

Chapter Four

The Master Narratives of Advising

**The Power of Story:
Narrative Theory in Academic Advising**

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Metanarratives have a rhetorical, moral force, regulating society according to their proclaimed truths. They are narratives in the sense that they organize history as the revelation of meaning. These teleological (goal-oriented) narratives are metanarratives in that they organize, account for, and reveal the meanings of all other narratives, from stories of scientific discovery to individuals' development, while these smaller narratives emulate and substantiate the grand narratives. It is through their universal explanatory scope that they hold a society together. Master narratives give credence to the status quo of institutions and activities: they orient decision-making, prescribe behaviour, order social life, give it a sense of purpose, determine rules and conventions and what counts as valid practice, establish what is true and just, and provide means of interpreting and valuing human action and experience. They are static, universal, absolute, and totalizing.

—Russell and Russell (2011), “Master narrative” from *The Encyclopedia of Literary and Cultural Theory*, para. 5

Our story thus far: in Chapter Two we looked in some detail as to how we can view narrative as one of the main ways in which we conduct advising interactions; in Chapter Three we looked at the ways in which the individual student's progress toward an education can fruitfully be viewed in narrative terms, as a story. So why not leave well enough alone? Stories are what we co-create with our students and stories are how we do it. End of story, right?

But no. Each *Story of This Student's Education* is itself but an instantiation of one or more larger stories—**master narratives**, also called **metanarratives**—that influence, at times heavily, the stories that advisors and students are able to tell and hear and co-create. In this chapter, we will look at two types of master narratives that we advisors use daily: the **curriculum** and our philosophy of education. It is important to realize that these two things are narratives. First, it is important to focus on the story that we urge upon our students—the curriculum—and to engage with it critically, because it is the curriculum that provides intentionality and meaning to students' *bildungsromane*. Second, it is important to our daily practice to examine critically our own philosophy of education, because this is how we come to understand why we do what we do. These two master narratives make advising possible and necessary.

Master narratives are the backdrop against which stories make sense or not. Individual stories that fall too far outside the master narratives almost do not qualify as coherent stories. Master narratives can be thought of as background ideologies that might or might not be codified. In the present day, we can think of The American Dream as such a master narrative. It is not written down anywhere, but most Americans have a general sense of what it is. Master narratives do not have to be true or right—often they are not—but they strongly influence what we accept as true or right and how we behave. Master narratives are always there, humming away in the background. We may struggle to break free of them, but that struggle, even if successful, only brings about new master narratives.

Let's take a look at a master narrative that may well be more pervasive than the American Dream. It is not going too far to say that Confucianism still retains a strong presence in the cultural fabric of both China and the Sinophone diaspora. A far older and more pervasive

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master narrative than its American counterpart, the Confucian concept of *ren* is a familiar master narrative to many:

Sometimes translated as “human-heartedness,” or simply “humanity,” *ren* combines [in its written form] the root “person” with the number two, an etymology that reflects Confucius’ conviction that cultivated humanity depends on interaction with others. For Confucius, family relations and filial piety were the building blocks, the center from which one could extend benevolence to others. “A person of humanity, wishing to be established, also establishes others, and wishing to succeed, also helps others to succeed.” Asked whether one word could guide action throughout life, Confucius proposed reciprocity as the most dependable guide. “Is not reciprocity such a word? Do not do to others what you would not want done to you.” (Knight, 2012, pp. 13–14)

This is nothing like the more individualistic American Dream. Advisors who operate uncritically from within that American paradigm would do well to seek to break out of the constraints of the American Dream and become more familiar with other master narratives, such as *ren*.

Confucians have historically viewed each person not as a morally autonomous individual but as a social being whose identity derives from his interaction with and conduct within the broader human community. The person who exhibits *ren* exemplifies the ideal of what a human being should be and encourages others to strive toward it. (Stefon, 2016, para. 2)

Knowledge of other master narratives is difficult to come by, but necessary for advisors to do.

Master narratives can be more tightly codified as well. For example, we need only look at the curricula that are found in all our college bulletins and websites in order to see a codified and often highly

prescriptive master narrative that creates the backdrop against which individual stories play out.

The Idea of a Curriculum

While we can think of the curriculum at the local institution as one of these master narratives, the individual local institutional curriculum is itself influenced by a longer story, one that has been around for a long time and is still being told and embellished in faculty senate committees and general studies committees. It will never be finished: The Idea of a Curriculum, the ideal curriculum.

The Idea of a Curriculum is an old one indeed. It pre-dates Christianity and Islam. Like these major religions, The Idea of a Curriculum provides structures and a set of guidelines to follow. The Idea of a Curriculum surfaced into recorded history at about the same time as writing itself, at least in the West, in fifth century Athens. Plato's (370 BC/2005) *Phaedrus* is an early statement on what should be studied. During the Roman empire, both Cicero and Quintilian wrote on what shall comprise a good education. The system we have come to know as the Seven Liberal Arts formed over a long period of time and pretty much ruled unchallenged in Western culture for over a thousand years.

This master narrative, the Idea of a Curriculum, has been undergoing revisions for thousands of years. But our purpose here is not to chart the history of curricula. Rather it is to introduce the notion that there is such a thing as The Idea of a Curriculum and that it serves as a master narrative to guide and constrain the curricula at our local institutions. All such curricula can trace their pedigree back dozens if not hundreds of years.

The Idea of a Curriculum is a master narrative that establishes parameters for each of the smaller *Stories of This Student's Education* indirectly, through each curriculum established at the local institution. The master narrative of the curriculum at your institution can be thought of as the outline for *The Story of This Student's Education*. Just as a given story can be written a multitude of ways from the same outline, so each finished education story might be very unlike another even though guided by the same outline. It depends on how many choices are allowed in the curriculum at your institution. But it is this outline, the master

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narrative of the local curriculum, that imposes certain boundaries. Knowing the curriculum, advisors have a pretty good sense as to how *The Story of This Student's Education* will turn out. We have seen it play out hundreds of times. Indeed, the curriculum is the very sense of an ending, both in the sense of the goal toward which the individual student's story must tend and in the sense of how it will develop and draw to a close. In the first portion of this chapter, we will look at the master narrative of the curriculum.

But each advisor has their own Idea of a Curriculum that has developed over the course of their academic life and has been modified by attendance at and now having worked at (probably) more than one college. These philosophical stances or ideologies can also be thought of as master narratives because, like the actual curriculum at the local institution, these philosophical master narratives influence, at times heavily, *The Story of This Student's Education*. That is, the philosophy of higher education held by the individual advisor (that may or may not be in harmony with their local institutional curriculum) will influence *The Story of This Student's Education*. The philosophy of higher education held by the advisor is a stance, an ideology, a worldview—and not a mere approach—that will always exert its influence in the background of the discussions between the student and the advisor.

Adding to the complexity, the student may also have a philosophy of higher education. While that philosophy might be unschooled and untested, it is not necessarily incoherent or naïve. Both parties of the advising interchange bring their philosophies of higher education to the table. And both philosophies of higher education have a bearing on *The Story of This Student's Education* as it unfolds. If the two philosophies are greatly at odds with each other or with the local curriculum, then trouble may be brewing. These philosophies will be discussed in the second part of this chapter.

Master Narratives: The Curriculum

How shall we say that the curriculum is a narrative at all, much less a master narrative? How shall we say that it is a story?

Most narratives are not created out of nothing. They are part of a tradition of narratives that have gone before. This is the most basic

reason for calling the curriculum a narrative. Any given curriculum at most higher education institutions is thoroughly grounded in a tradition, just as stories and myths are. Students and even many advisors might be unaware of these myths, shrouded as they are in the mists of time. Curricula that are based in the liberal arts traditions are especially prone to enshrouding; given this mythic dimension, we may be inclined not to question the liberal arts, but merely to accept them uncritically. Yet even these noble realms of learning are not unassailable, but they are unassailably narratives. Nevertheless, it would behoove advisors working with any part of the liberal arts—even if seemingly unattached to some more practical segment of the curriculum—to delve into the mythological past. Why were there seven liberal arts in ancient times? What was the eighth?

In Chapter Two, we said that there are four master elements present in all narrative situations: context, style, plot, and theme. If we find these elements to be characteristic of the local curriculum or of the Idea of a Curriculum, it will not irrefutably prove that these entities are narratives, but this presence will certainly add some credence to the assertion that they are narratives.

Like other narratives, they certainly take place in a narrative context. They are stories, invented for the benefit of students, and must be tested in the crucible of the real experience of graduates. The master narrative of the curriculum is a story told to an audience for a purpose. It is addressed by an author to an audience. We can therefore talk in narratological terms regarding the curriculum. The author of the curriculum, usually a large committee, crafts a master narrative that has to take into account all the previous history of curricula. In devising a pathway for students to follow, the author of the curriculum must be conversant with all of the pathways that have been relevant in the past, as well as all of the possible pathways.

In all narratives, the author can never really come to know fully the audience of that narrative; that audience is implied or imagined by the author. So it is with the crafting of curricula: faculty committees imagine the ideal student for whom this master narrative shall influence and constrain *The Story of This Student's Education*. Also, as in all narratives, the audience can never come to know fully who the author is and what led that person (in the case of curricula, we are referring to a committee of persons) to create the narrative. Students and advisors

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can only guess what was on the committee's mind when they created that arts requirement even for business majors. Because the full mind of the author cannot become known to the audience, the audience must invent such an entity, which we might call the imagined author, or the implied author, which personage functions the same way as we have seen in Chapter One. But in all cases, the local curriculum takes place in a context; it is addressed communication crafted with intentionality by an author and that intention is directed at an audience.

The master narrative of the curriculum is a narrative wherein plot is paramount. There is a beginning, a middle, and an end. Often, curricula are represented as sequences of courses that must be taken in a certain order so that things come out right in the end. In this regard, the curriculum is always intended as a comedy. Whether the master narrative of the curriculum has the goal of self-authorship or of professional certification, there are usually sub-plots as there are in novels that are related to each other in some way. Sub-plots such as general education and professional education often end up in the same narrative and much ink is spilled by critics seeking to declare their relevance to each other (and some critics their incommensurability). But in any case, the master narrative of the curriculum is bound tightly to plot.

There is a style to the master narrative of the curriculum at the local level. Tightly knit requirements that admit of no choice are a stylistic contrast to loose, open requirements with lots of flexibility. But style plays a much lesser role in master narratives than the other components.

Last, the curriculum has a theme; it has meaning to those who write it and to those who give it life by taking the prescribed courses. The curriculum seeks to convey meaning to the institution and to the student partaking thereof. The curriculum is not just a recipe for cooking up a degree. It is a narrative meant to be interpreted, understood, and even taken to heart by students whom, we might imagine saying some day, "Ah. *That's* why I had to take an arts course." The excitement of the discovery (or of creating) this theme, this meaning, is described well by Lowenstein (2000):

The excitement that comes with grasping the interrelationships among the parts of one's education, identifying an organizational scheme that makes the

whole suddenly more than the sum of its parts, is extremely powerful. (para. 7)

Lowenstein uses the word “logic” to refer to these interrelationships and defines it further as:

- an overall goal (possibly more than one);
- sub-goals that are parts of the overall goal or steps toward it;
- groups of courses chosen to address each sub-goal; and
- relationships among these courses—which can include building on each other, providing complementary perspectives on common subject matter, relationships among ideas encountered in different courses, and perhaps others as well.

While the word “logic” means a certain thing to a philosopher such as Lowenstein, he is clearly not walking us through the truth tables of symbolic logic, nor is he describing the formal logic of propositions and conclusions. Logic here means the sometimes hidden interrelationships and meanings waiting to be discovered, both the “built-in” logic of the curriculum (the theme or meaning that the institution intends) and the logic that the advisor and the student build together as courses are taken. A salient example of codification of built-in logic is the document known as the Yale Report of 1828, which stands out as a master narrative that established, or at least justified, the curriculum of Yale College from that point forward. The faculty of Yale College asserted that the object of the college was to “LAY THE FOUNDATION of a SUPERIOR EDUCATION” (Yale Report, 1828, p. 6).

In that report, we also have a brilliant statement regarding a division within higher education that remains to the present day:

The two great points to be gained in intellectual culture, are the *discipline* and the *furniture* of the mind; expanding its powers, and storing it with knowledge. The former of these is, perhaps, the more important of the two. A commanding object, therefore, in a collegiate course, should be, to call into daily and vigorous exercise the faculties of the student. Those branches of study should be prescribed, and those modes of instruction

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adopted, which are best calculated to teach the art of fixing the attention, directing the train of thought, analyzing a subject proposed for investigation; following, with accurate discrimination, the course of argument; balancing nicely the evidence presented to the judgment; awakening, elevating, and controlling the imagination; arranging, with skill, the treasures which memory gathers; rousing and guiding the powers of genius. (Yale Report, 1828, p. 7, emphasis in original)

In this important statement, the focus is clearly on liberal education and not on professionalism.

Things have changed since 1828. But students continue to ask “Why do I have to take this arts course? I’m a business major.” Such a question has to do with the theme of the curriculum. We could just take the easy way out and answer the student’s question by railing at them for misapprehending the meaning, the theme of their own curriculum. Or we could go with the Yale College faculty, who, in 1828, gave a splendid answer:

But why, it may be asked, should a student waste his time upon studies which have no immediate connection with his future profession? Will chemistry enable him to plead at the bar, or conic sections qualify him for preaching, or astronomy aid him in the practice of physic? Why should not his attention be confined to the subject which is to occupy the labors of his life? In answer to this, it may be observed, that there is no science which does not contribute its aid to professional skill. “Every thing throws light upon every thing.” The great object of a collegiate education, preparatory to the study of a profession, is to give that expansion and balance of the mental powers, those liberal and comprehensive views, and those fine proportions of character, which are not to be found in him whose ideas are always confined to one particular channel. (Yale Report, 1828, pp. 14-15)

Properly speaking, this Yale Report of 1828 is a statement of a philosophy of education. But it is based in part upon an important work

at the time on the philosophy of mind. The unattributed quotation—“Every thing throws light upon every thing”—is from the Scottish philosopher Thomas Brown (1778-1820) who taught at Edinburgh University from 1808 to 1820. His *Lectures on the Philosophy of Mind* was published posthumously in 1827 and would have been enjoying widespread popularity among academics on both sides of the Atlantic in 1828 (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1911).

The wider context of the unattributed quotation, from the introduction to Brown’s lecture on vision, is an astonishing paean to the glories of studying across a broad spectrum and the serendipitous insights such study can lead to. No wonder it shaped the thinking of the Yale faculty of 1828:

It is thus scarcely possible, in science, to treat of one subject, without considering it in relation to some other subject, and often to subjects between which, on first view, it would be difficult to trace any relation. Every thing throws light upon every thing, —though the reflection,—which is, in many cases, so bright, as to force itself upon common eyes,—may, in other cases, be so faint, as to be perceptible only to eyes of the nicest discernment. It may almost be said, that there is an universal affinity in truths,—like that universal attraction, which unites to each other, as one common system, the whole masses which are scattered through the infinity of space, and by which the annihilation of a single particle of matter, in any one of these orbs,—however inconceivably slight its elementary modification might be of the general sum of attraction,—would in that very instant be productive of change throughout the universe. It is not easy to say, what any one science would have been, if any other science had not existed. How different did Astronomy become, in consequence of the accidental burning of a few sea-weeds upon the sand, to which the origin of glass has been ascribed; and, when we think of the universal accessions, which navigation has made to every department of knowledge, what an infinity of truths may be considered as almost starting

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into existence, at the moment, when the polarity of the magnet was first observed! (Brown, 1827, p. 179)

It can still stand, as it did in 1828 for the Yale faculty, as a major statement on the theme, the meaning of the curriculum. This is why business students take arts courses.

The Yale Report of 1828 was written in service of curricular reform, or rather, to fend off curricular reform: a move by some progressives to take Greek and Latin out of the curriculum. It worked, possibly bolstered by the strength of Brown's arguments. Greek and Latin remained part of the curriculum for everyone at Yale College for some time to come.

Context, plot, style, theme: these are all present in the narrative of the curriculum at your institution. It would not take much digging on your part to bring them to light; such effort on your part may have a beneficial effect on your day-to-day advising. It will certainly provide insight on why you do what you do. Seek to discover how and by whom your curriculum was framed, even to the point of uncovering the records of debate surrounding curricular decisions. Such documents may lurk in your library's archives somewhere. They will have much to say about context and intended theme. Plot and style are easily gleaned from the degree audits or curriculum worksheets you use daily.

Master Narratives: Philosophies of Education

Each individual advisor carries their own version of what a curriculum should be that may or may not be in harmony with the local curriculum. We might fruitfully call this the advisor's philosophy of higher education. It functions as a master narrative that influences the stories that the advisor and the student can perceive as meaningful and worthwhile stories; it influences the stories that advisors and students can tell that make sense. Importantly, it may influence the student's philosophy of higher education. After all, students come to higher learning with *some* idea of what it means to them. That pre-existing philosophy may undergo change as *The Story of This Student's Education* unfolds.

There are several possible philosophies of education that a given academic advisor might be likely to have. These may vary with the discipline the advisor comes from and by the type of institution the

advisor attended or works at. But these master narratives are always there in the background, influencing curricular actions that the advisor might recommend.

They play out in subtle ways in our interactions with students. “Listen,” a particular advisor might say to a pre-med major, “why do you want to take Intro to Drawing? What if it turns out that you can’t draw to save your life? You gotta keep that cumulative average up. Take something easy.” This advisor is operating from a philosophy of education and is not violating the curriculum. All requirements will likely be filled to the letter of the law. Nor is this advisor violating the best practices in advising. The advisor wants what is best for the student: in the best of all possible worlds, that advisor wants to see the student graduate with the highest possible GPA and get into medical college and sees the best way to do that is to take “safe” classes. Perhaps the student might have flourished in Intro to Drawing. Perhaps the skills learned in Intro to Drawing might have made the difference between a merely competent surgeon and one with gifted hands. We will never see how that alternate story might have played out.

To examine the array of possible philosophies of education, let’s look at two dialectical tensions that will help us describe and contextualize the possibilities for education philosophies:

- The Dialectic of Mathesis and Praxis and
- The Dialectic of Personal Authenticity and Community Engagement.

“**Dialectic**” is used here in the sense of the contradiction between two conflicting forces viewed as the determining factor in their continuing interaction. It is a continuum between polar opposites.

The Dialectic of Mathesis and Praxis

Mathesis is a Greek word that means “the act of learning, of acquiring information” and further, “the desire for learning, the power of learning” (Liddell & Scott, 1966, p. 422). I am awakening this ancient word and pressing it into service because we need to have a word that is on the same level (and from the same language) as praxis. As used here, mathesis is on one pole of a continuum that deals with the relative

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practicality of higher education. Taken to the extreme, a philosophy based only on mathesis would see education as an end in itself: the experiencing of the joy of learning for its own sake. Such a philosophy, in its purest form, appreciates the joy and power of learning, both for self-fulfillment and for the pursuit of happiness, both personal and societal.

On the opposite end of this dialectic is praxis. **Praxis**, more familiar to us speakers of English, is the noun form of a Greek word that means “to achieve, to bring about, to do, to work, to attend to matters, to manage” (Liddell & Scott, 1966, p. 582). Proponents of this point of view, again, taken to an extreme, view higher education as a means to an end. From a philosophical stance characterized by praxis in its purest form, learning is always for a purpose, whether to bolster the learner to accomplish more in the world or to strive to improve the body politic; such advisors regard learning as necessary to conduct the business of the world.

It is illuminating for an advisor to consider where along this continuum they belong with respect to their philosophy of higher education. Do you remember your own undergraduate years as times when you could experience the joy of biology labs, of conjugating Spanish verbs, of cultural anthropology, of painting? Do you seek to convey that love of learning to your students? Do you sometimes catch yourself responding more warmly to students who express that love of learning for its own sake, regardless of its practical value in their lives? If so, you are more on the side of mathesis than praxis. This is not to say that you discount the practical side of education altogether. It is just less important to you than the joy, the intrinsic power that comes from learning.

If, on the other hand, you see higher education as having practical value; if you measure the success of any educational program in terms of how many graduates go on to find employment in that field; if you yourself had an educational journey marked by clear goals leading to predictable outcomes; if you find yourself responding more warmly to students who similarly see themselves as taking concerted action leading to a practical outcome, then you are more on the side of praxis than mathesis. This is not to say that you do not find great joy and power in learning. It is just that for you these things are the icing on the cake. They make it sweeter, but do not really add to the nutritional value.

So let's put this dialectic in visual form. Chances are you are not all

the way over to the left nor to the right. Maybe you are right there at the halfway point.

Figure 4.1

The Dialectic of Mathesis and Praxis



But the question you must ask yourself is “Where do I really stand on the question of the practicality of higher education? Do I view it as only for its own sake, as intrinsically good? Do I view it as leading to practical outcomes, for extrinsic rewards? Or am I somewhere in between these two extremes?” Consideration of these matters is important, because the stories that ring true on one extreme are less salient on the other. Recall our pre-med advisor who warned his student away from taking Intro to Drawing? That person did not necessarily regard drawing as a useless, vain pursuit. No doubt he was aware of what one learns in drawing classes. But here is an advisor who is more on the side of praxis. The stories that make more sense at this side of the dialectic are those where the student is accepted to medical school. It is not a wrong position to hold.

In fact, there is no position on this dialectic that is morally wrong. It is simply necessary to know where one stands, because that stance is likely to influence the sorts of stories one tells and hears and will likely influence the sorts of *bildungsromane* one is willing to cooperate in authoring. Be honest in your self-assessment! Such critical self-examination is necessary for us to practice advising well. One may yearn for stories where mathesis is the dominant master narrative, but structure one’s advising interactions toward the stories of praxis (or vice-versa).

Suppose yourself to be someone who loves learning for its own sake, without regard to practical outcomes. Suppose further that you work for an institution that puts pressure on you to turn out as many graduates as possible. Your institution demands product; you value process. Here is a conflict that can lead to unhappy results for you, the student, the institution, or all three, unless one of those three entities can be flexible.

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Is that you? Can you provide advice that is not in harmony with your own philosophy of education? Can you provide advice that is not in harmony with your student's philosophy of higher education? What are the moral implications for striving to do so?

In contrast to the previous paragraph, suppose yourself to be more on the praxis side of this dialectic, working for an institution that measures your success, at least in part, by the graduation rate. All is well. There is nothing morally wrong with you the advisor and your institution being located on the praxis side. But you are meeting with a student whose philosophy of higher education is squarely on the mathesis side, loving learning for its own sake, with less regard for practical outcomes. We can imagine a Greek tragedy shaping up, with a chorus of Legislators and Parents intoning dire warnings as they dance their strophes and antistrophes in the background. And there you are. You have options. You can:

- honor the student's philosophy of higher education, insofar as you are able to come to know it, above all other considerations;
- seek to modify the student's philosophy of higher education to bring it into harmony with your own and the institution's;
- modify your own philosophy; or
- refer the student to another advisor.

Again, there is no position along this dialectic that is morally wrong. Moral issues crop up when there is a conflict between philosophies.

There is, however, another dialectic upon which we can place philosophies of higher education.

The Dialectic of Personal Authenticity and Community Engagement

Personal authenticity is focused on the individual mind, person, or identity. The self is seen as a being who can and should grow and develop up to its capacities. While all persons grow and develop in a society, the focus on this pole of the dialectic is on fostering self-authorship, autonomy, and authority, to become an authentic person. Adherents of this educational philosophy in its purest form are focused on education for the student's SELF.

Community engagement sees higher education as being in service to the wider society in which the individual exists and which often pays

for part of the education a student receives. “The pursuit of happiness” becomes the pursuit of the peaceable kingdom, a happy society where citizens strive to bring about the greatest good for the greatest number. Adherents of this educational philosophy in its purest form are focused on education in service to the OTHER.

Advisors who see themselves as primarily involved in bringing about the fullest development of the student, who actively seek to precipitate the desirable state of self-authorship, have an educational philosophy that leans more toward the personal authenticity pole of this dialectic. They do not see other-directed education as misguided, only not central to the purposes of higher education.

On the other hand, advisors who seek to have students work toward the betterment of society, who see service-learning, social justice, and community engagement as the highest values we can promote in higher education, are those who align more with the community engagement pole of this dialectic. Personal authenticity is certainly desirable, but less important to advisors on the extreme toward community engagement in the following diagram:

Figure 4.2

The Dialectic of Personal Authenticity and Community Engagement

As with the Dialectic of Mathesis and Praxis, no position on this dialectic is a morally wrong position to hold, but as before, one must engage in self-reflection to determine where one’s educational philosophy resides on this continuum. This self-reflection can be in the form of related questions: “Where do I really stand on the question of who shall benefit from higher education? Do I view it as only for the benefit of the individual student who sits before me so as to bring about the best version of that student that I can? That student is the one paying dearly for the privilege of being educated. Do I view that education as being for the benefit of the larger society? Taxpayers often shoulder the rest of the burden not covered by tuition. Am I somewhere in between these two extremes?” The stories that ring true on one extreme are less salient on the other.

Personal
Authenticity

Community
Engagement

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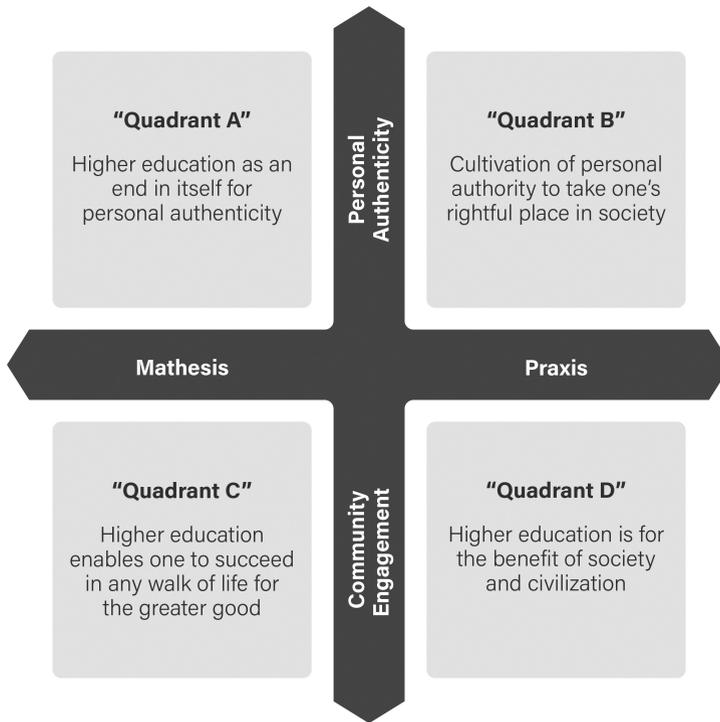
Community engagement does not rule out personal authenticity. Indeed, one often leads to the other. This dialectic is simply a tool for analysis, a heuristic device to help you reflect on what you value and what philosophy you hold, and to recognize that there are other valid viewpoints. And as with the Dialectic of Mathesis and Praxis, this Dialectic of Personal Authenticity and Community Engagement can be used as a tool to help you analyze your and your student's philosophy of higher education. As before, one is faced with choices if the student's philosophy does not match your own or the institution's. You can:

- honor the student's philosophy of higher education, insofar as you are able to come to know it, above all other considerations;
- seek to modify the student's philosophy of higher education to bring it into harmony with your own and the institution's;
- modify your own philosophy; or
- refer the student to another advisor.

The Interaction of the Two Dialectics

It is unlikely that any advisor holds any of these four philosophical stances in its purest form. Instead, we are likely to see that any individual advisor's philosophical stance is a blending of these four poles. To help us think about this blending, these two dialectics can be placed as the two axes on a Cartesian plane where the "coordinates" of a given philosophy of education indicate how the story should be told. That is, we can fruitfully look at how these two dialectical tensions can interact with each other in order to focus on our own educational philosophies. There is a different type of story that makes sense in each of the four "quadrants."

Figure 4.3
Interaction of the Two Dialectics



For example, an advisor whose philosophy of education is characterized by strong leanings toward mathesis and personal authenticity might tend to see the main purpose of education as bringing about self-authorship, whereas strong leanings toward praxis and personal authenticity would tend to view education as benefitting the individual, but for the purpose of taking their proper place in society and the work force. Philosophies of education that are located in quadrants that are more oriented toward community engagement have different purposes; different stories—focused less on the individual's development—make sense here. We can put names to some philosophies of education that inhabit one or more of these four quadrants. The following is not meant to be a catalog of all educational philosophies. Rather, I seek to provide some salient examples. Do you recognize yourself? Or a colleague?

Intrinsic Value Philosophy. We can think of this philosophy of higher education as residing in quadrants A and C and characterized

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by mathesis, a love of learning, whether in service to the SELF (personal authenticity) or the OTHER (community engagement). Advisors who subscribe to this philosophy of higher education believe that an education is valuable in and of itself even if it does not lead to a practical or worldly desirable end. It is an end itself. Yet even this philosophy is potentially of immense practical value, as noted by Brubacher (1982): “What could be more practical than a mind disciplined to turn its power in any direction?” (p. 5).

Advisors who hold this philosophy are concerned with pushing their students to achieve for the intrinsic rewards of doing so—not for the sake of grades, but of learning itself. Such advisors are concerned with the stated learning outcomes of the institution, but the finished product is an epistemological achievement: a lifelong learner. Other desirable outcomes and a cushy job may result, but such things are not the direct goal of the intrinsic-value minded advisor.

Pragmatic Philosophy. Pragmatic philosophers of education are found in quadrants B and D, where praxis holds sway, whether in service to the SELF (personal authenticity) or the OTHER (community engagement). Pragmatic philosophies of higher education often fit well with master narratives of community colleges and in the professional majors in colleges and universities. Pragmatic advisors might say of their obligations to the student, “Our joint purpose is to land that student into a start-up job with a good salary (or a graduate program) and a vista of ever-increasingly remunerative opportunities spreading out into the future. I will have failed that student, and that student will have failed me, if this does not happen.” Learning for its own sake is welcome, but is not a priority. Required liberal arts courses are often thought of as things to be gotten out of the way.

Our pre-med advisor mentioned above holds a very pragmatic philosophy of education. In such a frame of mind, the curriculum becomes just one more challenge to be overcome. Perhaps that advisor is under pressure to improve the percentage of students who gain admission to medical college. In such situations, interesting quandaries arise when the advisor’s philosophy of education is at odds with either the curriculum or the expectations of the administration. Suppose our pre-med advisor to be a proponent of the intrinsic value philosophy, but laboring under a regime that expects concrete results in the form

of admissions to medical college. Would the advice imparted above be any different?

Land-Grant Philosophy. Adherents of the land-grant philosophy are squarely in quadrant D, characterized by a blending of praxis and community engagement. Perhaps found more in agricultural and mechanical colleges and the institutions founded under the Morrill Act of 1852, advisors holding this philosophy of higher education see education as a way of providing the state with farmers, engineers, and other professionals to keep the machines, food supply, and infrastructure of society rolling. Such an advisor might say, “Yes, I want my students to be happy and to write well and all that, but how could they be more happy than to be engaged in the great works of agriculture and engineering?” Keep in mind that such a philosophy might be held by any advisor at any institution. And it is certainly not the case that advisors at a land-grant university need hold such a philosophy in order to work there. Rather, we are here talking about the philosophy of education that gave rise to the Morrill Act of 1852. Like the socialist philosophy below, this view of education sees it as a means to ends that are of crucial value to society at large, without which it could not function.

Socialist Philosophy. Advisors holding a socialist philosophy dwell in quadrants C and D, the province of community engagement, whether geared toward the power of learning (mathesis) or toward the practical values of fostering the good society and social justice (praxis). In this master narrative, advisors see the purpose of higher education to be geared toward the community. Benefits that redound to the individual student are not the primary goal. Rather, the goal is “What can this student learn by serving the community; how can the community benefit from this student serving it? What is the role higher education should play in bringing about social justice?” Such advisors might be fine with students learning the higher order skills, and to have a practicable major that leads to a job, but the student’s education will be incomplete without a commitment to community service and service-learning.

Consciousness-Raising Philosophy. The consciousness-raising philosophy is held by some advisors who occupy quadrant C, characterized by the love/power of learning (mathesis) and community engagement. Here, the student is not just an individual, but a member of a group that has not historically had the same advantages as other groups: such as African-Americans, women, disabled, or LGBTQ. The advisor may also

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be a member of that group. Such an ideology guides *The Story of This Student's Education* toward an understanding and a reevaluation of the social structures under which they labor, to make things more right for that student and for society at large.

Rachel, whom we will meet at the dinner party in Chapter Six, teaches post-colonial literature at Adacan University, where Bill, James, Max, and Hermes (all of whom you met in previous chapters) also work. That dinner party takes place in the present day, but let's set the Wayback Machine to about 15 years ago and listen in on a pivotal, life-changing conversation between Rachel, a first-year student at a major metropolitan university somewhere in Ontario, and her Intro to Women's Studies professor, who holds a joint appointment in women's studies and literature. We enter the conversation just in time to hear a knock on the door of the professor's office.

PROFESSOR

Yes. Welcome. You're in my Intro class.
What's your name again?

RACHEL

Rachel.

PROFESSOR

Okay. What can I do for you, Rachel?

RACHEL

I'm not entirely sure. I guess I just wanted to tell you how much I enjoy your course. There just wasn't anything like this in my high school. I'm enjoying the readings, the discussions, everything. It's my favourite class.

PROFESSOR

Splendid. I'm glad to hear it. What's your major?

RACHEL

Social work. I want to make a difference in my community.

PROFESSOR

Super cool. I'm sure our course will help you as you move into that profession.

RACHEL

Can I ask a question? Atwood's (1985) *Handmaid's Tale*. Could that really happen?

PROFESSOR

Sounds like you're reading ahead in the syllabus. Very well done. I guess I'd say that Atwood's novel is less about a possible future and is rather more about the present. She's calling attention to reprehensible tendencies and attitudes in our current society.

RACHEL

That's why I'm in social work. I want to call attention to, you know, what you just said.

PROFESSOR

And work to change reprehensible tendencies and attitudes. That's one of the things we do in this major: call attention but also seek change.

RACHEL

Wait. I can major in Women's Studies?

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You can see where this is headed. Rachel's professor is fostering and nurturing Rachel's nascent consciousness-raising philosophy of higher education.

Virtue Philosophy. Virtue philosophy is found in quadrant A, characterized by a blending of mathesis and personal authenticity. "Virtue" here is used in its secondary sense of human potentials, strengths, excellences. It undergirds the approach we have come to know as developmental advising (see, for example, Grites, 2013), which seeks to know and develop all of the latent capacities of the student before us. As a philosophical stance, virtue philosophy is an ideology in which the advisor sees the goal of higher education to be the full development of every potential of every student. Such an advisor says, "I know what my student is capable of. I look forward to the day when I can step back and let them shine forth." It is very much in harmony with the quest for self-authorship as we have described it in the previous chapter.

The attainment of authenticity lies in the decisions and commitments one makes as an individual. "What is essential to a human being—what makes her *who* she is—is not fixed by her type but by what she makes of herself, who she becomes" (Crowell, 2015, p. 7). Authenticity is the crafting of self or identity:

Authenticity thus indicates a certain kind of integrity—not that of a pre-given whole, an identity waiting to be discovered, but that of a project to which I can either commit myself (and thus "become" what it entails) or else simply occupy for a time, inauthentically drifting in and out of various affairs. Some writers have taken this notion a step further, arguing that the measure of an authentic life lies in the integrity of a narrative, that to be a self is to constitute a story in which a kind of wholeness prevails, to be the author of oneself as a unique individual. In contrast, the inauthentic life would be one without such integrity, one in which I allow my life-story to be dictated by the world. (Crowell, 2015, p. 11)

Here, then, we begin to see the idea of self-authorship come round full circle, not just as a plot element, but as characteristic of an ideology,

a stance one might hold with regard to education, a virtue philosophy of education.

One of the works that Crowell alludes to above is Paul Ricoeur's (1992) *Oneself as Another*. Ricoeur argues in that work (p. 114n) that the best way to think about human identity, the authentic self, is in terms of a narrative identity which draws its authenticity in the same way that literary or historical narratives do. That is, the narrative unfolds in the ways that narratives should do.

But what do authenticity, self-authorship, or autonomy look like in non-Western, more communal cultures? Can one advise members of such cultures while holding a virtue philosophy? It is a question of focus, and of the student's own philosophy of higher education. How about a story?

A few years ago, I had a student who was first generation Pakistani-American, born and partly raised in Pakistan, who then emigrated to southern New Jersey with her family. She graduated from a local high school and came to my university, where she excelled in science. She was perhaps the top student in biochemistry and molecular biology, a field she loved. She applied to and was accepted at graduate schools in biochemistry. Alas! Her parents wanted her to become a doctor. In fact, this goal was one of their motives for emigrating to the United States. She would have easily qualified for admission to medical college. There were long, tearful advising sessions; there were long, tearful dinner table conversations at home. But her parents were adamant: if she did not go to medical college, they would not only not support her to study biochemistry, they would disown her for the dishonor that she showed her parents. How could they hold their head up in the Pakistani community here in southern New Jersey with a daughter who would not obey their wishes?

Full disclosure: my own philosophy of education is somewhere to the northwest of the center point in Figure 4.3, yet I could not strongly argue the "I gotta be me" virtue philosophy to her, because it would amount to disparaging her parents' wishes in the matter. I could not in good conscience ignore their wishes. As we have noted, conflicts between philosophies held by students, families, advisors, and institutions require choices. I chose to hold my own philosophy in abeyance and focused on helping her figure out her own.

In the end, it was the student's philosophy of education—specifically

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the theme of that master narrative of virtue philosophy after all—that prevailed. She accepted the consequences and went with biochemistry. I hope her parents came around eventually, but I do not know how that story ended. I never heard from her again.

Conclusion

Trouble comes a-calling when the master narratives are not in harmony with each other. To say this is to claim for master narratives the power they possess but that often goes unnoticed. That power comes into play when there is a clash, as with my Pakistani student and her family. But a clash of master narratives may be brewing on a large scale in the United States. The chorus of legislators, taxpayers, parents, and students are calling for more accountability on the part of higher education to supply society with graduates at lower costs and in shorter times. More and more advisors are finding themselves working in “academic success centers” where success is measured in economic terms such as increased admission yield and increased graduation rates. More and more students are only too happy to see success in terms of shorter time to graduation and decreased debt. No one can gainsay those motives. They are not morally wrong.

But we must realize that these motives—and those of legislators, taxpayers, and tuition payers—stem from a philosophy of education that views it as a very expensive commodity (requiring customer satisfaction) that exists for practical social purposes and not for the joy of learning nor of self-authorship. If the advisor in the academic success center shares this ideology, all is well. But if that advisor’s philosophy of higher education is located more in the mathesis camp, then working with a student whose philosophy is more in the praxis camp becomes difficult. Such an advisor may not be able to provide customer satisfaction in ways that are in harmony with the institution’s philosophy. Such an advisor may not be able to provide the student with the advice they seek (“Just tell me what to take so I can get out of here quickly”) without trying to convey the joy of learning for its own sake, without trying to convey the value of taking a course even if it does not fulfill a requirement. Such an advisor often goes home from work unhappy.

So what do we tell advisors? Should they maintain their own narrative

even if it conflicts with the narrative of the institution that pays their salary? Or with the narrative of the student before them? Should the advisor seek to change the educational philosophy of the institution or of the student? I cannot resolve these issues for you. But I can claim that the conflict is between *stories*.

What is to be done? First, it is important that you become aware that you have a philosophy of education and that it serves the function of influencing the advice you give and the stories you are prepared to receive as valid. An advisor who is unwilling to examine their own philosophy of education is little better than an automaton. Second, seek to know what philosophies of education are held by your students, their families, your department, your institution, and so on. Third, become aware of possible conflicts. Fourth, if there are conflicts, decide whether you can change your philosophy, your student's, or take some other action.

The power of story is most clearly seen when master narratives collide. The power of story is something that advisors must become comfortable in wielding. The power of story has a bearing on how academic advisors should be educated, which will be the focus of Chapter Five.