraged what Fielding (2004) refers
to as “an epistemic agency, a capacity to construct legitimate knowledge” (p. 305).
Student research participants had an opportunity to share their perceptions related to
student voice within the advisory context. Later, the student volunteers who served on
the cooperative co-inquiry team began the analysis process through their descriptive
review of focus group transcript data. In this way, these students were co-analysts of
student data as well as co-constructors of findings that could impact the advisory experience for future students. My own meta-analysis of the cooperative co-inquiry component of my research study allowed me to consider the ways in which my research alongside students has impacted my evolving philosophy and practice of educational leadership.

**Site and participant selection.** EWS is accredited by the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) and the Independent School Association of the Southwest (ISAS). The total student body enrollment is 519 with an Upper School enrollment of 311. There are currently 43 upper school faculty at EWS. I chose EWS (generally) and the upper school division (specifically) for this study because it is the school and division where I was serving in both faculty and administrative capacities.

I chose to conduct a purposeful sampling of 12th grade students (totaling 80), their five faculty mentors, and the one faculty Grade Level Coordinator (GLC) within the upper school division because 12th graders were the students with the longest experience of the advisory program. Additionally, these students had experienced both the Advisory program (as 9th graders) and the updated *Chavaya* program (as 10th, 11th, and 12th graders). Carl and Ravitch (2016) stress that “purposeful random sampling is especially appropriate when the potential number of cases within a purposeful category is more than what can be studied with the available time and resources,” which is the case for this qualitative practitioner research study with embedded elements of student cooperative co-inquiry (p.132).
Selection criteria. Upon completion of the University of Pennsylvania’s Internal Review Board (IRB) process and after receiving permission from the Head of School, the Upper School Division Head and the 12th Grade Level Coordinator (GLC), I began the process of recruiting student and faculty research participants. During the spring semester of 2017, I had the opportunity to meet with the entire Class of 2017, explain my research inquiry, and request student volunteers to participate as either (1) part of a focus group or (2) part of a cooperative co-inquiry team which would analyze de-identified transcript data from a total of three student focus groups. My verbal announcement was followed by a written invitation sent through email.

In the end, a total of 15 of the 80 students that make up the 12th grade class at The Emery/Weiner School participated in one of three focus groups. Unfortunately, my original email request for student cooperative co-inquiry participants did not yield volunteers. My revised plan involved the personal invitation of 10 students from the 12th grade class—5 young men and 5 young women. I entrusted the selection of those 10 students to the 12th Grade Level Coordinator (GLC) who had been a faculty member at EWS for 14 years, who knew these students well, and who understood my desire to work with a diverse group of students. Eight of those ten students—four young men and four young women-- accepted my personal invitation to participate on the student cooperative co-inquiry team.

I provided an overview of the research questions, my working definition of student voice, the focus group protocol, and my dissertation proposal to my student cooperative co-inquiry team. They had the opportunity to ask me clarifying questions
before training for and then participating in the descriptive review of de-identified transcript data from three student focus groups. During the modified descriptive review process, students worked collectively and collaboratively to look for themes that emerge across focus group transcripts. (Please refer to Appendices B and C—found on pp. 117 and 119, respectively—for additional details related to the modified descriptive review process as well as the resulting data analysis and additional student data.)

**Research Methods**

As the practitioner researcher of this qualitative research study, I recognized that I was the “primary research instrument and the primary data-gathering tool” (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, p.160). Therefore, it was incumbent upon me to maintain and facilitate thoughtful and thorough data collection processes as well as to engage in regular documented reflections regarding everything from my research questions to interviews of participants to my own bias, all while maintaining a flexible stance that allowed me to be “comfortable with ambiguity and complexity” (Ravitch and Riggan, p.75).

The following methods and research design were intended to generate “data and analysis (that) are helpful to all concerned” and that “result in more complex community learning” while simultaneously demonstrating my awareness of Michelle Fine’s astute observation that “expertise is distributed” (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, p.162; Ravitch & Riggan, p.72). Please refer to Table I for an overview of my ongoing and sequenced research methods that are discussed in more detail below.
Table I: Ongoing and Sequenced Research Methods of Practitioner Researcher

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ongoing Research Methods</th>
<th>Fieldwork Research and Reflective Journal</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Researcher Interviews (conducted by a critical friend)</td>
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<td>Memos</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sequenced Research Methods</td>
<td>Archival Data</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(Total of three) Focus Groups (of 12\textsuperscript{th} grade students)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(Total of three) Student reviews of de-identified data excerpts (using an adapted descriptive review protocol)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(Total of six) Interviews (of 12\textsuperscript{th} grade faculty mentors &amp; grade level coordinator)</td>
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**Data collection: ongoing research methods.**

*Fieldwork research and reflective journal.* I used both an online journal and a physical notebook since there were times, especially while engaged with students and faculty on campus, when my computer was not readily available. During the completion of my pilot study, I learned that I was most comfortable writing notes in a notebook while on campus and then updating my online journal at regular intervals. I understood that both forms of my research journal enabled me to stay organized, engaged in regular reflection, and generating new questions and ideas (Ravitch & Carl, p.124). Further, I recognized that timely transference of thoughts, observations, ideas, questions, and reflections was crucial. After all, “observations without fieldnotes are mere memories, not data” (Ravitch & Carl, p.159).

*Researcher interviews.* I recruited a critical friend at my workplace to interview me to surface my thoughts, concerns, questions, and reflections before and during the various components of the data collection and data analysis processes. The initial researcher interview enabled me to consider my anxieties and preconceptions.
Subsequent researcher interviews helped me to reflect aloud, surfacing struggles related to validity and/or needs for modifications to the interviews, focus groups, or cooperative co-inquiry elements of the study. Additionally, the ideas generated in the process of reflecting aloud with a critical friend informed my memo writing. (Please refer to Appendix E: Researcher Interview Protocol on page 130.)

**Memos.** Memo writing is a data collection tool that I have used regularly (often less formally and strictly for my own benefit) in my professional life. I am a naturally reflective person and appreciate the organization of my thinking that occurs when I document specific experiences and their impact on my thinking process. In this study, I used critical incident memos for the articulation of my decision-making and the documentation of changes in my research study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Additionally, I used reflective memos—related to my positionality, after my interviews with the 12th Grade Level Coordinator (GLC) and faculty mentors, after facilitating the 12th grade student focus groups, after the student cooperative co-inquiry team’s practice and actual descriptive review rounds, and also as a “check-in” concerning my “general impressions about the space, environment, and the participants” (Ravitch & Carl, p.116).

**Data collection: sequenced research methods (in order of occurrence).**

**Archival data.** I utilized EWS’s organizational archival data in the generation of my research question and the completion of both the literature review / conceptual framework and the introduction / significance / rationale stages of my dissertation proposal development process. I also drew upon primary source materials, including
explanations of the School’s Mission, Values, and Ten Commitments as well as descriptions of existing systems and programs that are contained within the School’s handbook. Finally, I have used “original or firsthand accounts of events” (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 2007, p.205)—the hired advisory consultant’s unpublished report and the notes from the faculty-administrator retreat during which the Chavaya program was conceived—throughout the research study.

Focus groups. I facilitated a total of three student focus groups in April 2017. Each of these three focus groups consisted of four, five, and six 12th grade students, respectively. The focus groups occurred during a 45-minute lunch period. I provided lunches for all student research participants so that their time discussing student voice within the Advisory/Chavaya context would be maximized.

As student focus group facilitator, I recorded each of the three focus groups using the “rev” app on my phone. This allowed for consistency and quick turnaround of transcripts for collaborative analysis by my student cooperative co-inquiry team. Time was of the essence since all students departed for their month-long senior trip to Poland and Israel in the second week of May 2017.

The experience of learning directly from students about their perceptions of the supports for and inhibitors to the development and practice of student voice was a humbling one. I left each focus group filled with gratitude for the thoughtful contributions and the trusting nature of these students. (Please refer to Appendix G: Student Focus Group Protocol on page 132.)
**Interviews.** A data-rich portion of my data collection process was the in-depth qualitative interview phase (Rubin & Rubin, 2012) through which I learned the perspective of the faculty member who serves as the 12th Grade Level Coordinator (in charge of advising curriculum development, curriculum implementation, and programming) and the five faculty members who serve as 12th Grade Faculty Mentors. Since “interviewing gives us access to the observations of others,” I felt especially fortunate that this was a heterogeneous group of colleagues whose service to the school spans from two to fourteen years and whose roles include teaching, advising, and administration within the EWS community (Rubin & Rubin, p.103).

I relied upon a semi-structured interview format. I had a “specific topic to learn about, prepare(d) a limited number of questions in advance, and plan(ned) to ask follow-up questions” (Rubin & Rubin, p.31). The semi-structured, in-depth qualitative interview was based on key questions while simultaneously involving “the customization of each conversation through individualizing follow-up questions and probes for specifics” (Ravitch & Carl, p.147). The design of my interviews was intended to follow a logical sequence since “questions that appear logical to interviewees are easier for them to answer” (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, p.181). This required active listening skills on my part as the practitioner-researcher. Finally, my interviews were also responsive in nature because they “emphasize(d) the importance of building a relationship of trust between the interviewer and interviewee that leads to more give-and-take in the conversation” (Rubin & Rubin, p.36). (Please refer to Appendix F (Grade Level Coordinator (GLC) / 12th Grade Faculty Mentor Interview Protocol) on page 131.)
Data Analysis

According to Maxwell (2013), “All data should be treated critically, and not simply accepted at face value” (p.88). My data analysis began early (while I was reading through archival data related to the Advisory and Chavaya programs and their periodic review and assessment through the years). It continued throughout the data collection process as I reflected upon focus group and interview data through memo writing (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, p.168).

Formal data analysis occurred in three phases. The first phase involved three sessions with my student cooperative co-inquiry group. During each of the three sessions, we followed a modified descriptive review protocol (see Appendix B) as a method for surfacing themes from each of the three student focus group transcripts. The focus group protocol was designed to develop a thorough understanding of student perceptions of (a) the prioritization of student voice for the creation and implementation of advising curriculum that is relevant and useful to students, and (b) the supports for and inhibitors to the development and practice of student voice through the school’s advising program.

The eight 12th grade students—four boys and four girls—who served on the cooperative co-inquiry team had received copies of de-identified focus group transcripts in advance of each descriptive review session. This way, students were able to read through the data and make selections that resonated with them. During the sessions, each student took a turn reading a portion of the data and the rest of the cooperative co-inquiry group had the opportunity to contribute a descriptive response to that portion of the data.
In this way, students gave voice to the earlier contributions of their peers and offered
descriptive comments and/or questions related to the same. (The data selected for
descriptive review by students who served on the cooperative co-inquiry team are found
in Appendix C.)

The second phase of data analysis occurred with my Mid-Career peers during the
July class meeting of the University of Pennsylvania’s EDUC 801-304 Inquiry
Community, a course designed to assist with the descriptive review of one’s data. During
my inquiry session, members of my cohort reviewed and discussed one of the three
transcripts from the student cooperative co-inquiry team’s descriptive review of student
focus group transcript data. This meta-analysis session was helpful for several reasons.
First, the clarifying questions that were asked prior to the descriptive review rounds
revealed aspects of my study that I needed to explain in further detail in order to
maximize the understanding of those from outside of my school context. Next, my
classmates’ reflections on the words “voice” and “power” were invaluable to me as I
continued to work to develop codes that would help in grappling with the relationship
between the two concepts when applied to both student and faculty data. Finally, my
peers expressed how impressed they were by the maturity of the student cooperative co-
inquiry group’s dedication to the data analysis task. One of them shared the following
observation after reading the cooperative co-inquiry group transcript: “Students were
experts. If you removed the student identifier, you would maybe think they were teachers
or administrators.” Another spoke of the generosity of spirit of the students who were
able to sidestep judgment, opting instead to empathize with their peers’ and mentors’ experiences throughout the inquiry process.

During the third and final phase of data analysis, I had the opportunity to look across data types—everything from archival, observational, and fieldnote data to focus group and interview data. I generated a short-list of deductive codes based on review of and reflection on my research questions, conceptual framework, and applicable literature. I applied these deductive codes to one student focus group transcript and to one student cooperative co-inquiry team descriptive review transcript and worked to develop a set of inductive codes that would bridge the two layers of transcript data. Finally, I applied the deductive and inductive codes to the transcript data collected during the student focus groups, the student cooperative co-inquiry team’s descriptive review processes, and the faculty interviews.

The purpose of first (descriptive) and second (pattern) coding strategies for the analysis of interview and focus group transcripts, fieldnotes, and archival data was “to retrieve the most meaningful material, to assemble chunks of data that go together, and to further condense the bulk into readily analyzable units” (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, p.73). Using the qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti.8.0, I worked to organize coded data using a matrix display, “an ‘at-a-glance’ format for reflection, verification, conclusion drawing, and other analytical acts” (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, p.91). This was followed by the regular review of said matrix in conjunction with field notes and memos for the creation of a narrative description. My choice to employ a variety of data
collection methods (archival data, focus groups, memos, interviews, and researcher fieldnotes) enabled me to triangulate my findings and assess their validity.

The solitary data analysis experience was occasionally an intimidating and always a humbling one for me as the research practitioner. I found the task of interrogating and synthesizing the coded data intimidating at times because of the large quantity of data to consider and because I wanted to be sure that I was adequately representing the qualitative data entrusted to me. The honesty and thoughtfulness of my research participants was a gift that left me feeling humbled throughout the data collection and analysis processes.

**Researcher relationships.** Maxwell references Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman Davis (1997) who argued that “‘relationships that are complex, fluid, symmetric, and reciprocal—that are shaped by both researchers and actors—reflect a more responsible and ethical stance and are likely to yield deeper data and better social science’ (pp.137-138), and they emphasized the continual creation and renegotiation of trust, intimacy, and reciprocity” (Maxwell, p.92). As a dedicated student advocate, I genuinely care for and value the unique perspectives that each student is generously entrusting to me. Always mindful of practicing active listening throughout the data collection and descriptive review processes, I wanted to honor the time, dedication, and vulnerability of my student participants and student cooperative co-inquiry team as well as my faculty participants. I have striven “to remain as authentic as possible to participants’ experiences” and coached my cooperative co-inquiry team to do the same, understanding that “the goal is to rigorously, ethically, and thoroughly answer (my) research questions to achieve a
complex and multi-perspectival understanding” (Ravitch & Carl, pp. 115 and 138).

Further, while my qualitative research findings will not be generalizable, it is my hope that they “can help to make important decisions and suggest applications to a broader population,” as well as provide a basis for generating further research (Ravitch & Carl, p. 138).

**Researcher positionality.** “Finally, you need to be aware of the purposes and assumptions that you bring to the relationship, which you may not initially be aware of” (Maxwell, p. 93). First, I was new to the EWS community; therefore, I had only known the student and faculty research participants and the student cooperative co-inquiry team for about 6 months. My impression was, and is, that I have strong relationships and good rapport with both students and faculty; however, I understand that there may have been a reluctance to trust my intentions and/or motives since our relationships were new and trust takes time to develop.

Second, I had originally interviewed for the position of Upper School Division Head and was one of two finalists for that position. In the end, the other finalist was hired for that position and I was hired to serve as Director of Student Life, Chairperson of the World Languages Department, and Spanish teacher. In November, the newly hired Upper School Division Head was asked to resign when the Head of School determined (through both his personal experience and anecdotes that his trusted colleagues had brought to his attention) that he was not a good fit for the EWS community. I was then asked to serve as Interim Dean of Students and the Dean of Students was asked to serve as the Interim Upper School Division Head. There is the possibility that the challenging
start to the school year and/or my evolving roles may have been on the minds of research participants and may have impacted their responses in the focus groups, the interviews, or the descriptive review sessions. That said, I did not sense that anyone was reluctant to share during these data gathering conversations. Instead, I had the impression that participants were quite forthcoming with their perceptions and experiences related to student voice within the Advisory/Chavaya context.

Finally, my choice to study the 12th grade exclusively was an intentional effort to avoid potential bias and discomfort from students and faculty. My daughter (having made the move with me from another independent school in August 2016), was a new 9th grader at EWS during the months I was involved in data collection. And, in my original role as Director of Student Life, one of my responsibilities was the creation of the 10th Grade Chavaya curriculum, a responsibility that I passed on to a colleague after my role and responsibilities changed. I chose not to work with the 11th graders because much of their curriculum was already planned and time-sensitive because it involves preparing for the college application process.

Limitations

This study included the perspectives of 23 students and 6 faculty members from a total student body of 311 and faculty of 43. Therefore, the data accounts for approximately 7% of upper school students and approximately 14% of upper school faculty. The choice to work exclusively with the 12th graders and their faculty mentors and grade level coordinator was an intentional one. In addition to being the most practical and politically sound grade level choice, the Class of 2017 was the only group of students that had experienced both the Advisory Program (as 9th graders) and the
**Chavaya Program** (as 10th, 11th, and 12th graders). Therefore, within the smaller Class of 2017 context, this study represents approximately 29% of 12th grade student and 55% of 12th grade faculty perspectives.

Nevertheless, the study is context-specific (a relatively small Jewish Day School in Houston, TX) as well as program-specific (our unique brand of advisory). Generalizations to other schools and programs would not be prudent. That said, the study participants’ experiences and perceptions related to support for and inhibitors to the development and practice of student voice may offer insights for practitioners and researchers who wish to develop and/or study school programming that aims to enhance the likelihood of the former and reduce the risk of the latter.

Additional limitations include the gender disparity among student focus group participants, the reliance on participant memory of the past four years of Advisory/Chavaya programming, and the practitioner researcher’s positionality. Of the 15 students who participated in focus groups, only two students were males. Fortunately, the student cooperative co-inquiry group—consisting of four males and four females—was able to claim the gender equity that was lacking in the focus groups. Nevertheless, it is unclear as to whether or not the student data would have yielded different findings if more male voices had been represented.

Next, the focus group protocol asked students to reflect on the past four years of Advisory/Chavaya programming. Another study limitation is the reliance on student memory at a time when burn-out might be greatest. That said, these students just as easily might have been more reflective at this point in their high school careers. It was
certainly my impression that these students took their focus group participation seriously; some even articulated a hopefulness that their insights would improve the experiences of future students.

Finally, my positionality as a first-year employee at EWS may have impacted my findings. My roles and responsibilities evolved from Director of Student Life to Interim Dean of Students during the course of the school year. One of my professional responsibilities as Dean of Students was the enforcement of school policies and procedures. Therefore, it is conceivable that some students may have been reluctant to offer critical feedback for fear of repercussion. Once again, the decision to work with 12th graders who were at the end of their high school experience was an effort to mitigate this potential limitation.
Chapter 4: Key Themes and Findings

Introduction

Throughout the data analysis process, I referred back to the following research questions that served as an anchor in my efforts to stay the original course of my study:

1. How do upper school students and their faculty mentors perceive and experience the development and practice of student voice through the school’s advising program? 2. What are supports for the development and practice of student voice within the advisory context (as perceived by upper school students and by their faculty mentors)? 3. What are deterrents/inhibitors to the development and practice of student voice within the advisory context (as perceived by upper school students and by their faculty mentors)? 4. In what ways is my work as an educational leader affected by my inquiry? I will return to these questions for the discussion of my findings in the following chapter. Key themes that emerged from the data were the missing goal and inconsistent structure of the Chavaya Program, the need for a supportive context for SEL and strong student-teacher relationships, the importance of ongoing SEL training and a system of accountability, the need for faculty and student voices for the creation of meaningful Chavaya content, and the importance of a reconceptualization of student voice.

Looking Closely: The Chavaya Experience

Transcript data from both students and faculty reveal that the lack of a clearly communicated program goal, an inconsistent program structure, and inauthentic contexts for meaningful connection are all contributors to the lack of traction of the EWS Advisory/Chavaya Program. Additionally, in its current iteration, Chavaya is not
consistently providing the time or space for the development of strong student-mentor relationships. Some students’ lack of engagement is related to their not feeling safe to be honest because feedback they have provided has been repeatedly ignored. Data from focus groups and interviews help to explain some of the ways that the success of the Advisory/Chavaya Program has been undermined over time.

**No clear goal.** The EWS Upper School Handbook states that “the Chavaya curriculum delivers programs designed to educate and develop students outside of the formal classroom setting. The curriculum includes topics centered on citizenship education and personal development.” However, the dominant perception amongst students and faculty who have personal experience with the program is that Chavaya is used as a time and space for the dissemination of information. During the second of three student focus groups, one student offered the following observation:

Some of the things we do during Chavaya we don't want to do, but we sort of have to do, like aren't we required by law to talk about fire drills and stuff like that? That's stuff we have to do, I feel like... But, I feel like Chavaya can't be both a place to do that and a place for bonding and close relationships with their mentors. I feel like it sort of inhibits the purpose of having a mentor by doing all of the stuff we have to do, so if we could find a different forum for that, and not call it Chavaya.” (student from focus group, April 20, 2017)

A faculty mentor offers a similar commentary:

I think it is a way to disseminate information to the students that can be disseminated in monologue. I'm just thinking back at the last few Chavayas (sic) I've had, it's been, "Here's information about the 4M speakers that we're about to hear. Here's the survey that you're going to fill out about wellness. Here are procedures about fire drills." Or whatever it is. That's really a lot of what it is. I mean, it may be different in different grades, but certainly for the senior class, there's not much else. (faculty mentor interview, May 23, 2017)
Interestingly, the Grade Level Coordinator (that is, the faculty member tasked with the creation of the curricular programming and activities for Chavaya) explains her perception of the strengths of the Chavaya Program as follows:

I love the fact that we do have a set time to get together, whether it's as individual small groups or as a large group. I think that it's all about community building and being in touch with the kids and the mentors and seeing what's going on. That's the only way we're going to know is by having these regularly scheduled meetings. The kids seem to like it. I think that the mentors like it. The mentors get a lot of perks, especially with the senior Chavaya, with the senior surprises and all the fun stuff that we benefit from. (GLC interview, May 24, 2017)

Clearly, there is a discrepancy between the perception of the Grade Level Coordinator (who creates the curriculum) and the perceptions of the students and faculty mentors (who experience and implement it). The Grade Level Coordinator values Chavaya as an opportunity for community and relationship building while mentees and mentors experience the same program as top-down directives to explain school policies and procedures.

An inconsistent structure. Student research participants experienced Advisory as freshmen and Chavaya as sophomores, juniors, and seniors. As 9th graders, students and faculty were told that the Advisory they were assigned to would be their Advisory group for the next four years. Therefore, the vision for Advisory at that time was that of a looping advisory structure. Some student research participants remember feeling excited by this prospect and others voiced a preference for a different advisory assignment each year, as demonstrated in the following excerpts from three different student focus group transcripts. The first student explains the advisory structure that had been promised to their grade level:
At the beginning, they said that we kept the same advisory group, or I guess Chavaya now, for all four years. Then they changed it every single year because they kept on changing the program. I think that was a huge take-back from the entire idea of having an advisory group to grow close to and stuff like that. I know we're a tiny school but having four different advisory groups - Chavaya now ... That's ridiculous. . (student from focus group, April 19, 2017)

Another student explained the negative impact of a rotating advisory group as follows, “When you keep changing it, there's no connection at all. You're supposed to have a connection to your Chavaya group or your advisory group or whatever you want to call it but there is none because we keep changing it every year.” (student from focus group, April 19, 2017)

While there was a clear preference for a looping advisory structure in two of the three focus groups, the student participants in the third focus group felt differently, as expressed below:

I'm glad that we didn't get the same group just because it is a small school and it gives us an opportunity to expand even the slightest bit and be around people that you might not normally be around. So instead of us just being in a constant comfort zone, we have to readjust a little every year. Which it is a little step back with what we're able to accomplish just because of comfort, but ultimately I think for student experience and outreach with each other it's more productive. (student from focus group 3, April 25, 2017)

Regardless of the advisory structure preference, the decision was made above the student and faculty mentor level to abandon the looping advisory structure that was originally communicated to students. An explanation of the reasoning for that change was not communicated to students or faculty, resulting in even less clarity amongst students and faculty about the goal of the program.

The decision to abandon the earlier plan for a looping advisory and the name change from Advisory to Chavaya occurred at about the same time. Both students and
faculty remember Advisory as having a looser framework than its Chavaya counterpart. One student recalls, “I just remember sophomore year Chavaya was brand new, so it was really forced on us and topics we would discuss were so random. It was like every Tuesday and Thursday it was the randomness thing that no one really understood.” (student from focus group, April 25, 2017) Another student recounts, “In freshman year, my Advisory, everyone was so nice to each other and wanting to talk. That's not how my Chavaya is anymore. (student from focus group, April 19, 2017)

A faculty mentor who began serving in that capacity the same year as the name change observed that “They (The students) had some difficulties getting used to it, and they were just used to Advisory which was a little bit more lax, and they could use the time as they saw fit. So, there was some adjustment for them in that, or more of a planned curriculum, set goals, different activities that were pre-planned so that they couldn't just use that period as an extra study hall or free time.” (faculty mentor interview, May 16, 2017)

The name change from Advisory to Chavaya, while intended as a positive rebranding of Advisory, appeared to have had the opposite impact on students who remembered the fear and anxiety they felt as rising sophomores who faced punitive consequences if they were caught even using the word “Advisory” rather than “Chavaya.”

At the beginning of sophomore year, it was like, "This isn't my advisory group and why is it called Chavaya now?" There was a jar for people who said advisory… You had to pay a dollar every time you say advisory instead of Chavaya. I was like, "That's ridiculous. I don't have any money." (student from focus group, April 19, 2017)
During a different focus group, another student remarks, “If it (Chavaya) means pleasant experience and you're making someone pay every time they don't say pleasant experience, like what is that?” (student from focus group, April 19, 2017) Several other students from the first focus group had the following exchange when they remembered the same:

Speaker 2: Seriously? It's not pleasant when I feel like they're a dictatorship preventing me from saying advisory.
Speaker 3: For the transition year, that's what it felt like. Okay. It's advisory but you can't call it advisory.
Speaker 2: It's called Chavaya. It's Chavaya.
Speaker 3: It was very forceful. Scary. (student from focus group, April 19, 2017)

When asked about the penalty imposed for not using the new name Chavaya, the Grade Level Coordinator (GLC) remembers, “I think they would charge you a quarter if you said the A word instead of the C word. It was kind of a joke.” (GLC interview, May 24, 2017) As we saw earlier with the different perspectives on the purpose of Advisory/Chavaya, the students and the GLC have markedly different perceptions of the consequences for the misuse of the program title. The students used the words “they got mad” and “they were so stern” when referring to enforcement of the new terminology by at least some administrators and faculty members. (students from focus groups, April 20 & 25, 2017) What may have been intended as a joke was not perceived as one.

Finally, when I asked a faculty mentor to tell me more about the evolution of Advisory during her decade at the school, I learned the following:

Evolution is maybe a generous term because it implies that there's been sort of smart or thoughtful changes made or that what's worked we've kept or that kind of thing, and I wish that were the case, but I don't really think that it has been. I think the programming is dependent largely on the people in charge, sort of the personalities or the philosophies of the people kind of running things, and while I
think it can be good to have people bring new ideas in and things like that, I wish there were more consistency in terms of really thinking about what's best for our kids and our school, as opposed to it really varying widely based on who was running it.  (faculty mentor interview, May 22, 2017)

The lack of a shared program vision at the mentor and mentee level combined with the top-down program creation and control at the GLC (or, previously the administrative) level help to explain the inconsistencies of Advisory/Chavaya as well as the program’s inability to gain traction.

**An inauthentic context for the building and strengthening of relationships.**

Students and faculty concur that Chavaya is not a space that is conducive to authentic building or strengthening of relationships (whether amongst students or between mentor and mentee). One reason that was cited repeatedly relates to the activities that are planned by the GLC for use by the mentor and mentees during the (up to) two thirty-minute long Chavaya meetings per week. Another reason was the lack of student voice and the faculty-articulated perception that students do not feel safe to be honest and transparent within this program context.

One student explains, “Chavaya isn't like ... I feel like it's supposed to be where you can talk to your peers and build a bonding relationship with a group, but I just really don't think it's like that.  (student from focus group, April 20, 2017) Another student recalls the fun activities and team-building exercises that she and her peers have experienced during school trips (including beginning of school grade-level retreats as well as winter outdoor and spring culture trips that are part of the school’s commitment to experiential education). She goes on to contrast “sort of naturally building friendships
and a bond” that were part of her experience on these trips to the “forced conversations” that are the norm during Chavaya. (student from focus group, April 25, 2017)

Concerning the relationship between a mentor and mentee, another student states, “I sort of feel like… the types of activities we're doing are not supporting a mentor relationship, if that makes sense.” (student from focus group, April 20, 2017) During a later focus group, another student elaborates on this idea as follows:

We do always have an opportunity to share what we think about whatever video we saw or whatever program we just did, but for the most part our meetings were just kind of in and out. You go, you do the thing that was sent in the email to the teacher that was the thing that was assigned to do, and then after that it's kind of a forced meeting and then it's a study hall for the rest of the time. It's a constrained schedule that doesn't really allow for students to explore topics that they're interested in, because everything's being assigned. Although we do have that time to share our thoughts after, it's not that much of student voice, I don't think. (student from focus group, April 25, 2017)

Students from all three focus groups as well as four of the five faculty mentors concur that student voice (explained as the opportunity to express your sense of self having to do with who you are, your ideas, your perspectives, your beliefs, your values) is not prioritized within the Chavaya Program. One faculty mentor acknowledges the limited engagement of student voice as follows:

I know we sent out surveys, but that to me, again, it's like they don't necessarily have the buy-in to really tell you what they think, they're not sure it's safe to tell you what they think, they don't want to spend the time filling out the survey if it's not gonna change from year to year. I just don't think that, to me, my sense of it is that there's been very little student input. Whatever input that’s coming is being filtered through mentors or advisors. Yeah, voice to me is just not present. (faculty mentor interview, May 22, 2017)

When student voice is repeatedly solicited and repeatedly ignored, the natural repercussion is disengagement, distrust, and/or cynicism.
The GLC offers a different perspective of Chavaya as a context for student voice during her interview:

*Chavaya* essentially is a class so I think that we want to hear from the kids. We want to do things that will benefit them. I think it's certainly a priority. If we were just doing what we wanted to do, then I don't think it would be successful. Again, I think that there's always room for improvement, but I think we're always open to listening to them and engaging the pulse. Like I said, I can tell when the kids are totally just tapped out and we'll send them an email and say, "Okay guys, y'all can just have a study hall." In years past we've also tried to stay away from just calling it a study hall or study time just because we don't want them to perceive it as this free time, but they're teenagers and they need that. When we give that to them they're so thankful because they feel heard.  (GLC interview, May 24, 2017)

The gift of time was mentioned again when the GLC explained that one of the perks for faculty who are given a senior *Chavaya* assignment is that they do not have mentor responsibilities for the last month of the school year (when 12th grade students spend four weeks traveling through and studying in Poland and Israel). The idea of gifting time and the perception that time without *Chavaya* responsibilities is a special benefit speak to both the top-down decision-making structure that characterizes this program and the lack of meaningful, engaging programming content. Both of these factors work against the building of authentic relationships that tends to be the experience of students and teachers in most other contexts at EWS.

**Creating a Context for Supporting SEL**

Students and faculty agree that the current practice of *Chavaya* reflects a lack of voice (from students and faculty), a lack of meaningful and relevant content, and a lack of training and feedback systems. A student participant in the first focus group made the following statement (which was subsequently shared as part of the student cooperative co-inquiry group’s descriptive review process), “Nobody really knew what was going on
and then it took five or six minutes to pull up a PowerPoint that we maybe talked about for two minutes and then left.” (student from focus group, April 19, 2017) A faculty mentor underscores the idea that the practice of using *Chavaya* as a place and time for the dissemination of information is not conducive to bonding nor is it compatible with student and faculty engagement over meaningful SEL content when she explains,

> Disseminating information, to me, is not a good enough reason to have a program, especially when it takes up so much time of faculty and students, and bonding with each other, again, I don't see that happening in the programs as they’re designed. I’m not really clear ... It just feels like a place-holder to me, and I have seen some more ... I've seen more successful versions, I would say, in the middle school. (faculty mentor interview, May 22, 2017)

In addition to “place-holder,” other terms that faculty mentors used when referring to *Chavaya* were “catch-all,” “filler,” and “fluff.” One of these faculty mentors elaborates by stating, “To me, *Chavaya* seems to me to be the ‘Oh, we need the kids to do this little thing that’s only going to take 20 minutes, let’s put it as *Chavaya*.” (faculty mentor interview, May 11, 2017)

**Other EWS programs provide a space for relationship, voice, and engagement.** Students experience their core courses and extracurricular activities (including sports, fine arts, clubs, assemblies, and school governance committees) as spaces where their voices and passions are valued. One student compares a class to *Chavaya* by stating, “I think a lot of our individual classes we take ... We have way more voice and some projects, we actually choose our own topic and we do it on our own. Whereas in *Chavaya*, there's nothing like that. (student from focus group, April 19, 2017) Another student explains, “Definitely I think there's more passion in our individual courses and that's more visible than in *Chavaya*. In *Chavaya*, I feel like that's not really a
voice. That's more of, we have to answer this.” (student from focus group, April 19, 2017) The articulated perceptions of these students resonated amongst their peers who noticed that these lines and others demonstrate that, “There's a lack of connection in Chavaya.” (student from cooperative co-inquiry descriptive review session, April 28, 2017) One member of the cooperative co-inquiry community wonders aloud, “How can we make these Chavaya connections like our regular class connections? (student from cooperative co-inquiry descriptive review session, April 28, 2017)

Within the classroom context, student voice is valued, and relational trust develops organically. One faculty mentor states, “We specifically design projects around what the kids in the class want to do.” (faculty mentor interview, May 11, 2017) A student speaks to the link between voice and relational trust when she confides,

I think that I would feel comfortable voicing my opinion to any of my teachers. Whether I would feel comfortable enough to tell if I had an issue, I feel like it wouldn't be all of them, but I think I respect all of them enough. And I think they respect me enough to take my opinion. (student from focus group, April 20, 2017)

A faculty mentor remembers specific recent examples wherein his academic students have approached him because they see him as someone to confide in, someone who is both trustworthy and willing to advocate on behalf of students. His words follow:

He came to me because he trusted me. Paul (pseudonym of a 12th grade male student), when he came that time, he's not in my advisory. He came to me because he trusted me. That happens just organically. Mary (pseudonym of a 12th grade female student) came to me, she might even be ... Here's the thing, I don't really know who's in my advisory. At the end of the year, it's so sad to say, but she came to me to advocate for her to stay here for her boyfriend's prom and not go to Israel when everyone else was leaving... She didn't come to me because I was her
advisor. She came to me because she trusted me, and she knew that I would speak for her on behalf of her. (faculty mentor interview, May 3, 2017)

This faculty mentor was one of three who spoke about not remembering exactly which 12th grade students were in his Chavaya group. All three mentioned this during their respective interviews as an embarrassing truth that was markedly different from their sense of connection with students in almost all other programmatic spaces at EWS. One of these three faculty mentors relates the following observation:

I think in terms of policies and things like that, I think it's probably a little bit of an outlier. I think we do a fairly good job as an institution of incorporating student voice, I mean, we're an institution so I'm sure the students probably don't always feel that way, but ... For example, when the dress code was rebooted, there was a group of students that sat on that committee with faculty and parents and admin and designed it, and same with the attendance policy. We have a policy committee that has students on it, things like that. I don't know that anybody has ever had students sit down and talk about advisory or Chavaya until you did it.

I would say in terms of classrooms I think it depends a lot on the faculty member, but I would say there's a good chunk of us who really do incorporate student voice pretty thoughtfully and consistently into our classes. Yeah, and I think that was probably part of why it feels like such a kind of "Ugh" topic to people. It's not consistent with who we are or who we at least try to be. It's kind of like the elephant in the room. (faculty mentor interview, May 22, 2017)

Another faculty mentor echoes the mention of student participation on the policy committee and adds other examples of student voice in various aspects of school governance ranging from the Student Government Association (SGA) to the Va’ad Tzedek (a committee of upper school students and faculty who hear cases involving violations of the School’s “Ten Commitments” and make restorative justice recommendations to school administrators) (faculty member interview, May 3, 2017).

Still another faculty mentor speaks to the natural incorporation of meaningful and
relevant life skills into one’s academic teaching curriculum and club sponsorships, explaining that she doesn’t “think that’s necessarily a thing that needs to be addressed” within a stand-alone program like Chavaya (faculty mentor interview, May 23, 2017).

Strong student-teacher relationships characterized by mutual trust, respect, and care provide an authentic context for the development and practice of student voice (specifically) and social emotional learning (more generally). At EWS, students and teachers agree that strong student-teacher relationships are a priority within the classroom setting and through extracurricular involvement. One faculty mentor, citing a recent student initiative to provide gender neutral bathrooms (as well as that initiative’s publicly stated support by the Head of School) indicates that the overarching school culture is one that prioritizes student voice (faculty mentor interview, May 3, 2017). Nevertheless, the Advisory/Chavaya program has not consistently provided a context for student voice, relationship development, or meaningful content. One student concludes,

For me, all of the topics that have been presented throughout four years of Chavaya, I was just not interested in, so I just did not have that engagement. I think they should ask us what we would like to talk about, so they can see that full participation out of everyone. (student from focus group, April 25, 2017)

While experienced in other EWS contexts, the majority of teacher and all student participants agreed that student voice is not prioritized in the Chavaya context.

Inclusion of faculty and student voices for the creation of a shared vision. Moving to a true shared vision requires an abandonment of the existing system and its earlier models. Two faculty mentors express their frustrations that starting from scratch has not yet been attempted with the struggling Advisory/Chavaya Program. One says,
Cramming something into a system and making it fit, which is kind of what it feels like we've been doing, like, "Well, it's on the schedule. It's already there, so now we have to fill this time." Like I said, kids sense that a mile away and they roll their eyes and they ... I mean, I would have paid money to be in some of those focus groups, I'm sure it was fascinating to hear what they had to say. (faculty mentor interview, May 22, 2017)

Another faculty mentor explains,

Creating programming to fill a space rather than creating, having a need, a demonstrated need and then creating programming around that. It just felt very much like we just have to fill that time since we have a space in our schedule. Quick, let's think of something to put into it. And I don't think that the particular lessons or activities were actually related to an interest or a demonstrated need. (faculty mentor interview, May 23, 2017)

Moving away from a forced, top-down programming model and embracing a shared vision model would allow students and faculty to grapple with the question that one of the members of the student cooperative co-inquiry team posed when he asked, “What do students actually want out of Chavaya?” (student from cooperative co-inquiry descriptive review session, May 1, 2017) It would also provide for some consistency that has been missing due to regular turnover of the Student Life Coordinator or GLC who has historically been tasked with the creation of the Chavaya curriculum and programming. Another faculty mentor laments that students likely wonder, “‘Why are we doing this?’ And I think the kids are probably seeing very different things from year to year and that has to be confusing to them and probably frustrating.” (faculty mentor interview, May 22, 2017)

Two of the five faculty mentors shared some of their ideas for Chavaya during the course of their interviews. Their ideas for a more intentional focus on SEL, a space for reflection and discussion, the time to support student participation in extracurricular as
well as experiential learning activities, and the teaching and learning of relevant life skills might factor into a shared vision for future *Chavaya* programming if they become part of the conversation.

As members of the student cooperative co-inquiry team aptly noted, the creation of a shared vision will likely require compromise and the consideration of the specific needs of students at each grade level. One member of the team wonders aloud,

Would it be beneficial to send out an email over the summer to have groups of students come in and share what they would like to be doing during *Chavaya* in each grade, and what their vision of *Chavaya* is? (student from cooperative co-inquiry descriptive review session, May 1, 2017)

A faculty mentor later advocates for the same during her interview:

I think having a committee of students would be really smart, especially if you get that perspective across different grade levels. I think, really, it's a big picture conversation at this point, and I know we're having a lot of... We have *Chavaya* meetings, but that's to discuss like, "Okay, what are we doing in the next three weeks?" You can't have a conversation of like, "How are we gonna overhaul this system?" People are tired and it's 4:00 and they want to go home, you know?... I think, ideally, that would be like a summer conversation or end of the school year conversation and create some kind of buy-in for students or give them some kind of part for doing that, whether it's they get their volunteer hours or feeding them lunch or whatever it is, and that they really do have a sense that they are gonna get... Their input is gonna be heard, and that we really are up for altering this in ways that they recommend. And have a real conversation about what is the point of this. (May 22, 2017)

The creation of a shared vision will require student and faculty voices and a school-wide commitment to the complete redesign of the *Chavaya* program to enact that shared vision.

**Engagement of student voice as a conduit for meaningful SEL content.** A shared vision requires the participation and voice of faculty and students for its creation. While this represents a digression from historical practice wherein the GLC (or, the
Student Life Coordinator prior to a few years ago) has assumed the bulk of the responsibility for Chavaya programming and activities, faculty have experienced more opportunities for participation than students have experienced. Several times each semester, teachers have meetings with the GLC for their assigned Chavaya grade level. These meetings (referred to by one faculty mentor in her quote above) tend to be times to discuss the upcoming programming plans and expectations. From time to time, student input has also been solicited through surveys and/or conversations during Chavaya. The genuine engagement of student voice as a conduit for meaningful, relevant SEL content requires intentional and ongoing student involvement and represents a departure from the current practice of Chavaya.

Students see the need for a dramatic increase in their involvement at the planning stages in order for Chavaya to improve. One student on the cooperative co-inquiry team remarks, “Finding topics that teenagers can relate to can be very helpful for increasing participation.” (student from cooperative co-inquiry descriptive review session, May 1, 2017) Another student on the team asks, “How can we introduce why we’re doing things in Chavaya to help students want to participate?” (student from cooperative co-inquiry descriptive review session, May 1, 2017) Student focus group participants voiced components of their vision for Chavaya and these included a safe space for relationship building and the discussion of relevant content.

As the following transcript data excerpts demonstrate, this vision represents a departure from the current practice. “I feel it’s supposed to be where you can talk to your peers and build a bonding relationship with a group, but I just really don’t think it’s like
that.” (student from focus group, April 20, 2017) And, “Recently, especially in Chavaya, we’ve been doing maybe one thing. The rest of the year, as far as I remember, we haven’t done anything that’s actually useful at all.” (student from focus group, April 19, 2017) The student desire for relevant content resonated with a peer who was part of the cooperative co-inquiry team when he offered the following descriptive review, “Students seem to appreciate Chavaya centered around teaching applicable skills that they can see themselves using in the future.” (student from cooperative co-inquiry descriptive review session, May 1, 2017)

The need for meaningful content is also the perception of faculty mentors, as the following portion of interview data reveals:

And it was just really terrible. It was really thrown together, and we did the same activities for ninth grade and 12th grade and there was the marshmallow tower and we watched this random TED talk and then ... It was just clearly grasping for ideas and then half the time, the lessons weren't really planned out in advance and then that wasn't communicated to us. But it was intended as a program that would build life skills. That seemed like the goal of it. And then they decided to revamp it and call it "Chavaya" because there was too much negative association with the term "Advisory" but it was essentially the same thing…. it ended up just being kind of thrown together. One of them was an egg drop. "Here, make an egg drop," with no real preparation or context. (faculty mentor interview, May 23, 2017)

The same faculty mentor adds later, “There’s a lot of stuff that can be done with that time. I think the lessons don’t address the needs of the students.” (faculty mentor interview, May 23, 2017) Another faculty mentor advocates for students’ readiness and preference for challenging content and programming as follows:

I think that we sometimes tend to undersell our kids in terms of what they're capable of, and then also, what they want. I think that we sometimes just forget that they really crave stuff that has meaning and weight to it, and they feel patronized when we kind of are like, "Oh, you know, here's a little thing that we clearly made 15 minutes ago." Right? And I just think that there's so much
potential for a time or a space like advisory or Chavaya, but I do think that if there were ... Another thing, there have been some pockets of substantial, thoughtful programming, and they respond really well to it. I just hate that there's not, again I think it's mostly been because of time, energy, and buy-in, not because we can't create that kind of programming, but just because it's been very hard for whoever's been trying to do that, to do that. I think the kids could respond really quite well to it if it's thoughtfully done. Even if it's once a week, but really meaningful and power-pack, I think they would buy in and start to respond more and start to value it more. (faculty mentor interview, May 22, 2017)

Students also recognize the superficiality of current Chavaya activities. One student recounts,

It also might just be because we're seniors, but usually the activities that we do have, they're not necessarily requiring the student voice. I think one time we did a door decorating contest. I guess you could kind of say that student voice had an impact on that activity because you needed to cooperate with other students, but a majority of the activities that we do don't really require that much student voice or that much initiative. (student from focus group, April 19, 2017)

The risks of superficial engagement of student voice are addressed more thoroughly in a later finding. However, it is worth mentioning here that students recognize that meaningful engagement of voice requires student courage and faculty readiness.

One student explains, “Because it takes a lot of courage to talk about some topics, especially if they're of interest to you. Hopefully they are of interest to you. But to make yourself vulnerable is scary.” (student from focus group, April 25, 2017) A co-inquiry team member asks, “How are the Chavaya discussions different from the discussions that teachers do lead in their own classrooms?” (student from cooperative co-inquiry descriptive review session, April 28, 2017) A student research participant grasps the balancing act required for developing engaging and educationally valuable content when he states,
I feel like it's also difficult when you want to make it interesting for the kids but also you want to emphasize the student voice and the topics. You want to have that balance and make it interesting but also educational. (student from focus group, April 25, 2017)

These examples from the data demonstrate that students understand the need for faculty training and skill development for the successful facilitation of students’ social emotional development.

**Commitment to ongoing training and feedback structures.** While the creation of safe spaces is important in all teaching and learning contexts, faculty usually represent a broad range of facilitation and listening skills competencies and professional practice. Both students and faculty at EWS recognize that a successful *Chavaya* experience requires a level of commitment to SEL that not all faculty members seem to possess. One student participant observes:

I also think that it's really hard because you have some teachers that are interested in being a mentor and then you have completely the opposite side, do not want to do it at all. I think you can kind of tell when they feel that way. I think maybe it would be more helpful if we had more mentors who were more into it… And have it feel like an opt-in program rather than an opt-out program. (student from focus group, April 25, 2017)

Another student wonders aloud:

Should all teachers be allowed to run a *Chavaya*?... It seems like the advisor… if you want good relationships with the teacher and stuff… one thing was the whole opt in, opt out. I think that, either way, if you keep it the same or you change it, the advisor should know what's expected of them because there are some people who aren't really interested in it, and that's totally fine but especially if you're going to loop it, nobody wants to have an advisor who doesn't care for four years. (student from cooperative co-inquiry descriptive review session, May 1, 2017)

The student suggestion of giving faculty the option of assuming mentoring responsibilities might lead to higher levels of faculty buy-in (which, in turn, might lead to
higher levels of student buy-in), increasing the likelihood of successful Chavaya programming experiences.

A current faculty mentor empathizes with both the faculty mentor who may feel uncomfortable with SEL content and the students who end up suffering as a result of the mentor’s discomfort and/or shirked responsibilities:

I personally feel comfortable with the kinds of things we tend to talk about in advisory and Chavaya, but I know others who really don't, and so I think if you don't have that kind of buy-in then your kids are getting very different experiences. I totally get that it isn't necessarily fair to ask someone who doesn't, I mean, I lead discussions all the time about really intimate, difficult topics, but if that's not something you're trained in doing, it's gonna feel really hard probably or uncomfortable. I know faculty have batted around the idea of like, "Let people opt in to doing this, and the people who don't, let's find them some other duty." Like, to compensate for the time and energy, but just sort of deciding that people should do this, that also feels like you're kind of setting it up for it not to be a very successful system. Some people won't even, like literally, won't even do what they're being asked to do, and so then kids are basically just having a blow off period. I think it feels disrespectful of their (the students’) time, and the kids, I think, know that. Then, of course, why are they gonna take it seriously? (faculty mentor interview, May 22, 2017)

The same faculty mentor adds later:

Then you have to, I think, train advisors and I think people have to opt in to doing that kind of work, even if it means the groups are a little bit bigger, which isn't ideal, but I would rather have a group of 20 and feel like I was really trained and given some time and energy to do that work versus there's small groups but nothing's really getting delivered. (faculty mentor interview, May 22, 2017)

Independent of the suggestion of creating a system whereby faculty could choose to participate (or not) in the role of mentor is the emergent understanding (again, amongst students and faculty) that there is a need for a School commitment to the ongoing and purposeful training of and provision of feedback to faculty mentors.
Students understand that training will enhance the likelihood of faculty comfort with the facilitation of discussions of difficult topics related to one’s social and emotional wellbeing. One student explains, “Not a lot, but a few of the Chavaya mentors, they don’t have a lot of experience with leading discussions and things like that. They sort of feel uncomfortable in their positions. (student from focus group, April 19, 2017)

Sometimes the faculty mentor’s discomfort is evident when he/she dominates the conversation rather than listening to the students’ perspectives. Another student focus member participant states, “When (the mentor) gets assigned the topic to talk about, and that’s all they talk about the whole time and they don’t really listen to what we’re saying most of the time.” (student from focus group, April 20, 2017)

Finding the “sweet spot” of faculty mentor engagement and creation of the safe space for student engagement and comfortable embracing of vulnerability came up repeatedly in both student focus groups and the student cooperative co-inquiry descriptive review process. For example, one student research participant shares her opinion as follows:

I think that when the teacher is engaged the right amount and makes everybody feel comfortable then people like to speak up and use their voice. But I think when the teachers are not into it or they're over-the-top into it then that limits student voice. (student from focus group, April 25, 2017)

Later, during the descriptive review process, another student shared the previous data excerpt with the group. During the inquiry round of the same excerpt, two other students offer the following descriptive reviews: (1) “I think that the teacher setting the tone really decides how the entire year is going to go with participation.” And (2) “Students feel that
the teacher is either too engaged with *Chavaya* or not engaged enough.” (student from cooperative co-inquiry descriptive review session, May 1, 2017)

In addition to improving faculty mentors’ comfort levels with difficult discussion topics and helping them to develop an understanding of the “sweet spot” between their own engagement and the facilitation of student engagement with content, training may lead to a better system of organization than is the current experience of faculty and students. A faculty mentor explains:

> In terms of weaknesses, I think I mentioned, just lack of planning and clarity and lack of buy in. There's often just ... There's a lot of dead time and it's just hard to contain ... It's just hard for kind of everybody. That just doesn't feel very thoughtful and makes it seem to them like the adults don't know what's going on and that's never a good thing. (faculty mentor interview, May 22, 2017)

Students also perceive the lack of organization and preparation amongst some faculty mentors. One student remembers, “Nobody really knew what was going on, and then it took five or six minutes to pull up a PowerPoint that we maybe talked about for two minutes, then left.” Another student relates, “You can tell when the teacher seems bored to do something. They’re not really prepared for it. I’m not saying unprofessional. I’m saying you can tell that they’re not interested in it either.” A third student states:

> Yeah. If the school's going to do it, then they ... I'm not trying to put it on anybody but if we're going to do it, then I feel like it should be more organized otherwise I would rather just have a study hall. (students from cooperative co-inquiry descriptive review session, April 28, 2017)

This last student articulates a preference for meaningful programming or the ability to use that time in a more productive manner.

The lack of a mechanism for the gathering and processing of student and faculty feedback was another important finding that, if reversed, would likely provide helpful
information to better inform future programming decisions. Such a mechanism would allow students to express their concerns about the creation of safe spaces or faculty mentor preparation, organization, and training. One faculty mentor expresses her frustration with the organization’s tendency to use anecdotal evidence rather than evidence-based data to drive decision-making as follows:

I think not having a clearly defined structure in accountability is an institutional struggle to use data to drive decisions. I consider that student voice information, that's data that we should be using to drive our advisory curriculum and that is not something that we do. We don't gather and analyze data. We use anecdotal evidence from a very small subset of kids’ experiences to guide a lot of what we do. (faculty mentor interview, May 23, 2017)

Faculty and students perceive a need for the consistent reliance upon a dependable feedback mechanism to inform improved practice.

**Reconceptualizing Student Voice**

One of the ways that research participants from each stakeholder group (the GLC, faculty, and students) interpreted the term “student voice” was related to the provision of feedback. From the GLC’s perspective, students have an open invitation to provide their feedback either to her directly or to any of the faculty mentors. As the GLC explains:

I think with the seniors specifically, I think that they do have opportunities if they feel that they're not heard, or they don't have that voice. We try to encourage the kids, "Send us an email, let us know what you think, give us some feedback." We're trying to touch base with them because obviously we're trying to do this for them. We're not trying to do this to waste time, because sometimes that's the perception. "Well, we've got to fill in this time so ...", and that's not what we want Chavaya to be.

She later adds, “Taking a pulse. They feel comfortable emailing any one of us, which is nice.” (GLC interview, May 24, 2017)
The GLC’s perspective differs from that of several of the faculty mentors, one of whom acknowledges that the current practice is for the adults involved to attempt to predict what they think students want or need without actually asking them.

I do think we try to anticipate what the students will want and act accordingly but we never actually ask them. And so, you’re never going to have the buy-in that you would have if you ask them first. Maybe you’d get the same result and the same answers, but it looks very different when you ask them first. And I think that’s true of classes as well, the difference being that we actually do solicit feedback from students about classes. And, I think in all cases, our incorporation of student voice is very reactionary. We incorporate student voice as a result of a complaint being raised or an issue being raised. Certainly, we try to anticipate those issues, but I really feel like it’s the teachers that drive the curriculum. In Chavaya, it would be the GLCs and in the classrooms it’s the classroom teachers. They drive the curriculum, hopefully they incorporate what they believe the students will want and what will benefit them most. But, it’s really left up to individuals to solicit that feedback and act on it. We get course evaluations for our classes, but there’s no accountability for implementing anything differently as a result. And so, I would say in that case it’s the same. It’s relying on individuals to try to anticipate student voice but not gathering any data about whether that’s actually been done—what the student voice actually says and having that align with what we’re actually doing. (faculty mentor interview, May 23, 2017)

Finally, a student makes reference to feeling more comfortable voicing her feedback to a classroom teacher than she would to a Chavaya mentor when she states:

Having to do with academics, we fill out academic surveys, like the teacher evaluations. I feel like there's more, I would feel more comfortable giving my opinion about a class structure to a teacher than I would about how Chavaya works to a mentor. (student from focus group, April 20, 2017)

Here we see that the provision of honest feedback requires relational trust that is largely lacking in the Chavaya context.

The use of surveys as a formal structure for soliciting student voice and input was mentioned in student focus groups and faculty interviews. One student remembers,

A while ago, maybe last year or two years ago or something like that, they would send out a survey of what you want to do for Chavaya and they’d base it off of
stuff like that. I think that was pretty okay. (student from focus group, April 25, 2017)

One faculty mentor suggests that providing a limited number of options for students to select from has worked best for the incorporation of student voice within Chavaya. She states, “I think just giving them options is probably the best instead of really leaving it open-ended. With this grade level, I think it’s the best way to approach it.” (faculty mentor interview, May 16, 2017)

**Student voice through surveys.** Students and faculty refer to the use of surveys as a way to access student voice, providing a means for learning directly from students about their needs, concerns, and programming interests. The assumption is that the information collected through the survey will guide the decision-making for future Chavaya programming. However, the actual student experience (as it was articulated during focus groups conversations) has been that the input they have provided through surveys has rarely impacted later Chavaya programming. One student cooperative co-inquiry participant described focus group transcript data as follows: “I feel like sometimes in Chavaya they ask what we feel about different programs. Actually, we feel like it remains, but they never really take our input in the planning of Chavaya like what we do during that time.” (D12:14). Another wondered, “Are the surveys that are filled out by the students every year used in the planning of Chavaya?” (student from cooperative co-inquiry descriptive review session, May 1, 2017)

It appears that the sense of frustration that students have felt when their solicited feedback is repeatedly ignored has led to a student preference for using Chavaya time as a study hall. One faculty mentor with two consecutive years of mentoring experience
with Class of 2017 students (the first year when these students were juniors and then when they were seniors) states:

I believe we do give them numerous opportunities to voice their say and their opinions, but they don't always take the initiative, but I think this varies from grade to grade. Again, with seeing this group, I saw far more enthusiasm and more volunteers when they were juniors, rather than when they were seniors… And giving them several opportunities to suggest programming even. On a couple of occasions, we dedicated a whole Chavaya session to brainstorm possible Chavaya topics and ideas, and there was just hardly any feedback. It was always kind of the same few kids over and over, and those students tend to be the more involved on campus. And of course, they always said more study time, or study hall. They always ask for study hall. (faculty mentor interview, May 16, 2017)

Another faculty mentor offers the following explanation of a student preference for independent study time:

I think it's like you have to create the trust or the faith that, "We want to create something meaningful, what do you really feel like you need?" If they feel like we're actually gonna deliver on it, then maybe they would tell us, but I think right now, they just kind of like, "Yeah, you might as well give me a study hall 'cause this is a waste of my time." (faculty mentor interview, May 22, 2017)

Finally, a student explains the preference for study halls by connecting that preference to past missed opportunities for timely, meaningful, and relevant content due to an inflexibility around pre-planned Chavaya programming:

Everyone just puts study hall and they move on, but I think what would work better... If they had a more regular survey that you could fill out because there are things that come up that people want to talk about with advisors and stuff like the thing with Mr. Smith (pseudonym of a former school administrator). That could've used some discussion in a Chavaya. Nothing really happened because there was already something scheduled ahead of time. (student from focus group, April 19, 2017)

The student experience of disregarded input combined with the rigidity of the pre-programmed, didactic nature of Chavaya is consistent with a tightly controlled, top-down program structure. There is a nod toward the need for student voice as evidenced through
the occasional dissemination of surveys to elicit student feedback and/or input. That said, efforts for the meaningful incorporation of student voice could be more robust.

**Voice as choice.** Part of the 12th grade *Chavaya* programming that students brought up as an example of activities that were enjoyable and useful were the life skills activities. Once again, students were asked to complete a survey, ranking their life skill activity preferences. Some of the choices that students remembered aloud were changing a tire, managing personal finances, choosing college courses, and meditation. Looking across the various stakeholder perspectives—GLC, faculty mentor, and student—provided some insight as to the nuance that exists within the realm of voice as choice.

The GLC explained the life skills activity programming as follows: Basically, I had talked to the mentors and we were all on board. It has been successful over the years. I had asked teachers what they felt comfortable presenting. It would be a couple of times when we'd meet with the kids. Then I sent out that survey. Again, we want to do what's going to benefit them. Most of the kids did respond but some of them don't so then we just had to put them in where there was some room. I think overall, yeah, I think it was successful because we're trying to meet their needs, we're trying to hear what they're saying to us. (GLC interview, May 24, 2017)

One of the faculty mentors offered the following commentary on the same life skills programming:

Well, it sort of started two years ago. They did life skills. But then it kind of turned into, "Okay, we have these two random *Chavaya* sessions to fill in March. What skill do you wanna work on with the kids? We'll have them sign up," but it's not really a concerted like, "Here are the things that students want to learn about. Here are the people on staff who can teach them those things. Here's a multi-lesson arc of how to learn these skills." It's more a filler. (faculty mentor interview, May 23, 2017)

Finally, a student suggested the following:

I think it would have been nice for us to be able to, before they decided on what adult skills actually we were going to do during that *Chavaya*, to maybe give
them our opinions on what adult skills we wanted to learn. Just to know what our objective was. I feel like it's sort of little things like that where it's just planned without our input. (student from focus group, April 25, 2017)

Students are interested in participating in their learning at a more foundational level.

**Voice as agency.** Another student shares the frustration of a limited understanding of the genuine incorporation of student voice when she shares,

For me, I feel like student voice is ... when I think about it, it's more something that's driven by passion, but the stuff that we do have to put input on is really just in response or because we have to do it. (student from focus group, April 19, 2017)

Like this student research participant, students from the cooperative co-inquiry team understand the need to move from a conceptualization of voice as choice to a conceptualization of voice as mentee-driven programming as well as mentee and mentor equality and equity. One student asks, “Should we dedicate the first few *Chavaya* to planning and discussing what students are interested in, so they can have a voice?” (student from cooperative co-inquiry descriptive review session, May 1, 2017) Another student understands that “students aren’t engaged or participating and that affects the impact of the program.” (student from cooperative co-inquiry descriptive review session, April 28, 2017) And, another descriptive review leads to the statement, “Every student has to participate for it to have impact on them.” (student from cooperative co-inquiry descriptive review session, May 1, 2017)

One faculty mentor perceives the student longing for reaching the higher rungs of Fletcher’s (2011) Ladder of Youth Voice when she remarks, “I think they have a craving and a desire for more really meaningful interaction with adults; when we aren’t treating like them adults.” (faculty mentor interview, May 22, 2017) Even activities that are
intended to elicit student agency and social responsibility (such as the 10th grade garden project) have struggled. One student recalls that while the intention was to have students shoulder the responsibilities of tending to the garden, the structures (regular meeting times and clear communication across Chavaya groups about who had watering responsibilities when) were not there to support that intention. The short-term result was that teachers began shouldering the responsibility of garden maintenance; the long-term result was the garden’s demise. Ideally, Chavaya programming could continue even without the faculty mentors’ urging or presence; that is, if there were the buy-in and sense of accountability that a commitment to a shared vision might provide.

**Power and Control: Searching for Balance**

The following themes explore the limits of structures and practices that emphasize administrative power and control as well as the benefits of a different approach—that is, the creation of structures and practices that support shared power and control.

**Administrative power and control.** The data reveal that limits of the Chavaya structure and programmatic practices include rigidity and a void of teacher and student participation and engagement. A student describes the lack of programming flexibility as follows:

I think it's because the last person in charge of Chavaya was really set on having all the programing done ahead of time and on the calendar ahead of time, so we knew what was happening every single time. There was not wiggle room for what we wanted to have. I think that it would definitely be beneficial to have students coming in earlier in the year and deciding, "Oh, maybe we could do this this day," or something like that. I think it was really a lot of early-on scheduling. (student from focus group, April 25, 2017)
In an earlier focus group, three students explain the GLC-controlled *Chavaya* and the impact of this design on teachers and students during *Chavaya* sessions:

Speaker 7: Something I feel is that it (*Chavaya*) isn't even teacher-centered. Don't they just get an email with instructions at the last minute and they don't know what's going on? Speaker 2: “I think it's going to be a study hall today because they didn't email us with any directions.” Speaker 5: Or they're (teachers are) trying to figure it out and they're confused… Speaker 2: Yeah because they don't know what it is. They don't get to choose. We don't get to choose. We do whatever people tell us to do. (student from focus group, April 19, 2017)

The rigid structure as well as the lack of teacher and student participation in *Chavaya* planning appear to negatively impact the success of the program.

There were several reasons for this rigidity that emerged in the collected data. First, a faculty mentor posits that the highly controlled, GLC-run structure is likely a consequence of an over-extended faculty member who has accepted the Grade Level Coordinator title, stipend, and responsibilities while simultaneously attempting to juggle other teaching tasks for his/her core classes.

When you're asking a GLC to plan that kind of stuff and they also teach a full load of classes, that's gonna be at the bottom of the priority list. It's just the thing that's not gonna get done and that's not to fault anybody personally, but again, the system, I don't think it is designed to create successful, meaningful programming. (faculty mentor interview, May 22, 2017)

Another possible explanation for the rigidity is an administrative concern (or even fear) that relinquishing control might prove problematic and could lead to even more work for its resolution. One example that came up during my interview with the GLC was what might happen if a student were unhappy with his/her assigned mentor and wanted to switch to another *Chavaya*.  

So, are you going to switch from Ms. Henderson to Ms. Aboulafia, well then that creates many problems, and is that what we want to encourage? I think that this is better. I just think that assigning the people to the right grade with the right kids is important, or a good mix of kids where maybe you have a few challenging kids but then you have the kids that you know you can always rely on. (GLC interview, May 24, 2017)

The concern shared above is guarded against with a rigid Chavaya grouping structure.

Additionally, there is no formal accountability mechanism through which students and faculty can provide their candid feedback about the strengths and challenges of the Chavaya program. This leads to the dominance of the GLC, as one faculty mentor expresses below:

It's really the GLCs, to my knowledge, who get to say if advisory is going well or not. And they can implement maybe the feedback that they get from the mentors, but they're not even held accountable for soliciting feedback from the mentors. They'll ask how things are going but that's not always in a context where you're really going to solicit honest feedback, especially if teachers perceive that nothing is going to change as a result. (faculty mentor interview, May 23, 2017)

Just as we saw earlier with the solicitation and disregard of student survey data, faculty are disinclined to offer honest feedback when they believe their investment of time and energy will not yield a substantive change. Just as students shift to requesting study halls, faculty default to the completion of the assigned task(s) rather than the pursuit of a shared vision and the collaborative creation of meaningful content that mentees and mentors crave.

The fixed Chavaya programming and expectation that teachers proceed through a specific activity, presentation, or list of discussion questions may be intended to minimize the discrepancy between Chavaya experiences. Data confirm that students, teachers, and the GLC are aware that not all teachers are comfortable with their mentor assignment and
responsibilities. Rather than providing training that might minimize faculty discomfort with SEL-related content, the EWS approach to date has been to send out a list of specific instructions for the uniform completion of a (set of) task(s). One faculty mentor who has had experience mentoring 9th and 12th graders explains, “We had specific things we had to cover. So, they'd email us a PowerPoint and say, ‘Hey, teach this.’ I think the Chavaya program is basically, here's what you're doing today, let's do it.” (faculty mentor interview, May 11, 2017)

Another limiting factor of the current Chavaya structure and practice that emphasizes administrative power and control is the lack of teacher and student participation and engagement. One student relates her perception of the centralized power structure by stating, “You could just tell he (my mentor teacher) was just so forced to do it.” (student from focus group, April 25, 2017) A member of the cooperative co-inquiry group connects a void of teacher voice to a void of student voice when he offers, “Students feel that they don’t have the ability to express their opinions on topics that their mentors are assigned to speak about.” (student from cooperative co-inquiry descriptive review session, May 1, 2017) Another student member of the co-inquiry team describes a portion of student focus group transcript data as follows: “When they (the mentors) get assigned the topic to talk about and that’s all they talk about the whole time, students don’t really listen to what they’re saying most of the time.” (student from cooperative co-inquiry descriptive review session, May 1, 2017) Here we see that a drawback of a highly controlled “discussion” is that teachers tend to dominate, and students become disengaged.
Another student remembers limited student participation and engagement in *Chavaya*: “There are maybe one or two examples I can think of where the student voice was ever involved and one of those was just reacting to a video, like, ‘what were your thoughts on that?’-- things like that. (student from focus group, April 19, 2017) Another student relates the following:

We do always have an opportunity to share what we think about whatever video we saw, or whatever program we just did, but for the most part our meetings are just kind of in and out. You go, you do the thing that the teacher was assigned to do. And then after that it's kind of a forced meeting and it's a study hall for the rest of the time. It's a constrained schedule that doesn't really allow for students to explore topics that they're interested in because everything is being assigned. Although we do have that little bit of time to share our thoughts after (a video or program), it's not that much of student voice I don't think. (student from cooperative co-inquiry descriptive review session, May 1, 2017)

When the teacher receives a programming directive from the GLC, the result tends to be the exclusion of students’ active participation in this component of their education. A shift in the balance of control and power away from the GLC and towards the students in collaboration with their faculty mentors, while frightening to those who crave and are accustomed to a sense of control, may ultimately foster greater student and faculty buy-in and could improve the *Chavaya* experience for all. An excerpt from my own fieldnote journal elaborates on this idea:

While it's a challenge, I think, for some teachers to let go of control and power and whatever identity they cling to as teachers, I just think it's so worth it. You hear what students come up with and that they want impactful experiences. (Fieldnotes, May 23, 2017)

Further exploration of the potential benefits of a more distributed leadership (and the control and power implied therein) is explored below.
Shared power and control. Students, faculty, and the GLC articulate a need for structures and practices that allow for greater distribution of power and control. These stakeholders share an understanding of a need for a balance between programming that is planned out in advance and the intentional creation of space for student-generated topics and issues that will surface organically through the course of the school year. Such a structure and practice will increase the likelihood of student participation and engagement, enabling students to carry the baton of shared Chavaya objectives even in the absence of the mentor or GLC. Then, instead of the following student exchange, students may feel empowered to initiate and facilitate relevant discussions on their own.

Speaker 7: Also, it sort of feels like the time is reserved for whatever's been scheduled I think. If there's not an email that comes in about what's going to happen ... In individual Chavaya day, sometimes we'll just sit there, and it'll be quiet. It would be better if we could feel free to start talking about something.

Speaker 5: But we have to sit there and be quiet. (student from focus group, April 19, 2017)

Peers of the students quoted above recognize that “students want to participate, but they feel limited due to the pre-decided schedule.” (student from cooperative co-inquiry descriptive review session, May 1, 2017)

One student expresses a need for less programming rigidity when she remarks, I think it's because the last person in charge of Chavaya was really kind of having the programming done ahead of time on the calendar per semester, ahead of time. So we knew what was happening every single time. There was not wiggle room for what we wanted to have. I think it would definitely be beneficial to have students coming in earlier in the year deciding, "Oh maybe we could do this one this way." (student from cooperative co-inquiry descriptive review session, May 1, 2017)

Another student advocates for a committee of students to convene over the summer to generate ideas for Chavaya programming for the upcoming school year, citing the
importance of lessons that are applicable to teenagers. She adds, “It seems like teens are
tired of hearing the same things over and over again from the guidance counselor,
parents, and other adults in their lives.” (student from cooperative co-inquiry descriptive
review session, May 1, 2017)

At certain points during her interview, the GLC reveals her own perception of the
tension between the EWS administration’s preference for having a GLC to act as a “point
person” for all aspects of the Chavaya program for a particular grade level and her own
experience of a need for greater balance between pre-determined programming and
student freedom. Her words follow:

The struggles that some of the mentors may have with the younger grades, we
probably don't see that just because so much of what we do is already planned.
That's just part of our programming, which is good, but we still have to find that
balance. I find that kids want some freedom. I don't think, as much as we want to
have that structure, I think it benefits the kids to also have some flexible time,
some time just to wind down. I think also a lot of the younger kids look forward
to being a senior because they know they have that. I think that we've tried very
hard, incorporating curriculum and incorporating important pieces of information,
yet still being able to have that time to just chill. We're able to get a nice gauge of
how the kids are doing and go from there. (GLC interview, May 24, 2017)

While mild in its critique (seemingly suggesting that adult-controlled structure and free
time for students are the only options), the GLC goes on to relate an experience wherein
the adherence to a rigid structure limited student access to meaningful content. She
remembers the frustration she and students from the National Honor Society (a club for
which she served as the faculty sponsor) felt when they were unable to schedule the
annual NHS Spelling Bee for the entire upper school’s participation. She explains:

For example, we had a late start to the NHS Spelling Bee and unfortunately the
kids had not put that on the calendar. I just don't think that they realized how
booked we get during Chavaya and things like that. Anyway, the reason why I'm
telling you this is that two of the grades they had their curriculum, everything set, and there was no room to do anything so basically we only did it with the freshmen and the seniors. It was still terrific, but we made a point for next year. We're already on the calendar for next year for NHS because I was like, "But this is a shame." I think flexibility, to have it to an extent, is also important. (GLC interview, May 24, 2017)

My fieldnote journal contains reflections on my own struggles with the rigid structure expectation that was communicated to me by the 9th Grade GLC when I was hired and assigned the 10th Grade GLC role:

I was just really struggling with if I'm supposed to plan it, how much did students get to be involved?... Because I really felt like there was an expectation to have it all planned, like maybe the whole year but if I couldn't get that done then at least have the semester planned, but that didn't really leave room for student voice either. (Fieldnotes, May 1, 2017)

As a newcomer to the school, I opted to create a semester’s worth of programming and then explained to the 10th grade faculty mentors that this planning should be viewed as possibilities that could be amended or discarded as students and faculty saw fit.

In addition to greater flexibility and intentional inclusion of faculty and student perspectives, a distributed (rather than a highly centralized) system of control allows for the creation of safe spaces where mentees and mentors are more likely to feel comfortable grappling with challenging SEL content. One faculty mentor with a decade of experience at the school confides the following:

I think, again, that hesitation that students will have ... It's really vulnerable for them to share what they really think. I think we forget that and discard that, and so, again, I think that trust has to be established. I think when it's done successfully in classrooms, it's because a teacher has demonstrated that they are listening and they really do care what you think and that they're not looking for a correct answer or that kind of thing. We would have to find a way to do that with students in the advisory context before we can even ask them for their input, and I think you were successful in doing that with your focus groups and that kind of model or approach for them to know that we were really asking and really
listening before we even have the conversation. That, to me, is an inhibitor. Their hesitation has been borne out by their experience. Then time and energy constraints, again, it's just kind of been at the bottom of people's priority lists, and so in order to create something new or really think through something, you'd have to devote some time and energy and personnel who are not also trying to do a million other things. (faculty mentor interview, May 22, 2017)

Public acknowledgement of past missteps in the form of superficial engagement of student voice may prove useful as a first step in the rebuilding of trust.
Introduction

This chapter begins with a discussion of my findings as they respond to my research questions. Next, I explore the implications of these findings for both future practice within my own school setting and other organizational contexts as well as the implications for future research. I conclude with some final reflections related to the connections between the development and practice of voice and the confrontation of hegemony in pursuit of a kinder, fairer, and more just reality for future generations of students.

Discussion: Mapping My Findings onto My Research Questions

How do upper school students and their faculty mentors perceive and experience the development and practice of student voice through the school’s advising program? Participating students and faculty overwhelmingly perceived and experienced that the development and practice of student voice was lacking within the Chavaya program. When asked if they believed that student voice was prioritized within the Chavaya program specifically, all students answered in the negative. Of the faculty, only the one non-teaching mentor and the GLC answered affirmatively. And, over the course of their respective interviews, each of these two faculty participants spoke of a need for greater student voice within this program.

What are supports for the development and practice of student voice within the advisory context (as perceived by upper school students and by their faculty mentors)? Student mentees and faculty mentors appear to agree that the following
supports are needed for the development and practice of student voice within the Chavaya context: (1) a clear, shared vision that includes student and faculty voices, (2) strong and authentic mentor-mentee relationships, (3) distributed leadership, (4) ongoing faculty training and support, and (5) a dependable structure for regular and ongoing feedback (from mentees to mentors and from mentors to GLC). These findings align well with those from the 2014 consultant and from the meta-analysis of Sklad, DeRitter and Ben (2012). Specifically, the Sklad, DeRitter and Ben (2012) study of 75 school-based SEL programs revealed that the most effective SEL programs involved well-defined goals, thorough training and quality control, and feedback on interventions (aligning with 1. the need for a clear and shared vision, 4. ongoing faculty training and support, and 5. a dependable structure for regular and ongoing feedback). Additionally, their finding that consistent staffing is associated with SEL effectiveness is at least tangentially related to the finding from this study that strong and authentic mentor-mentee relationships (#2 above) support the development and practice of student voice. Therefore, the unique finding of this study relates to the equitable distribution of power and control and the need for a structure that provides for distributed leadership (#3 above). The implications of this finding are explored in more detail later in the chapter.

What are deterrents/inhibitors to the development and practice of student voice within the advisory context (as perceived by upper school students and by their faculty mentors)? The data support the findings that the deterrents/inhibitors to the development and practice of student voice are indeed the antitheses of the supports mentioned above. That is, inhibitors include (1) a nebulous goal/objective, (2)
inauthentic, forced relationships between mentors and mentees, (3) a transactional, top-down power structure, (4) a lack of professional development opportunities to support faculty and students with SEL, and (5) no dependable mechanism for feedback or accountability.

Additional inhibitors to the development and practice of student voice include the inability or unwillingness to actively listen to students as well as the inability or unwillingness to create space for the meaningful discussion of challenging topics. Students in each of the three focus groups spoke of the desire to feel heard and safe within the Chavaya context in order to feel comfortable embracing vulnerability amongst their peers and mentor. Mitra (2005) highlights “the importance of active listening and mutual respect” as a first step in the collaborative work of creating shared spaces for “participation, caring, inclusiveness, and shared leadership” (pp. 542-543). Cook-Sather (2002) concurs when she emphasizes the imperative of “re-tuning our ears so that we can hear what they (the students) say and redirecting our actions in response to what we hear” (p.4). Educators at EWS need training to learn interpersonal communication strategies (namely, what Freire (1998) refers to as “learning to speak by listening”) for the facilitation of safe and caring SEL environments (p.104).

In what ways is my work as an educational leader affected by my inquiry?

My inquiry has reaffirmed my deep commitment to interconnected thinking and to modeling and prioritizing lifelong learning at all levels within the organization. I explore my reflections on each of these professional commitments below.
**My commitment to interconnected thinking.** A successful leader believes in collaborative educational leadership which is characterized by interconnected thought. Decisions coming from group deliberations over diverse perspectives are likely to be superior to those arrived at independently. Thinking interdependently requires the courage to articulate your own perspective, the willingness to listen actively and reflect thoughtfully on the perspectives of others, and the commitment to work with others to arrive at a plan of action or a change effort that advances the collective good. Just as student-centered learning is deeper and more meaningful than the teacher-centered (or, in this study, the GLC-centered) alternative, a flattening of the traditional top-down leadership structure is more likely to create a healthy school community that supports its school governance system because members of the community will be more confident that various constituency groups (students, faculty, staff, and parents) have had a voice at the figurative decision-making table.

One constancy in the field of education today is the need to navigate change. Investing time and energy in the conceptualization of a problem or system that needs changing is time and energy well spent. With a deeper understanding of the issue, a successful leader is more likely to determine an effective course of action. Perhaps public acknowledgement of a difficulty and intentional guidance about how to navigate that difficulty is all that is required. Or, perhaps an actual problem exists, and its further exploration will prove helpful in determining whether it requires a first or second-order change strategy (Watzlawick, Weakland & Fisch, 2011).
Arriving at an understanding of the nature of the matter under consideration is more thoroughly accomplished when a leader can rely on the candid input of a diverse leadership team. That said, school leaders do not always have the luxury of time and collective deliberation when making decisions that affect the organization. In these time-critical situations, the leader’s previous practice with collective decision making will serve as a guide, increasing the likelihood of thoughtful, mission-driven governance.

Whether a leader’s decision is arrived at independently or as part of a team effort, clear and regular communication with stakeholders from various constituency groups proves helpful throughout the reflection and action processes. During the open exchange of ideas, it is important for the school leader to be receptive to both positive and critical feedback from others. Over time, the experience of such receptivity will build trust within the leadership team as well as the organization at large. To be clear, receptivity does not mean agreement. In fact, a successful school leader may decide to pursue a course of action despite concerns articulated by one or more stakeholders and still be able to count on the support of the latter, especially if the decision-making process has allowed space for dissenting views and a transparency about the reasoning behind the ultimate decision.

Finally, a successful leader appreciates and empowers her/his staff and students. In so doing, space is created for the strengthening of relationships that are based on mutual trust and that enhance the wellbeing of the overall community. Intentional inclusivity is a goal that a successful leader prioritizes within both our school and classroom/advisory/extracurricular programming contexts. Leaders can begin this effort
through personal and professional modeling and by encouraging faculty and staff to work together to reflect upon and confront our biases, to share useful existing resources for professional growth, and to brainstorm and practice effective strategies for confronting inequities and injustices while creating the space for meaningful learning and transformation. In so doing, we will uphold our moral and professional responsibility to care for and respect one another and our students.

*My commitment to lifelong learning.* When it comes to professional development (which was found to be sorely lacking for faculty members expected to shoulder SEL responsibilities as *Chavaya* mentors), I believe that we should avoid the temptation and historical practice of imposing a hierarchical organizational structure. The district or school leader has as much to learn as the school principal and the classroom teacher and the student. I believe this to be especially true when the learning relates to social and emotional issues that may not have received much emphasis throughout the schooling experiences of many of today’s educators.

Growth and learning are lifelong processes and the public acknowledgement of that fact (through one’s words and actions) is a crucial first step for someone who aims to lead professional development efforts successfully. Successful leaders recognize their own professional strengths and challenges and actively seek opportunities to claim the latter publicly while simultaneously explaining the active steps they are taking to pursue opportunities for self-improvement. The willingness to be vulnerable amongst one’s colleagues fosters mutual trust and respect. Others are more likely to embrace
vulnerability if/when a district or school leader does so and the domino effect continues from there.

My own school context is in the upper (or high) school division of an independent school. While my leadership position during this study was Interim Dean of Students, I was recently hired to serve as the Upper School Head at St. Francis Episcopal Day School, another independent school in Houston. Therefore, I will proceed with references from and examples of my perception of best practices for an upper school division head (the independent school terminology that equates to high school principal) who hopes to exemplify research-supported practices for the effective professional development of her faculty charges.

Once the division head has established (again, through statements backed by modeled behavior) the importance of engagement in lifelong learning and the practice of what Carol Dweck (2006) has identified as a growth mindset, it is important that she invest the time and energy to get to know the strengths and challenges of her colleagues for whom she is professionally responsible. This involves the division head both meeting with and observing faculty members on a regular basis. Conversations before and after these observations will help with contextualization and trust building. While anxiety on the part of the observed teacher is understandable, as a division head I will make every effort to put the faculty member at ease—a goal that requires time as well as intentional efforts to demonstrate respect and to build trust.

Knobel and Kalman (2016) aptly claim that “when you create the time and space to truly know your students and listen to their interests and ideas, you can develop
learning opportunities that are important, impactful, and purposeful” (p. 53). I believe that the same is true for a division head and her faculty. The onus is on the division head to have a genuine understanding of who each faculty member is so that she can engage in authentic and meaningful conversations wherein the faculty member feels empowered to identify areas for growth and seek opportunities for learning, knowing that she/he has the support of the school leader.

Additionally, the division head should be working to foster a learning culture that allows for movement between the roles of mentor and mentee, leader and follower. Once again, Knobel and Kalman (2016), this time citing the work of Jenkins (2009), explain that “a participatory culture is one characterized by low barriers to being able to ‘join in’ (the practice, the activity, the discussion, artistic expression, etc.) and sustained support for ‘creating and sharing one’s work’. It also includes some kind of mentorship that may be quite fluid and distributed across a number of people and that enables novices to tap into expertise and experts to share their knowledge and skills with novices and to perhaps learn something more in the process” (p.9).

Ideal professional development is “deeply collaborative and participatory” (Knobel & Kalman, 2016). Davidson (2011) concurs when she writes that “the idea of productive collaboration requires participation, diversity, and flexibility” (p.192). I agree wholeheartedly; the more faculty voices that are a part of a professional development opportunity, the better the professional development. We must all work to challenge the status quo of professional development that involves an outside talking head “expert” who is invited (and, frequently paid handsomely) to speak of the latest trend that may or
may not have worked in another educational setting. Instead, school leaders should challenge one another to be aware of the gifts of their faculty and to create the space as well as set aside the time for faculty to pursue their interests and passions and to tap into the talent of their peers.

**Student Voice: Implications for Practice**

There are two main implications for practice related to student voice—(1) the need for intentional and consistent incorporation of SEL into all school programming contexts and (2) the need for ongoing support of programs that currently or previously have provided for the development and practice of student voice. Each of these implications and their ties to the findings of this study are discussed below.

**Intentional incorporation of SEL.** McClure, Yonezawa, and Jones (2010) assert that "the integration of caring strategies into the daily work and overall school climate, as opposed to its annexation within an advisory program," may prove more successful (p.12). Students and faculty study participants agree that, for the most part, EWS seems to have achieved a culture of caring between students and faculty in other school programming contexts, including core classes, electives, fine arts and athletic offerings, and extracurricular activities. The same cannot be claimed for Advisory and *Chavaya*. That said, research demonstrates that the incorporation of SEL into all facets of the schooling experience yields the positive student outcomes of personal development, academic achievement, and health and wellness as well as the positive teacher outcomes of increased job satisfaction and commitment to students (Bergmark, 2008; Durlak et al.,
As Kathleen Cushman (2014) and her team of student researchers learned through their YPAR study, students crave engaging with challenging, meaningful content. Programming that requires students to be passive recipients of information stifles engagement and the development and practice of voice. Student and faculty research participants noted the superiority of relationships that developed organically around a shared purpose, problem, or passion. This finding aligns with the work of Noddings (1992) and Darling-Hammond (1997) who claim that genuine caring and expanded teaching roles do not require independent advisory programming. Rather than having SEL conform to a silo mentality, they argue for its incorporation throughout the schooling experience.

If the School wants to develop a clear, shared vision for SEL, then it must actively commit to the same. There is an abundance of open-sourced resources available through organizations such as the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) to assist schools with establishing clear goals and then meeting them with objective-aligned lessons, activities, and procedures (CASEL, 2013). A shared vision requires involvement from different stakeholders (students, faculty, parents, and administration) and ongoing communication with the same. EWS is well-positioned for this collaborative work, as evidenced by student and teacher interest in meaningful SEL that incorporates their respective voices.
Part of recognizing the need for SEL is understanding that the development and practice of social and emotional skills requires regular and ongoing SEL-specific professional development for all adult educators who are entrusted with the responsibility of facilitating such learning. As the data from this study and existing research (Phillippo, 2010) indicate, some educators are more receptive to these responsibilities than others. Here again, the School must recognize the need for transparency and training when broadening expectations of teachers to include a social-emotional support role.

Finally, a dependable structure needs to exist for accountability and feedback. If SEL is to become an expectation of the schooling experience for all students and in all programs, then the school must state that expectation and provide observable and measurable outcomes that will become part of a regular and ongoing evaluation procedure. In addition, a mechanism is needed for the regular and ongoing collection of student and faculty/staff feedback on their respective perceptions and experiences related to SEL. Both the evaluative tool and the regular reflective feedback from students and faculty/staff should be used to inform growth and development conversations with educators (which include faculty, staff, and administrators) at all levels of the organization.

**Ongoing support of programs that provide for the development and practice of student voice.** As mentioned earlier, there are many contexts at EWS (core content and elective classrooms, fine arts and athletics programs, and extracurricular activities) where the development and practice of student voice happens quite naturally. Interestingly, these are spaces where teachers, coaches, and activity sponsors also have a
voice and sense of autonomy that is and has been lacking within the Chavaya and Advisory programs where last-minute directives are and have been the norm. If the School chooses to continue the Chavaya program, it would behoove all involved to begin to recognize the link between teacher voice and the advancement of student voice initiatives.

In addition to classroom settings, several EWS programs (the policy committee, the Va’ad Tzedek, and the safe-cracking and eco-marathon clubs) were mentioned during student focus groups and faculty interviews as spaces where student voice is valued. The regular use, support, and celebration of these programs should not be neglected. I fear that recent administrative changes and the resulting preference for a highly centralized, tightly controlled governance model may be putting these programs at risk.

As an example, the Va’ad Tzedek—a committee of upper school students and faculty who hear cases involving violations of the School’s “Ten Commitments”—heard about ten cases during the 2016-2017 school year. From my vantage point as the Interim Dean of Students, these were excellent learning opportunities related to everything from confidentiality to academic integrity and restorative justice. Unfortunately, as of the end of February 2018, there have been no cases brought before the Va’ad during the current school year. While I wish this were due to no instances of students being in violation of the School’s “Ten Commitments,” I know that has not been the case.

I know from first-hand experience that the reliance on a system like the Va’ad Tzedek can feel overwhelming. The sense of urgency and pressure to dole out a consequence and move on to the next item on a long to-do list is real. Nonetheless, I also
write from experience when I state that the investment of time and energy is well worth it when you experience the genuine learning, community building, and commitment to a sense of integrity that can happen for both the student serving on the Va’ad and the student appearing before the Va’ad. We must commit to the support of and reliance on existing programs that develop and practice student voice; otherwise, we fail the students we are charged with educating.

Finally, there is always room for the expansion of programs aimed at the development and practice of student voice. A youth participatory action research (YPAR) program comes immediately to mind as a possibility. While not strictly YPAR, this study allowed me to witness student commitment to the research process and to the improvement of the learning experience for future EWS students. The opportunity renewed my faith in students’ abilities as change agents, especially when we work together to create and support spaces for students to develop “confidence in their own voice and an ability to make a difference in their community” (Baroutsis, McGregor & Mills, 2016, p.124).

**Student Voice: Implications for Research**

In current practice, efforts towards SEL are oftentimes siloed in advisory programs. This makes sense when we consider the original motivation for advisory programs—the creation of a space for a nurturing child-adult relationship within the secondary school setting. However, as McClure, Yonewaza, and Jones (2010) contend, schools ideally work to outgrow these stand-alone programs, opting instead for the incorporation of SEL into all facets of the schooling experience. Further research (in the form of a case study or even a meta-analysis across many schools or districts) into the
strategies employed by schools and districts that have successfully navigated from advisory programs to the broader incorporation of SEL would likely prove helpful to schools contemplating such a change. Schools’ choices of SEL curricula and an explanation of various stakeholders’ perceptions of the strengths and challenges of the implemented curricula would help others in navigating similar decision-making.

One aspect of SEL—student voice—also beckons additional research. Mitra (2009), a prominent researcher of student voice claims, “the role of student voice in educational change is underutilized and therefore understudied” (p.428). This practitioner research study reveals a need to acknowledge the adult tendency to hoard power and control within school communities, thereby blocking the student pathway to higher, student-centered rungs on Hart’s (1994) and Fletcher’s (2011) “ladder of youth voice” (see Figure 1, p.29). A recognition of adultist tendencies to crave control is a necessary first step towards confronting and later abandoning those tendencies in favor of additional spaces for student voice and agency.

Students deserve the space to find and assert their unique voices while simultaneously listening to and learning from the voices of their peers. Educators need to be deliberate in their efforts to step aside and facilitate these safe learning spaces by stepping into the role of providers of support and encouragement. Students will likely gain confidence in their respective voices and begin to recognize (through practice) the power of voice to effect change.

A final suggestion for additional research relates to the evolving landscape of civic participation and agency. Mirra and Garcia (2017) argue for a reconceptualization
of “what counts as civic participation in public life and how youth are positioned as civic agents” (p.136). The normative characteristics of citizenship (which include attending religious services at least monthly, belonging to a union, and believing that people are trustworthy) reflect an outdated and narrow view of what it means to be civically engaged.

Recently, we have borne witness to an expanded conceptualization of civic agency in everything from movements (such as Black Lives Matter whose mission is to build local power and to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes) to social media campaigns (such as #metoo which was intended to help demonstrate the widespread prevalence of sexual assault and harassment, especially in the workplace) to marches (such as March for Our Lives, the student-led protest for gun control). The success of such powerful online mobilization may indicate that we are already making the shift from civic participation and engagement to civic interrogation and innovation.

Struggle and the feelings and emotions associated with it (such as anger, disenfranchisement, and disappointment) can act as catalysts for voice, agency, and civic action. That said, overcoming the reluctance or refusal of those with power and privilege to listen to narratives that threaten the status quo takes time. As an example, student and athlete reports of sexual misconduct against Dr. Larry Nassar have spanned two decades with little to no action before recently. As of this writing, there have been 266 accusations against Dr. Larry Nassar (overwhelmingly female, but most recently including one male). Perhaps there is a tipping point when it comes to listening to voices
that were previously ignored. Indeed, the resistance to listening to youth voices and the
growing incidences of youth combining their voices (both online and in person) for
greater impact within the community is an area that beckons additional research.

**Leadership: Implications for Practice**

The finding that a distributed leadership model supports the development and
practice of student voice is supported by existing research in the field. Weissberg and
Cascarino (2012) and Bergmark (2008) write of a need for strong support of SEL at all
levels of the organization and the importance of an ongoing commitment to SEL amongst
school leaders. In turn, Mitra (2005) writes of the importance of balancing our offers of
support to and our letting go of our advisees (or mentees) in order to create the space for
shared authority. Before this can be accomplished within an advisory context, the School
will need to make the shift from a top-down to a distributed leadership model at all levels
within the organization.

Kouzes and Posner (2011) highlight the importance of leaders who “(1) model the
way, (2) inspire a shared vision, (3) challenge the process, (4) enable others to act, and
(5) encourage the heart” (p.16). McKee (2014) adds “the need to eliminate the
pathologies related to hierarchical power so that leaders and leadership practices emerge”
free of “fear and mistrust, which are toxic to innovation” (p.613). As these and other
researchers suggest, transformational leadership requires a shared and modelled vision, a
commitment to lifelong learning, and a reliable mechanism for and receptivity to critical
feedback.
A transactional power structure impedes the development and practice of student voice. Such a top-down structure leads to the internalization and perpetuation of adultist beliefs and practices (Connor, Ober, & Brown, 2016). Cook-Sather (2002) encourages students and teachers to maintain a hypervigilant stance when it comes to power differentials, supporting one another in broadening our conceptualization of authority on education to include the voices of schools’ primary consumers—its students. Additionally, administrators must interrogate their own relationship to power and control and the messages such relationships are sending to faculty and students.

Rigorous and ongoing professional development of all educators and school leaders related to SEL is an urgent necessity. Phillippo (2010) finds that, in addition to the enhancement of educators’ social and emotional skills, professional development in SEL is correlated with increased job satisfaction and commitment to students. Other studies that are more specific to effective and sustainable advisory programs (Cervone & Cushman, 2014; Cushman, 1990; Johnson, 2009; Mitra, 2005) echo the need for ongoing training and the allocation of valuable resources.

Finally, both student and faculty research participants highlighted the need for a dependable structure for regular and ongoing feedback from mentees to mentors as well as from mentors to GLC. Researchers agree that asking teachers and students about their perceptions of advising programs and making modifications to said programs based on those perceptions is critically important (Makkonen, 2004). This research study accomplishes the task of collecting and analyzing student mentee and faculty mentor perceptions of EWS’s Chavaya Program. The next crucial step is for modifications to be
made based on these voiced perceptions and experiences. As Baroutsis, McGregor and Mills (2016) aptly note, “It is what happens with the information, what is done with it, that is also of great importance” (p.127).

**Leadership: Implications for Research**

Kane and Chimwayange (2014) stress “the importance of attending to student voice when seeking to understand or improve participation, teaching, and learning in schools” (p.54). Collecting and ignoring student survey data was just one of the many ways EWS failed to use student voice in either the design or the maintenance of the advisory program. In contrast, the genuine engagement of student voice is situated at the higher rungs of Fletcher’s (2011) Ladder of Youth Voice, necessitating a distributed leadership structure rather than a hierarchical one. There is undoubtedly a relationship between student voice and leadership models that merits further study.

Further, the intentional practice of the skills and habits needed to understand and articulate our unique perspectives as well as to listen actively, critically, and compassionately to the unique perspectives of others, enables us to develop capacity as authentic people, strong leaders, and thoughtful change agents. Therefore, it is incumbent upon the adults (parents, teachers, and administrators) in school communities to provide intentional opportunities for students to develop their voices and sense of agency.

Educators must create and nurture relationships and learning environments that provide each student with opportunities to better understand his or her own unique identity, to practice sharing his/her narrative with others, and (when inequities and
unfairness surface) to develop strategies for confronting hegemony within the school, local, and global communities. After all, “the most successful leaders of change are people who don’t work in silos. No one person holds the key to success. Reach out to people, talk and listen deeply. You’ll learn a lot and both you and others will get the support you need” (McKee, 2014, p. 218).

Administrators, teachers, and parents (working collaboratively with the shared goal of preparing our students and children to engage in the challenging work of self-awareness and mutual acceptance) must model embracing vulnerability in the ongoing process of self-awareness, self-acceptance, and self-actualization as well as tolerance and inclusion. The study of school communities that have succeeded in creating and sustaining distributed leadership policies and practices would be a welcomed contribution to the field of educational research.

**Final Reflections**

As my parents’ only child and as a female growing up in the South, I felt a tremendous amount of family, community, and societal pressure to fit in, to prioritize other people’s hopes and expectations above my own, and to strive for perfection in all that I did. Failure was seldom acknowledged, let alone discussed. There was an ever-present pressure to keep up appearances of success, happiness, and purity. I frequently felt alone because I didn’t feel that there was space for my truths. The culture was for children to be seen, not heard and I did my best to comply.

Developing an understanding of who we are and what we value is a lifelong process that is constantly evolving. It is our moral responsibility as educators to create
safe, inviting spaces for even the youngest of children to better understand their cultural backgrounds, personal strengths and challenges, and ethical values. How do we, as teachers and school leaders, accomplish this? We can begin by relying upon a distributed leadership model that prioritizes the creation of safe spaces for the development and practice of student voice. Such spaces allow for students to build confidence in their unique voices while simultaneously listening to and learning from a wide range of other, equally valid voices and perspectives.

Rueda and McIntyre (2002) write about the three levels or planes upon which the development of a community of learners occur—the personal plane, the interpersonal or social plane, and the community or institutional plane (p.198). I have borrowed from this framework by expressing the importance of developing a strong sense of (and even pride in) one’s own identity. Having the opportunity to develop one’s sense of self within an affirming classroom and school context that makes time for regular reflection and practice of the articulation of one’s evolving voice amongst one’s peers and teachers is invaluable.

Educator and learner alike must embrace “the vulnerability needed to support and encourage honest conversations around the emergence of who we are and what we want to become” (Tanaka et al., 2014, p. 221). As demonstrated by the humbling stories and wise musings of Linda Christensen (2009) as well as the literacy autobiography of Villanueva (1993), the transformative potential of teaching and the classroom experience brings with it a hope for what Antonio Gramsci termed “counterhegemony” (Freire & Macedo, 1987) and Luke and Freebody (1997) referred to as “heterotopias,” that is,
“communities of discourse where difference and diversity are valued rather than shunned” (p.213). Willis (1995) echoes these hopeful outlooks when he writes that “literacy is a discursive practice in which difference becomes crucial to understanding not simply how to read, write, or develop aural skills, but also how to recognize that the identities of others matter as part of the progressive set of politics and practices aimed at the reconstruction of a democratic public life” (p.395).

We need to encourage our students to recognize acts of injustice, inequity, and unfairness when they see them, whether they occur within their school, local, or global communities. Next, we must empower them to develop effective strategies to push back in ways that honor the dignity and genius inherent in each unique individual. To do so is to care for our children and to believe in their potential to use their voices to serve as agents of positive, equalizing change.
Appendix A: Research Questions and Student Voice Definition

Research Questions:

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>How do upper school students and their faculty mentors perceive and experience the development and practice of student voice through the school’s advising program?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>What are supports for the development and practice of student voice within the advisory context (as perceived by upper school students and by their faculty mentors)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>What are deterrents/inhibitors to the development and practice of student voice within the advisory context (as perceived by upper school students and by their faculty mentors)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>In what ways is my work as an educational leader affected by my inquiry?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Definition of Student Voice:

I use the term student voice to refer to the articulation (through words and behaviors) of one’s sense of self (which includes one’s identity, one’s truth—including ideas, perspectives, and beliefs—and one’s values).
Appendix B: A Modified Descriptive Review Process for the Analysis of Data by the Student Cooperative Co-Inquiry Team
(Adapted from Patricia Carini)

- The process is a constructed conversation that follows procedural guidelines. The guiding principles of a descriptive review process include:
  o treating the work seriously, not dismissively,
  o setting aside the evaluation baggage of "correctness,"
  o viewing the work as active-- as thought in process-- recognizing that it is not definitive and, by the same token, neither is it exhaustible,
  o recognizing that description lays out a range of possible meanings and that it is not intended to be an explanation or to answer the question of why someone said it or to draw definitive conclusions
  o letting description do its work by not leaping to huge interpretations of the picture, psychological or otherwise.

- Each member of the group has a turn to speak in go-arounds. You are free to pass. Everyone listens actively. There is no cross dialogue. Comments are kept short. (If you keep hearing yourself say "and" you’ve said too much). The purpose of this process is to understand one’s peers’ ways of knowing.

- General Impression Round: (Begin with 3 minutes of writing and then share what you have written with the larger group when it is your turn to do so.)
  o What did you notice? (There are no right or wrong noticings.)
  o The purpose of this early round is a re-telling of the words of the original student participants.

- Reading Rounds:
  1. The facilitator (a rotating responsibility) sets the focus for each round by reading aloud a portion of the focus group transcript that she/he has selected for sharing. (The portion of data may have been selected for a wide variety of reasons-- because it resonates with the ideas of the facilitator, because it is unlike the perspective of the facilitator, because it is unclear to the facilitator, because it raised questions for the facilitator, etc. The facilitator will not share the reasoning behind her/his selection of text to read aloud.)
  2. The person sitting to the left of the facilitator will begin the round with a question, an observation, or a restatement of a portion of the quoted text that resonates for him/her. The round will continue until each participant has had his/her turn to contribute a question, an observation, or a restatement of a portion of the quoted text that resonates for him/her. It is important that observations be grounded in description, not judgment or evaluation. (It is appropriate to pass if you do not have anything to add.)
3. The facilitator will summarize the round and decide if he/she would like to insert a clarifying question round. If so, once the clarifying question round is complete, another reading round will begin. (This time, the facilitator responsibility shifts to the person seated on the left of the original facilitator.)

4. Steps #1, 2, and 3 are repeated until each participant has had the opportunity to serve as facilitator.

- **“I Wonder” Round:** At the conclusion of a complete cycle of reading rounds, all participants will take 3 minutes to write down anything they are curious about as it relates to student voice in the advisory/Chavaya program at Emery.
  - Each participant will take his/her turn sharing his/her wonderings. It is appropriate to repeat what someone else has already said if it is also something that you had written down. It is also appropriate to pass.

- **Debrief/Feedback Round:**
  - How did this work, or not?
  - What did you learn?
  - What are your suggestions for tweaking this process tomorrow and Monday?

**In preparation for Friday and Monday:**

- Please select at least one portion of data from each focus group transcript that you would like to share during an upcoming Reading Round.
- Creating lists of noticings, questions, and wonderings in advance of our meetings is appropriate, but not required.
- Please be cognizant of using descriptive (as opposed to judgmental) noticings.
  - Example: “I noticed that the tone was happy.” vs. “I noticed that I liked it.”
- Please be fully present, honest, and engaged in active listening throughout the cycle of rounds.
Appendix C: Data from Student Focus Group Transcripts Selected for Descriptive Review by Student Cooperative Co-Inquiry Team

Student-Selected Data from Focus Group Transcript #1

1. Also, I think a lot of the ... Not a lot, but a few of the Chavaya mentors, they don't have a lot of experience with leading discussions and things like that. They sort of feel uncomfortable in other positions. [crosstalk 00:26:47] (p.9, lines 36-38, Speaker 7)

2. Even in just our regular classes, I think there's a better connection going on between the teachers and students than actually happens in Chavaya. (p.7, lines 44-45, Speaker 7)

3. At the beginning, they said that we kept the same advisory group, or I guess Chavaya now, for all four years. Then they changed it every single year because they kept on changing the program. I think that was a huge take back from the entire idea of having an advisory group to grow close to and stuff like that. I know we're a tiny school but having four different advisory groups - Chavaya now ... That's ridiculous. (p.2, lines 41-45, Speaker 5)

4. Nobody really knew what was going on and then it took five or six minutes to pull up a PowerPoint that we maybe talked about for two minutes and then left. (p.10, lines 10-12, Speaker 7)

5. Recently, especially in Chavaya, we've been doing maybe one thing. The rest of the year, as far as I remember, we haven't done anything that's actually useful at all. (p.2, lines 37-39, Speaker 5)

6. -That failed.
--That failed. It was an attempt of doing something more, but ...

---It was working on responsibility. It was-

--Yeah, social responsibility. It was in tenth grade.

---You had to ...

--We had to water each plant.

---Each person in the Chavaya would switch off and you would have to water the plant before school each week.

--The teachers ended up watering the plants most of the time.

-If they did. (p.2, lines 1-16, Speakers 3, 5, and 6)

7. --Of course but I think it was best freshman year because we didn't know people that well or at least as well as we do now. I didn't know anybody at all except for this one. Basically, I was in a group with nobody that I knew and it was just nicer because we were forced into that group which doesn't sound so nice but if you don't know anybody and you have to be with these people, then you can grow closer to them. Then they kept on switching it around and I was like, "how am I supposed to get close to new people if we're not forced together?"

-I remember freshman year, all of us were ... I don't think verbally we were like, "Oh my gosh. I'm so excited we all get to stay together for the next four years," but I think in the back of our minds, all of us were like ... [crosstalk 00:14:57]

This is nice that we get to know each other and have a bond.
--In freshman year, my Chavaya, everyone was so nice to each other and wanting to talk. That's not how my Chavaya is anymore.

-Yeah. Chavaya, I feel like after it switched into Chavaya and less of advisory ...

Freshman year, we were all forced to be together. I remember our Shabbaton and we had to ...

---It was so fun.

-It was a lot of fun because we all had to be together and work together and learn how to interact with each other. Now Chavaya is we go on Shabbaton and you'd still ... It's not as restrictive. It kind of sounds bad when I say "restrictive" but people would just fall back into their own separate groups and it'd just be kind of like ... You didn't really get to know one another and really ...

---It's like just having another class now. (p.5, lines 6-33, Speakers 2, 4, and 6)

8. --Yeah. Same teachers, same group but instead we've been switching teachers and groups. I think I find one person in the same Chavaya group from sophomore to this year.

-I feel like I have no connection to my Chavaya. To be honest, I don't really remember that much. (p.3, lines 7-11, Speakers 2 and 5)

Student-Selected Data from Focus Group Transcript #2

1. I don't know how it's worked, but I think they do a good job in mixing a bunch of people together, but also having at least one friend that you have, especially if you're a freshman. I remember I didn't have friends and I didn't know anyone in my freshman one, and it kind of bothered me. Eventually, I got switched, I don't
know how or why, but I did, and then I had a friend and I felt more comfortable. It's nice having a friend, but it's nice also getting to know other people. Personally, I like when they're switched. I don't like being in the same one for four years, just so you can get to know everyone, especially your grade. I know as a school we do a lot of grade bonding things, but I think Chavaya is important to because you do that mainly twice a week, or once a week. (p.2, lines 18-26, Speaker 4)

2. I was in there, we literally just sat around like talked to our classmates and just hung out. It was like a period for hanging out. I don't really remember our freshman year, but that's basically what I remember. (p.1, lines 20-22, Speaker 4)

3. I feel sometimes in Chavaya they ask what we feel about different programs and ask what we feel about different things, but they don't really ever take our input on planning Chavaya, like what we do during that time. (p.1, lines 7-9, Speaker 6)

4. Also, think like some of the things we do during Chavaya we don't want to do, but we sort of have to do, like aren't we required by law to talk about fire drills and stuff like that. That's stuff we have to do. I feel like ... Sorry. But I feel like Chavaya can't be both a place to do that and a place for bonding and close relationships with their mentors. I feel like it sort of inhibits the purpose of having a mentor by doing all of the stuff we have to do, so if we could find a different form for that, and not call it Chavaya. (p.6, lines 13-18, Speaker 5)
5. Now, I know almost every single teacher and have a relationship with almost every single teacher in the school, and my *Chavaya* person now is a teacher I can go to with almost anything. So I think it depends on what grade you're in basically, because coming in as freshmen, you don't really know much, but then you start to get to know all the teachers. (p.4, lines 19-22, Speaker 5)

6. I sort of feel like when you have a mentor, the types of activities we're doing are not supporting a mentor relationship, if that makes sense. (p.3, lines 9-10, Speaker 4)

7. -What about things that really inhibit student voice?
   --When they get assigned the topic to talk about, and that's all they talk about the whole time and don't really listen to what we're saying most of the time.
   -And “they” is the mentor?
   --Yeah. (p.6, lines 2-11, Speakers 1 and 6)

8. -I thought that was interesting, too. Okay, so that's my list of five questions. Do you have anything else that you would want to share related to student voice within the *Chavaya* program at Emery, or anything related to *Chavaya*, or advisory, or if you have something to contribute as kind of a last, departing words of wisdom.
   --I don't know if this has to do with student voice, but I remember there was one *Chavaya* where we had to choose what we wanted to do, like tire-changing, or stuff like that. It was kind of like life lessons that are nice to know, and I really liked it. I now know how to change a tire. (p.7, lines 21-29, Speakers 1 and 5)
1. I don't really think so. We do always have an opportunity to share what we think about whatever video we saw or whatever program we just did, but for the most part our meetings were just kind of in and out. You go, you do the thing that was sent in the email to the teacher that was the thing that was assigned to do, and then after that it's kind of a forced meeting and then it's a study hall for the rest of the time. It's a constrained schedule that doesn't really allow for students to explore topics that they're interested in, because everything's being assigned. Although we do have that time to share our thoughts after, it's not that much of student voice, I don't think. (p. 3, lines 1-8)

2. I feel like it's sort of been hit or miss, for me. I feel like some years I've been in Advisory where it's not necessarily the advisor or the mentor themself that really binds Advisory or Chavaya. It's sort of the group of people. I think that for Chavaya or an Advisory group to work it has to be a good blend of outgoing people and sort of people who are more quiet and people ... Everyone has to want to do things or then it's not fun for anyone else. (p. 1, lines 1-5)

3. I think the teacher really sets the tone for how the year is going to be. That's just what I've found because I know my first two years, I had teachers that were very, very engaged with it and sometimes to the point where we got kind of annoyed and didn't want to participate. I found for junior and senior year the teacher was less attached to it and less into it and the students were less into it, but also for the first two years even having teachers that were kind of overbearing with Advisory,
people were still not as into it. But I think the teacher setting the tone really
decides how the entire year is going to go and participation. (p.1, lines 20-26)

4. I think it's because the last person in charge of *Chavaya* was really set on having all the programing done ahead of time and on the calendar, her semester, ahead of time so we knew what was happening every single time. There was not wiggle room for what we wanted to have. I think that it would definitely be beneficial to have students coming in earlier in the year and deciding, "Oh, maybe we could do this this day," or something like that. I think it was really a lot of early on scheduling. (p.3, lines 32-37)

5. Also, something that I think would be really beneficial would be to have some sort of training for teachers if they're going to lead a *Chavaya* group, just because I know there's a lot of stuff that goes into being a teacher. (p.9, lines 5-7)

6. I'm glad that we didn't get the same group just because it is a small school and it gives us an opportunity to expand even the slightest bit and be around people that you might not normally be around. So instead of us just being in a constant comfort zone, we have to readjust a little every year. Which it is a little step back with what we're able to accomplish just because of comfort, but ultimately I think for student experience and outreach with each other it's more productive. (p.6, lines 32-37)

7. You can tell when the teacher seems bored to do something. They're not really prepared for it. I'm not saying unprofessional. I'm saying you can tell that they're not interested in it either. (p.6, lines 17-19)
8. It was kind of hard because we just didn't want to do it. And I know sophomore year we were just angsty sophomores and it was just not going well because we were all so annoyed with how into it our advisor was. (p.1, lines 36-38)
### Appendix D: Data Analysis Code Set

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Abbrev</th>
<th>Definition: Descriptions of...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Voice: Supports for Development &amp; Practice</td>
<td>SV:SUP</td>
<td>...factors (time, space, relationships, activities, etc.) that are perceived/experienced as supports for the development and/or practice of student voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Voice: Inhibitors to Development &amp; Practice</td>
<td>SV:IN</td>
<td>...factors that are perceived/experienced as deterrents to / inhibitors of the development and/or practice of student voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Control/Power: Perception of</td>
<td>TCP</td>
<td>...situations that indicate a preference for / reliance on a conceptualization of the teacher as arbiter of knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chavaya: Structure</td>
<td>C:S</td>
<td>…the structure/format of the Advisory/Chavaya program (e.g.: looping vs. year-by-year; size of group; time/week; etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chavaya: Goal/Objective</td>
<td>C:GO</td>
<td>...the purpose/objective/goal of spending time together during Chavaya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chavaya: Context for Relationships</td>
<td>C:RB</td>
<td>...the relationships (between students and/or students and mentor) that occur within the Chavaya context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-Teacher Relationship</td>
<td>STR</td>
<td>...circumstances/contexts that nurture relationships between students and teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-Mentor Relationship</td>
<td>SMR</td>
<td>…the relationship the exists/develops between a student and her/his faculty mentor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Abbrev</td>
<td>Definition: Descriptions of...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Voice: Lack of Student Voice</td>
<td>SV:L</td>
<td>…a lack of student voice/input related to Advisory/Chavaya programming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Voice: Superficial Engagement of</td>
<td>SV:SE</td>
<td>…activities/programming that solicit student reactions on a surface level rather than providing an opportunity for organic, authentic, and/or substantive input</td>
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<td>Student Voice: Student Understanding of</td>
<td>SV: SU</td>
<td>…the meaning/understanding of student voice from the student perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Voice: Faculty Understanding of</td>
<td>SV: FU</td>
<td>…the meaning/understanding of student voice from the faculty perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty Mentor: Interest, Training, Voice</td>
<td>FM:ITV</td>
<td>…a need for faculty interest, training, and/or voice to experience success/satisfaction within the advisor/mentor role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison: Chavaya vs. Other Program</td>
<td>Comp: Ch v. O</td>
<td>…a way / ways in which Advisory/Chavaya is the same as / different from other school programs (an academic course, Ma’amad, extracurricular offerings, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison: Past to Present</td>
<td>Comp: P to P</td>
<td>…a way / ways that the Advisory/Chavaya program has changed over time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade Level Coordinator Control/Power</td>
<td>GLC:CP</td>
<td>…situations that indicate a preference for / reliance on a conceptualization of the grade level coordinator as arbiter of knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared Control/Power</td>
<td>Sh:CP</td>
<td>…situations that indicate a preference for / reliance on a collaborative approach to learning and programming (between students and faculty/administrators)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chavaya: Activities/Programming</td>
<td>C:AP</td>
<td>…activities and/or programming that students experienced during Advisory/Chavaya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chavaya Mentor Experience</td>
<td>CME</td>
<td>…the experience (or lack thereof) of Advisors/Mentors for the advising/mentoring role</td>
</tr>
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</table>
## Inductive Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Abbrev</th>
<th>Definition: Descriptions of...</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Student Engagement in <em>Chavaya</em> Programming</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>…student engagement in / motivation to participate in Advisory/Chavaya programming</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix E: Researcher Interview Protocol

1. Where are you in the research process right now?

2. What are you most concerned about right now related to the study?

3. What has gone differently than you expected recently? Please explain.

4. What is taking up most of your time right now related to the study?

5. Have you needed to make modifications to your research plans recently? If so, please explain.

6. Are you concerned about any threats to validity? If so, please explain.

7. What aspects of your research or the research process are you finding particularly interesting right now? Please explain.
Appendix F: Grade Level Coordinator (GLC) / 12th Grade Faculty Mentor
Interview Protocol

Introduction

1. How long have you been working at The Emery/Weiner School?
2. Would you please share with me your perspective on the evolution of the advisory system while you have worked at EWS?
3. What do you perceive to be the greatest strengths and challenges of the current version of the advisory program?
4. How long have you served in the role of Grade Level Coordinator (GLC) / 12th Grade Mentor?

Student Voice within the Chavaya Program

1. For this study, I am defining “student voice” as the articulation (through words and behaviors) of one’s sense of self (which includes one’s identity, one's truth—including ideas, perspectives, and beliefs, and one’s values). According to this definition of the term “student voice,” do you believe that student voice is prioritized within the Chavaya program specifically?
2. How does the prioritization of student voice within the Chavaya program compare with the prioritization of student voice in other classes, programs, and policies at The Emery/Weiner School?
3. Based on your experience, how is student voice included in the creation and implementation of advising curriculum that is relevant and useful to students?
4. What are supports for the development and practice of student voice within the advisory context?
5. What are deterrents/inhibitors to the development and practice of student voice within the advisory context?

Conclusion

Do you have anything else that you would like to share related to student voice within the Chavaya program at The Emery/Weiner School?
Thank you very much for your time and participation in this study.
Appendix G: Student Focus Group Protocol

Questions: Student Voice within the Chavaya Program

1. For this study, we are defining “student voice” as the articulation (through words and behaviors) of one’s sense of self (which includes one’s identity, one’s truth—including ideas, perspectives, and beliefs, and one’s values). According to this definition of the term “student voice,” do you believe that student voice is prioritized within the Chavaya program specifically?

2. How does the prioritization of student voice within the Chavaya program compare with the prioritization of student voice in other classes, programs, and policies at The Emery/Weiner School?

3. Based on your experience, how is student voice included in the creation and implementation of advising curriculum that is relevant and useful to students?

4. What are supports for the development and practice of student voice within the advisory context?

5. What are deterrents/inhibitors to the development and practice of student voice within the advisory context?

Conclusion

Do you have anything else that you would like to share related to student voice within the Chavaya program at The Emery/Weiner School?

Thank you very much for your time and participation in this study.
Appendix H: Letter of Informed Assent

Dear Student,

I am writing to request your participation in a study about your perception of student voice within the *Chavaya* context at The Emery/Weiner School. This study is being conducted by Cara Henderson, a teacher and administrator at The Emery/Weiner School and a doctoral candidate at the University of Pennsylvania’s Mid-Career Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership. Below please find additional details about the study. If you have any questions about this document and/or the case study, please contact Cara Henderson for further explanation.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this study is to understand more about the inclusion of student voice in the *Chavaya* program. Additionally, students and faculty will reflect upon and discuss what they perceive as the supports for and the deterrents to student voice within the advisory program.

PROCEDURES: The 12th grade student focus groups will occur during lunch in April. Each focus group will last about 45 minutes. An audio recording of the conversations will be made and transcribed later for analysis.

RISKS AND INCONVENIENCES: There is a possibility that some of the questions in the focus groups may make the student feel uncomfortable. If she/he does feel uncomfortable, she/he can do any of the following: she/he can choose not to answer certain questions, she/he can take a break and continue later, or she/he can choose to exit the focus group setting.

BENEFITS: This study was designed to develop a better understanding of student and faculty perceptions of specific aspects of the *Chavaya* program (in general) and the *Chavaya* curriculum (specifically). While you may not directly benefit from participating in this research, you may feel some satisfaction in sharing your experience and reflections. Further, this research may help future students and educational professionals at The Emery/Weiner School and beyond.

COMPENSATION: There will be no financial compensation for participation; however, lunch of the student’s choice (from a menu of options) will be provided.

PRIVACY: You understand that your identity will not be revealed as a participant in this study. If any publication results from this research, you will only be identified by a pseudonym, and other information that could reveal your identity will be disguised.

WITHDRAWAL: Your decision as to whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with The Emery/Weiner School or the researcher (Cara Henderson). If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without affecting those relationships. You are also free not to answer any question during the focus group and/or interview and to exit the focus group and/or interview at any time.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Cara Henderson
Statement of informed assent

When you sign this document, you are agreeing to participate in this research study.

Please print your name: ____________________________________________________________

____________________________      ______________________________
Name      Signature     Date

Contact Person:
Cara Henderson
832-655-4076
chenderson@emeryweiner.org

Consent form template taken from the following source:
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