Strengthening Academic Advising by Developing a Normative Theory

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Discussions on academic advising theory have centered on application from many disciplines; however, academic advising is unlike any other field, and therefore, theories from other disciplines do not correspond with all of the unique goals of advising: assisting students in understanding the meaning of higher education, supporting students in their personal growth, and helping them set and achieve educational goals. To continue clarifying the role of advising within higher education, practitioners need to move from analogical theories to normative theories. The diversity and richness of current theories in advising will provide the foundation for developing a normative theory and strengthening the field of advising.

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> *When no existing research or theory is applicable to the phenomenon or idea at hand, the scholar must develop a theory on which to base inquiry.*—Rich Robbins (2010, p. 39)

Academic advising is variously understood and described by students, administrators, and others who work within and outside higher education. Even among advisors, answers to queries about the nature of academic advising likely differ. Each answer hinges on internal and external forces such as an individual's personal experiences and philosophy of advising as well as institutional perspectives and advising structures. Do these diverse explanations and descriptions of the advising role within higher education benefit advising at large?

Advising practitioners are at a pivotal point in clarifying purposes, theories, and scholarship efforts to establish a distinct identity as a unique field within higher education (Schulenberg & Lindhorst, 2008). Academic advising is often practiced and described from perspectives developed in nonadvising fields for other purposes such as education, counseling, psychology, and sociology. This rich diversity has played a key role in developing current ideas and perspectives, but now advising is at a crossroads. Internal demand from practitioners along with external pressure from societal stakeholders, students, and higher education administrators have created a need to clarify and describe the unique role of advising within higher education. To clarify the role of academic advising, stakeholders must conduct research and scholarship founded on a strong and distinctive theoretical foundation (Schulenberg, 2010).

To describe academic advising as Schulenberg and Lindhorst (2008) have advocated, stakeholders need to move away from complete reliance on analogic theories (i.e., comparisons of theory statements) to explain advising toward normative theories, which Hagen (2005) suggested would describe the ideal state of advising. By examining the characteristics advising shares with commonly applied analogic theories (from education, student development, and humanities), advisors can lay the foundation for a normative theory of advising. In contrast, the continued use of theoretical bases solely borrowed from other disciplines will jeopardize the recognition of advising as a distinct field of practice and scholarship (Schulenberg & Lindhorst, 2008).

In this article, I establish the basis for normative theory building by examining the characteristics of commonly used theory. Examination of the theoretical foundations used to frame advisors' work and identification of ways these theories fit together can help differentiate academic advising from other postsecondary practices and suggest areas for the development of distinctive academic advising theory.

The Role of Academic Advising

Definitions of academic advising are vague; advisors know it when they see it, but struggle to explain ways it differs from similar practices and disciplines. They use terms such as *development*, *teaching*, and *career counseling* to describe the attributes of academic advising. To add to the ambiguity, the structure and function of advising within and between institutions vary greatly. What do advisors do for students, institutions, and higher education? Based on research into the history, current practice, and theory of academic advising,

Schulenberg and Lindhorst (2010) named three common purposes of advising: engaging students in reflective conversations about educational goals, teaching students about the nature of higher education, and provoking student change toward greater levels of self-awareness and responsibility. The NACADA Concept of Academic Advising (National Academic Advising Association [NACADA], 2006) states,

> Through academic advising, students learn to become members of their higher education community, to think critically about their roles and responsibilities as students, and to prepare to be educated citizens of a democratic society and a global community. Academic advising engages students beyond their own world views, while acknowledging their individual characteristics, values, and motivations as they enter, move through, and exit the institution.

When defined per Schulenberg and Lindhorst (2010) and NACADA (2006), advising encompasses the student's academic goals and personal responsibilities as well as development of self-awareness within the framework of higher education. Theory focused only in education or student development does not adequately address all of these stated dimensions, and therefore, advisors must reexamine the theoretical foundation from which they work. As Robbins (2010) purported, "When no existing research or theory is applicable to the phenomenon or idea at hand, the scholar must develop a theory on which to base inquiry" (p. 38). I argue advisors must assimilate distinct perspectives into a normative approach that will focus on the unique goals and complexity of the field. Focusing on the ends not the means (Lowenstein, 2011), stakeholders must determine the expected outcomes of advising and advisor behaviors necessary to achieve these outcomes. A normative theory can help advisors and institutions identify effective strategies to aim for the ideal state.

The Interdisciplinary Foundations of Academic Advising

Hagen (2008) pointed out that theory "gives us lenses through which we can see academic advising more clearly" (p. 16). When thought of this way, a theoretical perspective is like looking at the world through a colored lens with each theory represented by a different color. The world will look different when looking through a blue lens as opposed to a red lens just as advising looks different when looking through one theoretical perspective compared to another. For example, if self-authorship theory is the lens used to examine academic advising, certain aspects of the spectrum of academic advising are revealed such as the role of reflective conversations and the developmental stages of students; however, some aspects relevant to academic advising appear distorted. For example, self-authorship theory does not illuminate a view of the advising curriculum. Advising requires an interdisciplinary theory: a theoretical lens that reveals the critical aspects of advising.

Researchers trained outside a particular field provide innovation and new perspectives (Butcher & Kritsonis, 2008). Fortunately for advising, scholars from education, counseling, anthropology, and literature provide unique viewpoints to further academic advising as a distinctive field. As observed in the case of archaeology, "Each theoretical perspective has something to offer and . . . they all contribute to the whole'" (Preucel & Hodder, 1996, p. 17). I argue, as Preucel and Hodder (1996) did regarding the use of theory in archaeology, that advising theories, developed in isolation, should not be treated as either opponents or parts of a linear progression, but rather as contemporaneous, overlapping, and interacting, and thereby contributing to an interdisciplinary foundation.

For example, Lowenstein (1999) built on the ideas about developmental theory expressed by Crookston (1972/1994/2009) and suggested a learning-centered approach. Rather than competing alternatives as many see them, the learning-centered and development paradigms are overlapping and contemporaneous, as are many other theories in advising. Current issues of the *NACADA Journal* and *The Mentor* contain many current publications on the application of theories in advising, including both developmental and learning-centered approaches. Other theories and their offshoots, as McClellan (2010, p. 57) refers to them, have strengthened advising as a field, but now this theoretical diversity is needed to focus on meeting the unique goals of academic advising. The diversity and richness of advising practitioners' educational backgrounds provide the knowledge base for evolving academic advising theories.

Current Theory in Academic Advising

A crucial first step in articulating a normative theory of advising requires an understanding of the

richness of the theoretical diversity as evidenced by the histories and characteristics of current paradigms. Only a portion of the named theories can be effectively addressed here: developmental, self-authorship, hermeneutic, postmodern, and learning centered. I selected these theories because they frequently appear in current advising literature and contain similar elements. The numerous citations of these perspectives in the advising literature suggest they provide depth, support, and context for academic advising practice.

Developmental Theories

The concept of developmental advising originated from Crookston (1972/1994/2009) as an alternative to prescriptive advising. Reflecting the work of Erikson (1950) and Gould (1972), among others researching the life-cycle theory, developmental theorists identify students and advisors alike as moving through continual and predictable patterns of psychological development (see Thomas & Chickering, 1984).

Using the developmental framework, the advisor considers the student as a whole person by learning about his or her skills, attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, emotional needs, self-esteem, and coping mechanisms (Thomas & Chickering, 1984). These advising interactions characterize a process experienced through multiple perspectives (i.e., by the advisor and by the student) within complex systems (Raushi, 1993). Creamer and Creamer (1994) proposed specific goals as a framework for academic advisors: "setting career and life goals, building self-insight and esteem, broadening interests, establishing meaningful interpersonal relationships, clarifying personal values and styles of life, and enhancing critical thinking and reasoning" (p. 20). Additional tenets of developmental advising include students as partners in the advising process, caring and supportive advisors, and conflict use to identify underlying problems and challenge the student (Creamer & Creamer, 1994).

Developmental theory also embodies advisor self-awareness. To meet the needs of a student, an advisor must readily assume various roles and, therefore, know her or his own personal strengths, weaknesses, and values (Thomas & Chickering, 1984). Under the developmental framework, the advising relationship involves advisor learning about and understanding the individual student, and therefore, developmental advisors often use dialogue in ways that encourage both the student and advisor to learn and grow.

Self-authorship

Self-authorship theory involves a particular subset of developmental theory first expanded by Kegan (1982) and applied directly to academic advising practice through the work of Baxter Magolda and King (2008) and Pizzolato (2008). Individual development is represented as a continuum from simple reasoning and awareness to inter-individual balance, the most complex state of which includes awareness of others' feelings and knowledge as part of a complex system that includes ongoing reflection and synthesis (McAuliffe & Strand, 1994). Pizzolato (2008) characterized an individual in the self-authored terminal stage as one who develops his or her own way of knowing by combining an understanding that "knowledge is socially constructed, changeable, and contextual" with individual beliefs and sense of self (p. 20).

Self-authorship theory focuses on the process by which an individual moves through stages of increasingly complex development while changing the way she or he interprets and interacts with the world. Both Kegan (1982) and Baxter Magolda (2001) claimed that growth comes from challenge of existing assumptions and knowledge. Higher education is often a time of growth and personal development as students encounter new experiences, challenges, and relationships. During this time, students may become more self-authored: "The experience of going away to college can provide a new evolutionary medium that recognizes and cultures the move toward self-authorship and psychological autonomy which characterize the new balance" (Kegan, 1982, p. 186). Advisors encourage students to take initiative for their education as they take charge of their decisions and actions. In fact, McAuliffe and Strand (1994) claimed that advisors should intentionally trigger and support this development. For traditional-aged college students (typically under 25 years of age), this usually means a shift from following external formulas to tapping into their own internal beliefs to make decisions.

Often new college students look to trusted individuals (e.g., parents) for input in decision making (Baxter Magolda, 2001). A student following external formulas may choose a major because a parent suggested it would be a good fit for them. At some point students may experience dissonance between previously held truths and external information, what Baxter Magolda (2001) called the "crossroads" (p. xviii). For example, after taking required courses in a chosen

curriculum, the student questions the fit of the major because he or she does not like the required courses. The input from external influences (parents) contradicts the student's experiences. Through the conflict between internal and external forces brought about at the crossroads, the student values may shift from external influences to internally defined beliefs and opinions (Baxter Magolda, 2001). Advisors observe students approaching decisions from all stages of self-authorship development. Those familiar with this theory can identify different stages and use a variety of techniques to promote student self-awareness and -authorship.

To utilize self-authorship theory and Kegan's developmental stages, an advisor must learn about each student as an individual, particularly the ways she or he makes meaning; that is, the advisor needs to identify the advisee's stage of personal growth, ways the individual defines *self* and *other* as well as derives meaning from his or her experiences (Kegan, 1994, p. 113). Baxter Magolda and King (2008) suggested ways advisors can help students shift toward self-authorship by challenging their assumptions, providing opportunity for reflection, and supporting new premises. A natural order of familiarizing oneself with the student, asking about specific experiences, and learning about the individual's interpretations are familiar academic advising practices.

Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is ''the art or science of interpretation" (Hagen 2008, p. 19), or specifically, the happenings in the space where the listener meets the speaker (Freeman, 2007). Philosophical hermeneutics focuses on the event of understanding and interpretation including the reader's preconceived ideas and experiences necessary to engage with the story (Freeman, 2007). Hermeneutics is used to create new understanding (Freeman, 2007) and, as recent attention to hermeneutics in academic advising literature demonstrates, provides a basis for interpreting significance for each student in an advising interaction and in the advisor's own understanding (Champlin-Scharff, 2010). Hearing the student's story in an advising meeting is like reading a text (Hagen, 2008) in that each advisor interprets the narrative based on her or his own personal experiences.

Advising interactions clearly revolve around the use of language to express meaning. "Expression is a meaning-making event that exhibits the particular conditions of its telling; characteristics of its teller; and the cultural, historical, and ideological horizons that support or constrain the speaker in his or her search for understanding" (Freeman, 2007, p. 925). Through the act of interpretation, both the student and the advisor have an opportunity to grow by finding new understandings and creating new experiences (Freeman, 2007). Academic advisors seek to encourage and support students as they look beyond their own worldviews and find meaning within their educations. Hermeneutics provides a means to interpret and understand, and through it, advisors have a unique opportunity to learn how students make meaning and help each advisee expand on those meanings.

Postmodernism

Postmodernist theory claims, contrary to modernism, that the world is in chaos, knowledge cannot be standardized, and absolute truths do not exist. Lyotard (1984) defined postmodernism as "incredulity toward meta-narratives" (p. xxiv) in which one rejects large scale theoretical interpretations, universal applications, and the idea of progress (Sarup, 1993). According to postmodern ideals, each student is unique and broad generalizations or standardized observations and interpretations are inappropriate. Time and space comprise a framework for learning one's role and position in society. Innovations in technology, such as those in transportation, have revealed new ways to experience time and space and have thus changed this framework (Sarup, 1996): Prior to 1850, horse drawn carriages traveled an average of 10 mph, but between 1850 and 1930, locomotives reached 65 mph (Sarup, 1996), and now aircraft move faster than sound. These types of advances have transformed the way in which people experience the world and the ways of gathering and synthesizing information, but not always in the smoothest or most predictable ways. Postmodernists consider fragmentation, discontinuity, and transition to be the norm. In fact, according to Stowe (1996), disequilibrium provides an opportunity for advisors to intentionally promote change and growth. To the postmodern advisor, change is good!

Recent writings on postmodernism in education emphasize that learning processes illustrate that students do not learn identically; as a result, knowledge is not standardized (Butcher & Kritsonis, 2008). 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. Both psychological and sociological factors contribute to the definition of one's identity and concept of self (Sarup, 1996). Therefore, views of reality are based on ethnic background, socially constructed ideas, and individual life experiences (Butcher & Kritsonis, 2008), and so to understand an individual's identity, advisors first endeavor to learn about an advisee's background, life experiences, and how she or he makes meaning from those experiences.

Postmodern ideals are based on narrative knowledge (Sarup, 1993), and therefore, align closely with hermeneutics. The interpretation of the story depends on the receiver as well as the teller such that the narrative always remains incompletely understood (Sarup, 1996). Therefore, as students express their many different experiences and views of the world in their stories, advisors need to be aware of their own narrative and the role it plays in understanding the student. To help the student make meaning of his or her education, the postmodern advisor must grasp and embrace the complex, changing, and ambiguous nature of understanding.

Learning-Centered Advising

According to Hemwall and Trachte (1999), learning-centered advising, based on the postsecondary setting and the decisions made therein, is most properly placed into the educational purpose of higher education. Viewing practice as teaching and learning interactions, advisors focus on the process of learning and development of critical-thinking and decision-making skills. According to Lowenstein (2005), advisors teach students about the overall curriculum, specifically addressing ways smaller pieces of the curriculum contribute to the whole, creating strategies to make educational decisions based on self, and relating previous knowledge to future knowledge.

The foundation for the learning-centered approach is based on ideas from John Dewey, Jean Piaget, and Lev Vygotsky (see Hemwall & Trachte, 2005). Many components of progressive, constructivist, and social constructivist theories introduced by these theorists emerge in current discussions of the learning-centered theory in academic advising.

Dewey, a proponent of progressive theory, advocated a learn-by-doing approach to acknowledge that a student's experience is integral to the learning process. According to Dewey (1938), significance and meaning are defined through previous experiences, and because student experiences differ, each individual embraces a unique way of making meaning. The educator must discover each individual's experiences, perceptions, and sense of reality, and identify the best way to teach each student.

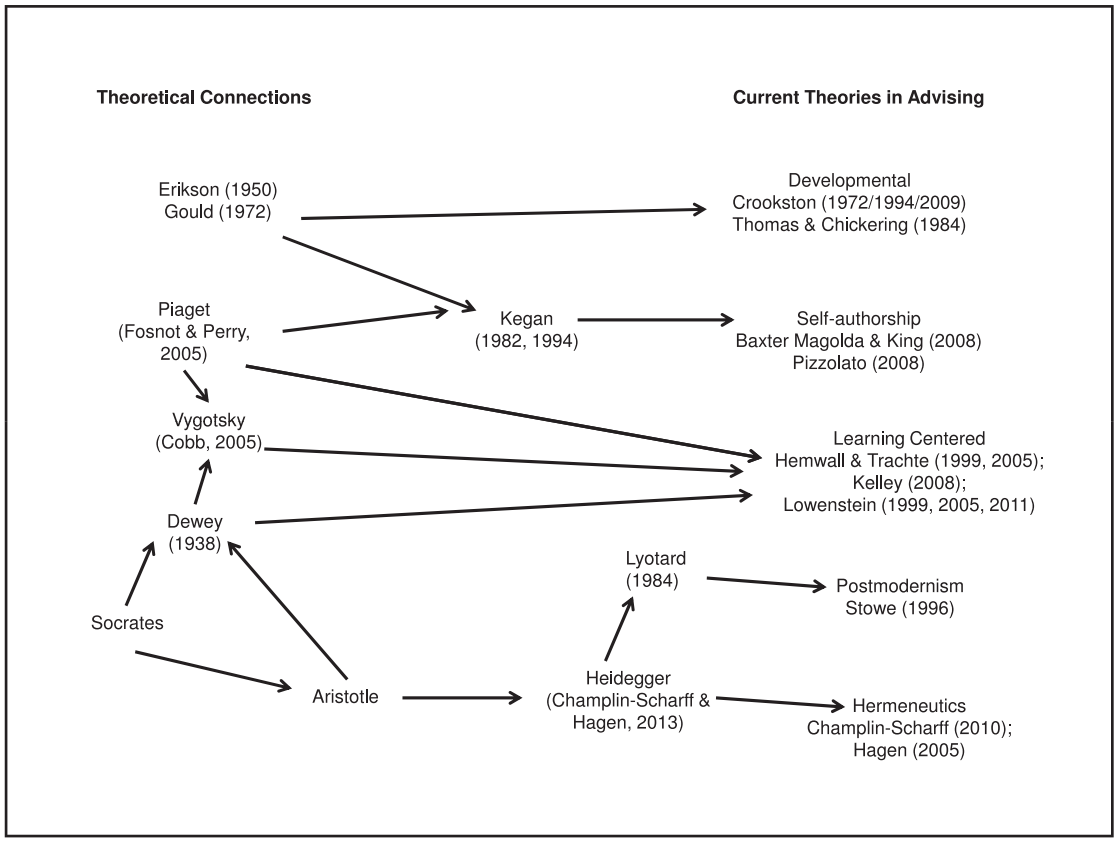
In addition to Dewey, learning-centered theory also draws on constructivist ideas from Piaget and Vygotsky. According to Piaget, the knower cannot make a copy of reality; knowledge cannot exist outside a person's mind (von Glasersfeld, 2005). Because individuals continuously construct a unique version of knowledge (Fosnot & Perry, 2005) based on their prior experiences, educators must provide opportunities for individuals to build knowledge. Critical elements of constructivism include the need for self-imposed questioning, disequilibrium, and reflection to facilitate learning (Fosnot & Perry, 2005). Advisors offer the time and space for students to reflect on their actions and the outcomes (von Glasersfeld, 2005). Knowledge construction through reflection also appears as an important concept in Kegan's (1982) and Baxter Magolda's (2001) work on self-authorship. The way each individual uses personal experiences to create meaning is unique because individuals continually construct knowledge based on their changing experiences, thus making it subjective.

In social constructivism, Vygotsky claimed any higher mental function first appears within the cultural group (or outside the individual), then it is internalized (Cobb, 2005); knowledge is constructed socio-culturally rather than cognitively. Through a social constructivist lens, one sees learning through participation with more knowledgeable people as undertaken in cultural processes (Cobb, 2005). Educators must understand the psychology of the learner and the dynamics of the student's social environment as well as application of appropriate pedagogical techniques to challenge the learner's thinking.

The Intersection of Ideas

Despite the seemingly separate disciplines represented by the various perspectives most recently attributed to advising, direct links between theorists show their interwoven history (Figure 1). For example, Baxter Magolda (2001) and Pizzolato (2008) based their ideas of self-authorship on work from Kegan (1982); Kegan in turn drew heavily on

Figure 1. The historical connections of current theoretical perspectives applied to academic advising practice



Note. Adapted from Champlin-Scharff and Himes (2008).

Piaget, who was a foundational theorist in constructivism. Piaget also provided a foundation for the learning-centered paradigm of Lowenstein (1999, 2005) as well as Hemwall and Trachte (1999, 2005), among many others.

Theorists draw inspiration from others then add their own perspectives from their discipline—education, psychology, and the like to create new concepts. Kegan (1982) stated, "I have changed the face of the theory in which I was steeped . . . every one of the changes can be shown to grow out of, rather than depart from, the theory's basic premise" (p. vii). Theoretical perspectives based on other academic disciplines provide a starting point for developing academic advising theory. The expansion of theory in advising, the growth of academic advising research, and the increasing need for stakeholders to understand the role of academic advising within higher education suggest that ideas borrowed from other fields should be modified to better fit advising. Consistent with Kegan's statement, an academic advising theory can grow out of, not depart from, the foundational ideas of current theories in advising. The salient theories I summarize are distinctly based in education, psychology, and humanities. Integration of ideas from theories based in these seemingly different, but related, foundations provides the framework with which to approach academic advising. Many advisors already draw on a variety of these theories to inform their work and scholarship, and with a clear understanding of the theoretical history of those ideas, a unique advising theory can be more clearly articulated.

Table 1 shows the overlapping characteristics of the key theories. These diverse, yet similar, theories feature recurring themes: (a) the development and acquisition of skills such as decision making, critical thinking, ownership, and responsibility; (b) the role of the learning process in

Table 1. Overlapping characteristics of theories currently applied to academic advising

	Characteristics					
	Higher Order Skills		Process of Learning		Subjective Knowledge	
Theory	Decision Making & Critical Thinking	Individual Responsibility	Chaos, Disequilibrium as Change Agents	Goal Setting & Self-reflection	Importance of Student's Story	Many Perspectives
Developmental	X		X	X		X
Self-authorship	X	X	X	X	X	
Hermeneutics		X			X	X
Postmodern	X	X	X	X		X
Learning Centered	X	X	X	X		X

constructing knowledge through goal setting, disequilibrium, and self-reflection; and (c) the importance of multiple perspectives and interpretations in understanding a narrative. Because of the frequency of these themes in theories frequently used in advising and the congruency to definitions of academic advising, I expect them to inform the foundation of a normative theory in academic advising. In fact, these themes are integrated within academic advising unlike in any other field.

Development of Skills

Students attend higher education for many different personal and professional reasons. However, most in academe support goals that enable students to develop and refine skills that contribute to citizenship, prepare for a professional field, and gain the knowledge and skills that help in leading a fulfilling life. These fundamental skills include decision making, critical thinking, and the ability to take ownership and responsibility for one's actions. For example, students utilize decision-making and critical-thinking skills, crucial in evaluating information, choosing majors, selecting courses, and appropriating time. Therefore, advisors educate, assist, and support students in the development of key competencies, sometimes through challenge or conflict. An emphasis on skill development characterizes self-authorship, developmental, learning-centered, and postmodern theories.

As seen in self-authorship and developmental theory, making decisions and evaluating information are pivotal steps and indicators of personal growth. Advisors facilitate and support the ability to evaluate and make decisions such that their efforts contribute to knowledge creation. According to the learning-centered paradigm, decision-making and critical-thinking skills indicate an ability to assimilate information and construct knowledge. Postmodernists also appreciate that critical evaluation of information allows individuals to continuously assess narratives through the lens of their own life experiences.

Process of Learning

People develop new perspectives and knowledge about the world by evaluating, reflecting, and assimilating external sources of information with internal beliefs. Because knowledge is subjective, a teacher cannot impart knowledge to the learner; it must be created by the learner. Because each student does not construct knowledge (i.e., evaluate information) in the same way as others, the learning process is unique to each individual, and therefore effective educators must focus on the learning process for each student, not on the teaching process. College professors, instructors, and academic advisors prepare students for the future by encouraging them to synthesize new information with past experiences to create knowledge. Self-authorship, hermeneutics, postmodern, and learning-centered theories emphasize important components of this complex process such as reflection and goal setting. Individual conclusions drawn from the learning process are valid because they are constructed by the individual and reflect her or his view of the world.

The process of learning includes the synthesis of external information with internal beliefs (a focus of self-authorship) and the connection of the resulting conclusions in the creation of new knowledge (a focus of learning-centered theory); it is continuous due to the pace and complexity of information exchange (a focus of post-

modernism). Moments of disequilibrium, such as when external information conflicts with internally held beliefs, facilitate the growth and change that lead to the creation of new knowledge about the world. First, however, students must recognize discrepancies and then choose to reflect, evaluate, and construct new viewpoints. This process creates a critical role for the academic advisor as well as an opportunity for students to learn and practice skills critical to constructing knowledge and making decisions.

Role of Narrative

Advisors use narratives to share experiences and knowledge as well as learn about the environment in which students make their decisions. Advisors use a student's story to understand previous experiences and ways the student has synthesized knowledge in the past. They also gain awareness of external influences, such as parents and family members, as well as socially and culturally based beliefs and expectations. Academic advisors assist in creating individual knowledge by using the student's story to modify the learning process in a way that encourages the student to evaluate continuously and synthesize information regarding academic decisions and the meaning of higher education.

Personal experiences also affect the interpretation of a story. According to hermeneutics, reading a text or hearing a personal narrative can result in the creation of a new understanding. However, postmodern theory suggests that a narrative can never convey all the intended information to a recipient and that numerous interpretations are the result of the experiences of the reader or listener. Interpretation of a student's personal narrative supports the efforts to develop skills and enhance understanding of individual perspectives and knowledge. While processing the information provided in students' stories, advisors must acknowledge their own experiences and biases in the interpretation.

Implications for Practice, Scholarship, and Development

A theoretical foundation guides all advising roles: practice, research, as well as personal and professional development. A normative foundation will influence all these. It will help answer specific questions: What are the qualifications needed for advising professionals? What strategies best meet the goals of advising? What is good advising? How does one become a better advisor?

Academic advisors have diverse educational backgrounds and experiences. A normative theory for academic advising will help new and experienced advisors, despite their various backgrounds, understand and articulate the value and role of advising consistently across institutions. A theory that informs and describes academic advising is critical in orienting new advisors to the practice of the field—not simply to an office or institution.

Theory guides the need for particular skills and methods during an advising interaction. For example, an advisor may ask a student about a current course because, as highlighted by constructivist theory, articulated experiences illustrate internal formulation of ideas and reflection on experiences and thus help the student construct meaning and knowledge. While listening to the student, the advisor may identify significant pieces of the story. Follow-up questions aid the advisor in learning about the importance and meaning of the narrative and how the student creates meaning from the described experience. In this example, hermeneutics, postmodernism, and self-authorship inform these practices. Hermeneutic and postmodern theories provide the tools for understanding meaning. In addition, self-authorship theory prompts advisors to consider the social and cultural context in which the student has created meaning. Challenging students to consider their internal beliefs in conjunction to external information encourages self-awareness and growth. Advisors probe students about their decisions, goals, and experiences with questions based on the expressed goals and experiences of the student as well as the advisor's own goals and past experiences. Framing these aspects of practice and concept into a theory rooted in advising can help advisors in daily work with students.

In a time when higher education institutions struggle with diminishing resources, a normative theory in advising could help stakeholders in advocating for support and resources at their institutions. A common theoretical foundation for academic advising could garner more widespread support across constituents, including administrators, faculty members, and students.

A normative theory in advising also will further research and scholarship by providing a shared foundation from which to guide questions and methods. For example, an advisor may study the ways students interpret academic advising interactions or the purposes of higher education. To assess the goal of understanding and meaning making within higher education, advisors may use a

hermeneutical approach to gain understanding about the process of student meaning making. Theory not only drives the type of questions, but also the methods utilized to collect data; for example, using hermeneutics to find meaning requires a qualitative approach. Use of both quantitative and qualitative methods can contribute valuable information to understanding different perspectives on advising and higher education.

Theory also influences professional development for advisors in individual advising interactions. Specifically, it helps elucidate understanding biases and guides long-term growth. Theory drives the answers to questions that inform the relational aspects of advising: How do advisors approach advising meetings with students? What experiences and biases do they bring to the conversation? How do they impact the outcome of interactions with students?

Furthermore, a normative theory in advising would help identify the necessary and foundational skills an advisor needs to be successful, thereby helping to identify skill areas or credentialing necessary for new advisors. What does advising success look like? What conceptual, informational, and relational skills and knowledge must advisors demonstrate? Is a specific graduate degree necessary to advise students effectively?

Summary

The changing landscape of higher education (Smith, 2013) demands that the basis of the field be strengthened for practitioners, others within the higher education community, and constituents (NACADA, 2005). Advising is a unique, interdisciplinary field; the theoretical framework should reflect the strength that this interdisciplinary foundation provides. If advising is advising (Schulenberg & Lindhorst, 2008), academic advising needs a theory that supports its diverse goals and unique position within higher education. To do this, practitioners need to recognize the range of theories currently applied to advising, identify significant aspects of these paradigms, and synthesize them to meet the complex and unique goals of academic advising.

Theories grow and change; a theory in academic advising that evolves out of current analogical theories will feature new and integrated components important to academic advising. In examining current theories used to inform academic advising practice and scholarship, one finds common themes: the development of skills, a focus on the process of learning, and the importance of narrative. These three characteristics of current theory are connected; that is, competencies are developed through learning, a process that includes understanding and interpreting narrative. These themes can provide the foundation for a normative theory of academic advising because they fit the distinct goals related to the student's academic interests, personal responsibility, and appreciation of education.

Advisors contribute many academic backgrounds and experiences to the discussion of theory within academic advising, but now the conversation needs to turn to the needs of advising as a field distinct from the disciplines in which practitioners and scholars were educated. As Kegan (1982) did in psychology, advisors need to move beyond reliance on individual isolated theories to an intentional normative theory that helps solidify the role of academic advising within higher education.

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