

# NARRATIVE THEORY IN ADVISING

Angela Bowlus, Director of Advising, Metropolitan State University, Minnesota  
NACADA National Conference, 2021, Cincinnati, Ohio

© 2021 NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising  
The content of all material in this presentation are copyrighted by NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising, unless otherwise indicated. Copyright is not claimed as to any part of an original work prepared by a U.S. or state government officer or employee as part of that person's official duties. All rights are reserved by NACADA, and content may not be reproduced, downloaded, disseminated, published, or transferred in any form or by any means, except with the prior written permission of NACADA, or as indicated below. Members of NACADA may download pages or other content for their own use, consistent with the mission and purpose of NACADA. However, no part of such content may be otherwise or subsequently be retransmitted, disseminated, disseminated, published, or transferred, in any form or by any means, except with the prior written permission of, and with express attribution to NACADA. Copyright infringement is a violation of federal law and is subject to criminal and civil penalties. NACADA and NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising are service marks of the NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising.



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Introduction

- A little bit about me
  - Director of Advising, College of Management, Metro State University
  - Background in Advising
  - Pursuing Doctorate of Education through MSU Moorhead focusing on the role of narrative theory in the reinstatement process



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Narrative Theory in Advising

- So much of advising is measured by objective data:
  - Graduation rates
  - Retention
  - Credits hours registered
- Those numbers don't truly tell us who our students are
- As advisors, we have the unique opportunity to get to know our students individually, and we do that through story-telling



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Narrative Theory: Key Authors

- Peter L. Hagen, *The Power of Story: Narrative Theory in Academic Advising*, 2018
- Walter R. Fisher, *Human Communication as Narration: Toward a Philosophy of Reason, Value, and Action*, 1989.
- Sarah Champlin-Scharff




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Why is Narrative Theory Important?

- Understanding the story of a student's education
  - Construction of meaning and the cultivation of understanding.
  - Storytelling is the most important way we have of creating, maintaining, defining, or changing our identities.
  - Stories provide structure and coherence to events, processes, and motivations.
- Utilizing narrative theory in advising requires recognizing the role of hermeneutics and our roles as co-narrators in writing the student's story of their education.




---

---

---

---

---

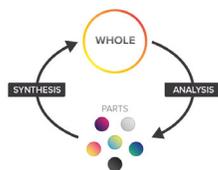
---

---

---

### Hermeneutics – The Art of Interpretation

- Hermeneutic Circle
  - All narratives are interpreted to find meaning.
  - Advisors engage in active listening to hear all aspects of the story.




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Hermeneutics - continued

- 4 key conditions for interpretation:
  - Recognition of prejudices
  - Recognition of the hermeneutic circle
  - Having a questioning attitude, and
  - Placing the student in the proper I/Thou relationship
    - (Hagen, 2018, Champlin-Scharff & Hagen, 2013)
- How the story is told and interpreted impacts the decision being made.

 ONACADA | THE GLOBAL COMMUNITY FOR ACADEMIC ADVISING

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Co-Narrating Our Students' Stories

- Co-Narration
  - Advising occurs through discourse.
  - Stories are told to convey messages and to persuade.
  - Advisors help to co-create the student's story of their education.
- Advisors are "coaches, mentors, teammates. They are co-learners who lead, guide, and attract students to the life of the mind. They hold a stewardship role, a teacher's role" (Hagen, 2018, p. 59).

 ONACADA | THE GLOBAL COMMUNITY FOR ACADEMIC ADVISING

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Why is this important to Advising?

- All narratives are interpreted to find meaning
  - Situation and context matter
  - How does the student make sense of their education, their experience
- How the story is told and interpreted greatly impacts the advice that's delivered
  - When advisors better understand the experience(s) of the student in front of them, they can provide more deliberate, sound advice
  - Inaccurate understanding of a student and their experience may lead to inappropriate or inaccurate advice being given
  - Narrative can help advisors "make sense of those times when logic might not tell the whole story, to help us find meaning, to save us from jumping to conclusions even when they are logical" (Hagen, 2018, p. 62)

 ONACADA | THE GLOBAL COMMUNITY FOR ACADEMIC ADVISING

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Narrative Theory and other Advising Theories

- Developmental Advising
  - Advisor considers student as a whole person, learning about their skills, interests, goals, values
  - Students are partners in the advising process
  - Advisors need to be self-aware of their own skills, interests, values, and biases
- Self-Authorship
  - Individuals move along a continuum from simple reasoning and awareness → intrinsic awareness → co-constructed way of knowing
  - Advising students through self-authorship requires getting to know each student individually, especially understanding the ways in which the student makes meaning of their experiences




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Narrative Theory and other Advising Theories

- Appreciative Advising
  - Asking positive, open-ended questions of students that help students make meaning of and make the most of their educational experiences
- Post-Modern
  - Each student is unique
  - No student experiences the institution and the curriculum is the same way
  - Advisors can utilize disequilibrium to promote change and growth
  - “Advisors must consider the process of learning to help each student synthesize and reflect on information because knowledge can be defined only from the student’s perspective” (Himes, 2014, p. 8-9)




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Why knowing our own story matters

- Our own personal experiences affect our interpretation of a story.
- Interpretation cannot be bias or judgement-free
  - “We cannot make any judgements at all if we are devoid of the prejudgments that come from living in the world” (Hagen, 2018, p. 38)
- “The process of advising, then, ought to include a contextualized understanding of the advisee from an advisor actively self-conscious about the ways in which her or his own contextualized understanding affects the work of advising” (Champlin-Scharff & Hagen, 2013, 230-231)




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Understanding our own Philosophy of Education

- Similar to an Advising Philosophy, but focused on how you experienced education
- Small group discussion:
  - How did you experience education? Traditional or non-traditional route? Were you set on your major or did that evolve as you progressed?
  - Was education expected of you? Was it something you wanted?
  - How has your education shaped who you are today?
  - Do you consider education important for the love of learning or for practical application?
  - Do you see education as primarily serving the individual or the broader community?




---

---

---

---

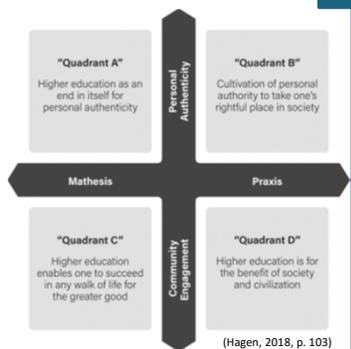
---

---

---

---

## Mathesis vs. Praxis




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## How does this impact our work in advising?

- Can you remember a time when your philosophy of education may have impacted how you advised a student?
  - Was the advice appropriate for the student?
  - Did the advice take into consideration the student's own story/experience?




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### How We Experience Narrative in Advising

- Initial communications
  - Welcome letters/emails
  - Orientation
- Student meetings/interactions
- Major/program selection
- Academic standing process
- Reinstatement/Readmission from suspension



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Improving What We Receive from Students

- How can we help students tell better stories?
  - Different kinds of prompts (qualitative inquiry)
- How can we be better prepared to hear the students' stories?
  - Understanding the story of our own education
  - Being open to new perspectives
  - Understanding different cultural backgrounds that may or may not use storytelling, values, motivations of students



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Formalizing Narrative Theory in Advising Processes

- Where student narrative impacts decisions – create rubrics
  - What are we looking for?
  - What do we need to hear?
  - How can we better prompt students to tell us their stories?
- Create student profiles based on student narrative, not student record data
  - Students want to know they are more than just numbers to us
  - Use advising technology to capture and then report on student narrative



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**THANK YOU!**

•Feel free to reach out with questions:

- Angela Bowlus  
[angela.bowlus@metrostate.edu](mailto:angela.bowlus@metrostate.edu)



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---