
Reviewed by Whitney Payton and Sheila T. Gregory
Clark Atlanta University
United States

*Advisory in Urban Public Schools: A Study of Expanded Teacher Roles* written by Kate Phillippo is a historical, empirical and sociological analysis. In this seven chapter book, Phillippo compares the expanding roles of teacher-advisors in three urban high schools and includes the perspectives of 47 teachers and 35 students. She uses a generous supply of figures and tables, to help illuminate the descriptive characteristics, structural elements, and various schemas for the defining roles of a teacher-advisor. The study was funded primarily through a Spencer Foundation Research Training Grant and also partially through a dissertation fellowship. Phillippo’s book represents the eighth book in a special series from Palgrave’s *Studies in Urban Education*, dating back to 2008. The series editors of this particular book are Alan R. Sadovnik and Susan F. Semel, who also write the Foreword of the book. They argue that urban school teachers who provide social and emotional support to their students and are dedicated to equity and social justice not only redefine teacher roles, but also improve student learning outcomes. The Appendix includes teacher interviews sorted by school, the complete

research methods and generous notes and references from each chapter.

In Chapter One, “Advisory: A View Into Expanded Teacher Roles,” Phillippo, aided by Beth Wright, opens with two brief case studies in two different urban high schools, involving one teacher and one student in each of the two schools. She illustrates how two highly qualified teachers can reach two different outcomes with similar student progress, not based on their teaching practices, but rather on advisory roles and characteristics. She identifies the advisory practices each of the two teachers followed, along with a relevant literature review, to highlight and support her contention of the expanding roles of new and seasoned teachers/advisors, which continues to be hotly debated in the industry. She introduces four important learning opportunities when studying the “advisory role” of teachers: 1) represent the formal expansion of traditional teacher roles; 2) provide further opportunities to understand more about teacher-student relationships; 3) add social and emotional support to the role of teacher-advisor; and 4) understand more about small urban school models. In light of the requirements of No Child Left Behind, the rising English Language Learner (ELL) population, political pressures, budget reductions, accountability and assessment standards, the debate on teacher roles and responsibilities are far from over.

Chapter Two, “Very Nice, But Not Very Helpful: The Education Profession’s Divergent Representation of Teachers’ Social-Emotional Support Responsibilities, 1892-2011,” explores the scholarly literature on teacher’s roles in the United States, including 80 archival historical documents. Most of the limited research over the past 120 years indicated the consistent challenges teachers faced creating and maintaining active, engaging, and encouraging teacher-student relationships, when addressing the academic, social and emotional needs of students. While much research supported one of these individual issues separately, few offered a bird’s eye view into the relationship among them. It was found that few teacher preparatory programs taught student development or mental health courses that would aid in better understanding the social and emotional needs of students. In fact, she quotes Labaree (2010) who claimed, “teachers are usually left alone to work out a way to teach effectively” (p. 25). Phillippo creates a typology conceptualizing the degree to which teachers envision their responsibilities for providing
students with social and emotional support. This typology is two dimensional with four clusters, ranging from the degree to which teacher responsibilities are narrow or wide, and the degree to which integration of teachers social and emotional support of students are low or high. The four distinct clusters are the teacher as an academic specialist, a system component, an individual agent, and/or a team member. What is abundantly clear from all the research is that there is no clear instruction or consistent expectation on how to provide social and emotional support to students, particularly those who struggle academically, often due in part to non-academic issues. Phillippo warns that if these circumstances persist, we will continue to fail to prepare teachers to effectively to meet the needs of an increasing population of learners in all of our American schools, although it will disproportionately impact students who struggle academically.

In Chapter Three, Phillippo begins with a literature review on the influence of school organization and culture, on teacher performance (knowledge and skills), disposition and retention. She then aligned these structural and cultural characteristics of organizations to the structural and cultural characteristics of the three urban high schools under study. Her findings revealed that each school needs to expand the roles of teachers that fit their student body, and must provide support that provides real instructional time toward training and development. She also found that the quality of the relationship between teacher/advisor and students relied on the alignment and interdependence between the three elements structural school elements: resources, formalized procedures and cultural dimensions to maximize teacher/advisor role.

Phillippo examines the historical evolution of the Advisor role through the lens of structure in Chapter Four. She demonstrates how a school’s structuring of the advisor role significantly impacts the behaviors of the advisor. She dissects the advisor role into the aforementioned three elements: resources, formalized procedures, and cultural dimensions. Her findings reveal that not only must these elements be present; they must also be strategically aligned in a related and proportionate manner. Further findings within this chapter indicate a negative confirmation of the alignment’s importance to expanded teacher roles. She confirms the possibility of providing support to the advisor role with sufficient organizational structure and that the absence of school-level structures to support the advisor
role contributes to a sense of abandonment and fosters a self-learning process by teachers. The findings of this chapter imply that if expanded teacher roles are to work within the school they must be significantly structured and aligned with other school structures.

Phillippo tells a story about the relationship between individual characteristics and the impact on teachers’ work in Chapter Five. Her findings reveal that based on their own individual characteristics, teachers interpreted the advisor role in various ways. Phillippo likens each teacher’s individual set of resources and schemas to her “toolbox.” Based on the provision of necessary resources, each teacher is called upon to utilize her toolbox in order to bridge the gap. As a result of variations within each teacher’s toolbox, students received a wide range of experiences with their teachers who advised them. This variation was also associated with differences in teachers’ adjustment to the advisor role, as suggested by teachers’ engagement in the work of advising, satisfaction with the advisor role, and teacher turnover rates. This chapter also delves into the importance of matching individual teachers with expanded teacher roles. Within the context of this theme, Phillippo identifies three aspects: teacher learning related to expanded roles, organizational structuring of expanded roles, and the staffing of expanded roles. Her findings suggest the importance of staffing expanded roles with teachers who are best suited for them, particularly in schools with fledging structures to support those roles. Further findings suggest that school administrators who include expanded roles in teachers’ formal responsibilities, should consider which teachers will fit these roles, as well as how the school’s support of the role influences this fit. She goes on to suggest that administrators hire teachers already suited to expanded roles, or giving teachers support and learning experiences to suit them to the roles.

Chapter Six identifies one framing question: “How do teachers respond to the advisor role’s pragmatic and emotional demands?” (p. 135). Phillippo’s research identified several answers, ranging from innovation to total disengagement. While some teachers engaged productively in formally expanded roles, many expressed contempt of the responsibilities without consideration of the necessity for student outcomes. Through the analysis of the experiences of two teachers, Phillippo finds that some teachers will work skillfully and innovatively with
expanded roles, even in the absence of professional or organizational support. While these findings offer a sense of promise that teachers can fulfill formally expanded roles, they are also accompanied by a warning that not all teachers will have optimism, inspiring experiences. This is particularly true when schools expand the advisor role, but abandon the teacher with a combination of high pressure, vaguely expressed expectations, and minimal support. Further findings in this chapter suggest that substantial rates of undesirable teacher responses to the role, such as role overload, burnout, and turnover have the potential to negatively impact teachers in the advisor role. In closing, the chapter reveals the advisor role as neither a good or bad one for teachers. Instead, the advisor role is one that contributes to a range of teacher responses and outcomes, depending on school and teacher characteristics.

In the final chapter, Phillippo examines the necessity of social-emotional support for advisees. As alluded to in Chapter Two, there are several reasons a teacher in the advisory role may not want to involve themselves in the social emotional support of their students. Phillippo states, “Even proponents of teachers providing social-emotional support tend to fail to specify what teachers should actually do” (p. 157). Failure to provide expectations in this area fostered the behaviors of teachers in the study who underperformed, misunderstood expectations, and totally avoided the topic. Phillippo surmises that despite misunderstandings in this area, teachers consistently encounter expectations to provide social-emotional support to their students, whether directly through administration or indirectly from students themselves. To develop teachers’ social-emotional support competencies, Phillippo recommends three areas of emphasis: providing clear and bounded expectations, increasing teachers’ knowledge and skills, and supporting teachers’ own coping efforts. She further suggests that teachers will also benefit from knowing how to address different social-emotional issues that arise in the classroom. To accomplish these goals, social-emotional support competence would need to be accompanied by schools’ enhancement for teachers. Further understanding and exploration on the topic is needed; however, a genuine consensus that preparation is needed now to ensure that teachers are physically and emotionally ready to perform in the continuously evolving advisory role and to support the extended needs of their advisees.
Overall, *Advisory in Urban Public Schools: A Study of Expanded Teacher Roles* is a well-written and timely addition to a dismal body of literature on the expanding roles of teacher-advisors, specifically in urban high schools. While Phillippo’s book looks exclusively at the role of teachers at only three high schools, P-8 teachers would likely find many teaching strategies applicable in similar settings with other ethnically diverse schools. This book would prove most especially beneficial for teachers of any race or type of school. The primary strength of this book lies in the experiences and stories of teachers. Furthermore, there is very little knowledge of how teacher-advisors are able to make meaning inside and outside their classrooms, without training and support. The contributors offer valuable insights from personal experiences and research that provide evidence and unique perspectives that will surely influence current and future research on teacher-advisor roles in P-12 classrooms. *Advisory in Urban Public Schools: A Study of Expanded Teacher Roles* is no doubt, a successful attempt from the Palgrave series to offer a historical, empirical, sociological analysis and practice-oriented evidence of how teacher-advisors can influence urban school students, both within and outside of the classroom.

About the Reviewers

Whitney Payton  
Clark Atlanta University  
United States  
Whitney Payton is a Bill and Melinda Gates Millennium Scholar and doctoral candidate in the department of educational leadership at Clark Atlanta University. She serves as president of the Young Education Professionals Atlanta Chapter and as Public Relations Coordinator for the Educational Leadership Student Association. She is currently an instructor in the Sophomore Year Experience program at Spelman College and the Assistant Director of Admissions at Argosy University, Atlanta Campus.

Sheila T. Gregory  
Clark Atlanta University  
United States  
Sheila T Gregory, M.P.A., Ph.D. is a professor of educational leadership and higher education at Clark Atlanta University. Dr. Gregory is the Editor of the *Journal of Invitational Theory and Practice*, of the
International Alliance of Invitational Education. In 2005, Sheila Gregory's fifth co-authored book, *Daring to Educate: The Legacy of the Early Spelman College Presidents*, was nominated for an NAACP Image Award. Also in 2005, she received the prestigious national award of *Teacher and Scholar of the Year*. Dr. Gregory is the author of seven scholarly books and nearly 60 articles, book chapters and other scholarly publications. She has been awarded two Faculty Resource Network Awards for scholarly research in residence and New York University, and has completed three Indigenous Visiting Research Scholar Appointments at the American University in Cairo, Egypt, the University of South Australia, Adelaide, and the University of the West Indies System in Jamaica, Barbados, and Trinidad-Tobago. Dr. Gregory has also consulted with the Shoshone-Bannock Tribal Association in Pocatello, Idaho, and the Las Vegas Piutes, in Nevada, where she trained and evaluated Non-Native American Indian teachers on the ways of knowing and learning within the Native American Indian culture. Dr. Gregory continues to work several P-12 school districts on community service projects, curriculum development, mentoring programs, Small Learning Communities (SLC) and School Improvement Plans, including a two-year collaboration with the New Schools for New Orleans (NSNO) and the New Orleans Public School District (NOPSD) which provides opportunities for doctoral students to also serve as mentor and visiting teachers in the NOPSD. She continues to consult with numerous universities, community colleges, P-12 school districts, and tribal associations around the country and abroad.