Challenging Narratives: Developing Theory of Mind Capacities for Academic Advisors
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1. Peter Said
2. Other Scholars Say
3. Our Experience
4. Things to Consider
Peter Said

- Advisors need to develop Theory of Mind capabilities.
- Reading literary fiction develops Theory of Mind capabilities.
- Literary fiction is the best way for Advisors to develop Theory of Mind capabilities.
Who is Peter?

Peter L. Hagen, Ph.D.
Associate Dean of General Studies
Director of Center for Academic Advising
Stockton University, Galloway Township, NJ, USA

2007 Virginia N. Gordon Excellence in Advising Award Recipient

Co-editor of the *NACADA Review*

Dozens of publications, including...
The Power of Story

Ch. 1 - Narrative, Identity, & Culture
Ch. 2 - Advising as Narrative
Ch. 3 - Co-Constructing the Bildungsroman
Ch. 4 - The Master Narratives of Advising
Ch. 5 - The Education of an Advisor
Ch. 6 - Academic Advising: A Symposium
Ch. 7 - Enhancing Your Power of Story
The Power of Story

Ch. 5 - The Education of an Advisor
“Reading challenging narratives makes us better advisors” (Hagen, 2018, p. 125).
What is Theory of Mind?

**Intellectual Heritage:**
- Cognitive Neuroscience
- Psychology
- Literature

**Theory of Mind Defined:**
- How we think about other minds” (Hagen, 2018, p. 126).
- Putting ourselves in another’s shoes, mind reading, empathy, creatively imagining another’s perspective.
- Simultaneously highly sophisticated and a basic human necessity (Leverage et al, 2011).
- “Evolved to track mental states involved in real-life social interactions... hence the pleasure afforded by following minds on page, screen, stage, and canvas is to a significant degree a social pleasure” (Zunshine, 2012, p. 197).
What is Literary Fiction?

**Literary Fiction Defined**

- **Literary**: “Of or pertaining to, or of the nature of, literature, polite learning, or books and written compositions; pertaining to that kind of written composition which has value on account of its qualities of form” (Cuddon, 2013 p. x).
- **Fiction**: “A vague and general term for an imaginative work, usually in prose. At any rate, it does not normally cover poetry and drama though both are a form of fiction in that they are moulded and contrived – or feigned. Fiction is now used in general of the novel, the short story, the *novella* (qq.v.) and related genres” (Cuddon, 2013, p. 279).
What is Literary Fiction?

**Characteristics of Literary Fiction**

- Hagen (2018):
  - “does not seek to gratify the reader with the familiar and certain”
  - “seeks to engage the reader to push for understanding, to fill in gaps, and search for meaning”
  - “states of mind are not always overtly stated... readers must infer”
  - “helps us not only escape from reality, but rather to understand it better”
  - “often demands we deal with three or more levels of mind reading at the same time” (p. 129)
Other Scholars Say

1. Other sources of narratives can develop Theory of Mind capabilities.
2. Narratives with visual imagery can include Embodied Transparency.
3. Sociocognitive Complexity is the key.
What are Other Sources of Narratives?

- Peter’s list from *The Power of Story* includes Story Podcasts and Ancient narratives (e.g. the *Phaedrus*).
- “Narrative-oriented cultural representations, such as fiction, movies, plays, team sports, broadcasts, as well as some forms of art, singing, and dance” (Zunshine, 2011, p. 115).
- “Cultural representations such as novels, drama, movies, paintings, and reality shows” (Zunshine, 2012, p. 179).
- Genre fiction (Kidd & Costano), comic books/graphic novels, film, theatre, art (Zunshine, Pratt)
What is Embodied Transparency?

“First, we assume that there must be a mental state behind an observable behavior. ... Second, even though we know that there must be a mental state behind a behavior, we don’t really know what that state is. ... Third, even though we can’t really know what other people are thinking, we conduct our daily lives on the assumption that we do, more or less. ... Fourth, because we go around knowing that there must be a mental state behind a behavior, and because we don’t really know what that state is, even as we act as if we do, cultural representations exploit this precarious state of knowing and not knowing” (Zunshine, 2012, p. 17-19).

Zunshine’s (2012) Body Language Paradox: Even though, “we are ready to turn around and treat this information as particularly unreliable,” our theory of mind leads us to, “put tremendous value on the information about people’s mental states we glean from their body language” (p. 13).

NOTE: “Body language” as a concept includes faces, “objects of our theory of mind’s particular attention” (Zunshine, 2012, p. 9).
What is Embodied Transparency?

- **Embodied Transparency Defined:**
  - “When characters’ body language involuntarily betrays their feelings, particularly if they want to conceal them from others” (Zunshine, 2012, p. 23).

- For moments of embodied transparency to be effective and satisfying, three patterns tend to exist (Zunshine, 2012):
  - The character's transparency must **contrast** with other characters’ lack of transparency or their own lack of transparency moments before or after.
  - Moments of embodied transparency must be **transient** to be believable and to prevent us from becoming uncomfortable from observing emotional “nakedness” for too long.
  - Transparency comes through a character’s very effort **restrain** their true feelings.
What is Embodied Transparency?

“Graphic narratives, particularly those committed to visual experimentation, intuitively exploit our tendency to obsessively watch, interpret, and reinterpret emoting bodies” (Zunshine, 2011, p. 129).

Embodied transparency is one of the numerous strategies used by cultural representations to intensify the social pleasure of our “greedy” theory of mind, but it stands out because it is so rare in real life (Zunshine, 2012, p. 197-198).

“Embodied transparency is relatively rare in prose fiction, [but] it’s abundantly present in visual media” (Zunshine, 2012, p. 25).
What is Sociocognitive Complexity?

**Sociocognitive Complexity Defined:**
“The depiction of a mental state embedded within another mental state” (Zunshine, 2011, p. 119).

Works of fiction cultivate mental states embedded within mental states. No fictional narrative can function on a level of sociocognitive complexity lower than 3 (Zunshine, 2011, p. 120-121):
- Author
- Character
- Reader

“Some authors / genres / works routinely operate on the fourth level, an some reach to the fifth and even sixth level” (e.g.: *Robinson Crusoe*) (Zunshine, 2011, p. 120).
What is Sociocognitive Complexity?

Mental states embedded within other mental states:
1. “Shakespeare wants
2. the audience to believe
3. and we know that he wants this, that
4. Romeo really thinks that Juliet is dead even though
5. we know she is not” (Hagen, 2018, p. 129).
What is Sociocognitive Complexity?

- Most readers are “neurotypical” and strongly prefer narratives about people vs objects, and “cannot turn off their mind-reading skills even if they wanted to” (Zunshine, 2011, p. 116, 118).
- No distinction between mental states of real people vs fictional characters (Zunshine, 2012, p. 179).
- Kidd & Costano “risk” quote, fictional setting are perceived as less risky than real settings due to social risk aversion.
What is Sociocognitive Complexity?

In Other Sources of Narratives:

- “Representations that rely on visual perception, such as movies, plays, and graphic narratives, also cultivate sociocognitive complexity, using methods specific to each medium” (Zunshine, 2011, p. 120).
- “Graphic narratives can be situated in a larger class of multimodal narratives, or stories that exploit more than one semiotic channel to evoke a narrative world” (Gardner & Herman, 2011, p. 5).
- “Narratives told in comics have abundant potential to be expressive of the artist's particular point of view. The simplicity of the medium entails that comics can offer an individual voice and foster an intimacy between artist and reader that meets the level of literature- or even exceeds it, since comics reflect the artist's visual as well as verbal sensibility” (Pratt, 2009, p. 115).
- “We almost have no choice but to start thinking about the intentions of the artist” (Zunshine, 2012, p. 152).
- “It is the visual style or a combination of visual and verbal styles that bring in complex mental states” (Zunshine, 2011, p. 133).
What is Sociocognitive Complexity?

**Conclusion:**
- Narratives with sufficient levels of sociocognitive complexity are “challenging narratives.”
- Therefore, narratives with sociocognitive complexity feed Theory of Mind development.
- “The worlds of fiction, though, pose fewer risks than the real world, and they present opportunities to consider the experiences of others without facing the potentially threatening consequences of that engagement” (Kidd & Costano, 2013, p. 378).
Our Experience

- We immediately connected via *The Umbrella Academy*.
- We had both been infusing professional efforts with popular culture activates scholarship.
- We both felt advisor training and develop benefitted from many points of access.
What is *The Umbrella Academy*?

- *The Umbrella Academy*
- 2008 Eisner Award for Best Finite Series/Limited Series
- Adapted into a streaming television series for Netflix by Steve Blackman Jeremy Slater
- The Netflix series has been nominated for multiple awards, including Primetime Emmys, Saturn, and GLAAD Media, winning the 2020 Art Directors Guild Award for One-Hour Contemporary Single-Camera Series.
The Umbrella Academy
Sir Reginald Hargreeves
Luther

Number One

Spaceboy
Diego

Number Two

The Kraken
Allison

Number Three

The Rumor
Klaus

Number Four

Séance
Five

Number Five

The Boy
Ben

Number Six

The Horror
Vanya
Number Seven
The White Violin
What is Popular Culture?

- **Popular Culture Defined**
  - Culture: “During the Romantic period (q.v.), the term became associated with practices which an increasingly materialist, industrial civilization was judged not to value: art, literature, music, religion and so on. In the Victorian era, Matthew Arnold famously defined culture in his Culture and Anarchy as ‘the best that has been thought and said’ in the world.”
  - Popular Culture: “We might add the distinction, initially made in the late 19th c., between ‘high’ and ‘low’ (or popular) culture. The term ‘mass culture’ follows the development of new forms of media and spectatorship in the early 20th c.” (Cuddon, 2013, p. 179).
What is Popular Culture?

The Place of Popular Culture in Scholarship
- Pratt - Comics as Narrative
- Zunshine - Cultural representations, Theory of Mind, and Embodied Transparency
- Kidd & Costano - Literary Fiction & Theory of Mind
- Wright & Sandlin
  o “Some view popular culture as a tool to promote learning... because it is deemed a way to connect with adult learners,” and remain relevant (2009 p. 125-126).
  o Others do so in a more critical way... seeing both the hegemonic aspects of popular culture as well as the potential for popular culture for effecting social change” (2009, p. 126).
  o Popular culture as “public pedagogy” (Giroux, 2000)
  o Graham (1989) and Brookfield (1986), pop culture should be taken seriously by adult educators

- The scholarship of advising...?
What is Scholarship?

- **Boyer’s (1990) Four Dimensions:**
  - Discovery - original inquiry
  - Integration - synthesis across disciplines, topic within a discipline, or time
  - Application/engagement - knowledge applied responsibly to consequential problems
  - Teaching and Learning - systematic education and enticement of future scholars

- **McClintock’s (2004) Scholar Practitioner:**
  - “An ideal of professional excellence,
  - ‘Grounded in theory and research,
  - ‘Informed by experiential knowledge, and
  - ‘Motivated by personal values, political commitments, and ethical conduct” (p. 393).
What is Scholarship?

- The Scholarship of Advising
- *NACADA Journal*
- *NACADA Review*
- *Academic Advising Today*
- *The Mentor*
- *The Journal of Academic Advising*
- Presentations
  - NACADA Conferences
  - State and Local Conferences
  - Other associations
What is Training and Development?

- Onboarding
- Ongoing training
- Professional development
- Personal reading
- Case studies
- Conversations with colleagues
Things to Consider

- Where is Theory of Mind in your training and development plan?
- Where is popular culture in your training and development plan?
- Where is the confluence reflected in the scholarship of academic advising?
Ways to Include Theory of Mind in AT&D

- Do what Peter says.
- Build for sociocognitive complexity.
- Center the mental states of others.
Ways to Include Popular Culture in AT&D

- Lead with what you know.
- Ask about other’s interests.
- Invite connective discussion.
Ways to Include All Three in Scholarly Activities

- Don’t reinvent the wheel.
- Invent a better wheel.
- Let someone else take the wheel and enjoy the ride.
References


References


References


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