Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and School Climate:
Building SEL Skills and Community through Participatory Action Research

Context
A large, suburban K-12 co-educational private school is seeking to improve its school climate by forging better relationships between middle school students, faculty, staff and administration. Fostering the development of social and emotional learning (SEL) skills such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL) can lead to a more positive school climate. The middle school has an advisory program intended to support SEL, but the curriculum is currently seen as not contextually-relevant.

Theory
Youth participatory action research (YPAR) offers promise as an approach for empowering student voice in solving problems (Shamrova and Cummings, 2017; Anyon et al., 2018), as well as for developing SEL skills (Ozer et al., 2010, Ozer, 2017). Bandura’s social cognitive and self-efficacy theories suggest that when individuals believe that they are capable of achieving a goal, they are more likely to pursue it, as well as to take on more challenging goals (Bandura, 1977, 2005). The related concept of social cognitive career theory (SCCT) similarly suggests that self-efficacy influences the choice to develop specific careers and skills (Lent, 2013).

Innovation
This study aims to examine how engaging in YPAR as an approach to improving school climate may foster development of SEL skills in both students and faculty, and also result in increased self-efficacy of both students and teacher advisors towards building relationships and making positive change. It is my hypothesis that such increased self-efficacy in SEL skills will lead both students and teachers to seek more opportunities to engage in such collaborative partnerships, ultimately resulting in a more positive perception of school climate by both students and teachers.

Research Questions
How and to what extent does engaging in YPAR in the eighth grade advisory program affect students’ and faculty advisors’ sense of engagement, perception of school climate, and self-efficacy toward SEL skills?

Method
This AR project will be conducted using mixed-methods, including qualitative interviews of students and faculty, journals, and field note observations, and quantitative surveys to assess self-efficacy towards SEL and perceptions of school climate.

Sources