

## Fix, build, diagnose or guide? Evaluating the metaphors for Learning Advisors

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### Abstract

Researchers have used metaphors to shed light on learning advising, yet these metaphors are rarely evaluated for how well they illuminate. Our contribution is to evaluate these pedagogical metaphors. We first explain our understanding of metaphor based on Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) work, then we describe the philosophical method we used to evaluate which metaphors are bright and illuminating for learning advising and which are dull and obscuring. In the second half of the article we present our philosophical evaluation. Our conclusion is that the brightest metaphors for illuminating the practice of Learning Advisors were the doctor-mentor, builder-mentor, architect, coach and guide, and the dullest metaphors, so dull they should be rejected entirely, were the fixer and counsellor.

### Introduction

Learning Advisors must make complex teaching judgements. For example, a Learning Advisor might consider: *What does this student need, and how can I support their learning? Should I teach them topic sentences and time management? If so, how should I teach these, in how much depth, and for how long? Or does this student instead need to develop a better sense of their identity as a 'learner' or how to learn? If so, how should I foster this?* And, like most teachers, Learning Advisors often use metaphor (implicitly or explicitly) to understand their practice and help them judge what to do: I can *coach* the students in academic skills or provide academic *counselling*. Yet Learning Advisors seldom evaluate whether their metaphors clarify or obscure their practice. In this article we evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of different metaphors for learning advising. Although Learning Advisors may also work on staff development and institutional change (Percy & Skillen 2001; Verity & Trowler, 2011), we focus on their work with students. We identify the better, brighter metaphors to guide the practice of Learning Advisors working directly with students. Learning advising, like other kinds of teaching, is a diverse, complex and uncertain practice (Loads, 2007, p. 243). Learning Advisors must provide learning advice for students whom they have just met, who could be from any background, level of study, discipline or country, and with their own particular learning needs, aspirations and pressures (Hilsdon, 2011; Loads, 2007; McLean, Surtie, Elphinstone & Devlin, 1995). The Learning Advisor then has to uncover the student's particular learning needs and goals, and judge how to assist this student. Immediately after seeing one student they may see another with a completely different learning issue, or they may run a workshop with diverse participants, each with a different learning concern, and each from a different discipline.

Learning Advisors typically work behind closed doors (Bartlett 2005; Chanock 1995) thus we are often in the dark about this complex practice. Because of this, the literature acknowledges that learning advising needs extra illumination (Bartlett, 2005; Loads, 2007; Strauss, 2013; Verity & Trowler, 2011).

In response, various researchers have shone torches on the background and professional identity of Learning Advisors, on how they are perceived, and on their uncertain place in their institutions and in the academic community (for example, Carter, 2010; Craswell & Bartlett, 2001; Loads, 2007; Strauss, 2013). However, shadows still linger around how Learning Advisors should understand and navigate their complicated practice. This is where evaluating metaphors can be illuminating.

## **The illumination of metaphor**

We employ ‘metaphor’ specifically as described by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) in their influential book *Metaphors we live by*. Metaphors provide a light to illuminate practice. They help us to organise our experience, to focus on what is important, and thus they provide “a guide for future action” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 156). “We draw inferences, set goals, make commitments and execute plans, all on the basis of how we in part structure our experience, consciously or unconsciously, by means of metaphor” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 158).

Metaphors act as meaningful personal theories that we can use to make sense of, shape and guide our concrete practice (Rando & Menges, 1991), and to judge what to do. “In this situation, a *facilitator* would ...” or “to be a *coach* I have to...”. However, different metaphors might provide a more or less useful personal theory for guiding our actions, so we also should evaluate them before adopting them in our practice.

Researchers have evaluated the metaphors associated with other educational practices, such as doctoral education (Hughes & Tight, 2013), teaching (Svinicki, 1991), and learning (Hager, 2008; Sfard, 1998). Our aim is to extend this body of literature to evaluate metaphors for learning advising.

## **Metaphors and learning advising**

To evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of metaphors for guiding the complex practice of learning advising we ask: To what extent are they consistent with and supportive of the practice of Learning Advisors, and to what extent are they inconsistent with, and thus undermining of, the practice of learning advising? In other words, to what extent do they provide a bright or a dim light for illuminating and guiding Learning Advisors? Is it more illuminating, for example, to see learning advising as fixing problems, solving puzzles, facilitating learning or coaching students?

Other researchers and practitioners have suggested various metaphors for being a Learning Advisor (for example, Aitchison, 2001; Holland & Silvester, 2012; Power, Carmichael & Goldsmith, 2007). Yet it is rare for anyone to evaluate these metaphors, and a full range of metaphors has never been systematically explored. Instead, the literature tends to merely list the metaphors that Learning Advisors use. For example, Carter and Bartlett-Trafford (2008) list 24 metaphors for Learning Advisors without elaboration or appraisal (pp. 50 – 51) while Bishop, Bowmaker and Finnigan (2009) discuss 19 metaphors without evaluating their consistency with the pedagogy of learning advising (pp. 12 – 13).

We contribute to this literature by first highlighting a range of metaphors for Learning Advisors, and then evaluating whether they are consistent with, and how well they illuminate, an advisor's aims and values. We aim to challenge the implicit, unexamined, and untested metaphors that Learning Advisors may employ.

## **Evaluating brighter and dimmer metaphors**

We can evaluate the strength or brightness of a metaphor based on its entailments, “the perceptions and inferences that follow from it and the actions that are sanctioned by it” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 158). Metaphorical entailments include connotations, normal language meanings, associations, and strict logical implications. Some entailments of a metaphor will be useful for guiding Learning Advisors and some will not.

We evaluate the metaphors for Learning Advisors as strong and bright, or weak and dim rather than true or false (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 158). A stronger, brighter metaphor is congruent with the practice of learning advising, and sanctions appropriate judgements and actions. A weaker, dimmer metaphor is incongruent with the practice, obscures possible judgements and actions, or sets up illegitimate expectations or limitations. For instance, as we show later, the metaphor of ‘fixer’ is weak because it limits what Learning Advisors see as their available actions — a Learning Advisor-as-fixer would only see opportunities to repair what is broken and would overlook opportunities to enhance what is sound. The ‘fixer’ is also a weak metaphor because it is inconsistent with a primary value of Learning Advisors, which is to provide learning development for all students.

So, metaphors for learning advising will be evaluated as strong and bright to the extent that they are coherent with the pedagogical aims, principles and values of learning advising, and to the extent that Learning Advisors can use them to inform and guide their pedagogical judgements and actions.

## **A philosophical evaluation of metaphors**

We evaluated the metaphors for learning advising by engaging in a philosophical Community of Inquiry. In this philosophical research method, a group of expert practitioners, experienced in the issue being investigated (the community), engage in collaborative philosophical inquiry to answer the inquiry question (the inquiry). Please note that this philosophical inquiry involves neither qualitative nor quantitative research, and differs from empirical methods.<sup>1</sup>

The inquiry question was: Which metaphors are stronger or weaker for illuminating and guiding the practice of learning advising? We took a philosophical approach to this question involving collaborative reflection on our practice, theorisation and evaluation, not gathering and analysing data (Golding, 2013). We wanted to know which metaphors for learning

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<sup>1</sup> This is a new philosophical method based on Dewey's pragmatist philosophy (1938) and Lipman's (2003) educative Community of Inquiry. Golding (2014) elaborates, explains and justifies this new methodology.

advising could be valuable, and which would be best to adopt (philosophical research), not which metaphors Learning Advisors actually use in practice, nor what our metaphors revealed about our conceptions (empirical research such as a focus group). Specifically, our approach involved philosophical theorisation about the pedagogical aims, principles and values of learning advising, and philosophical evaluation of which metaphors are most congruent with this pedagogical theory, and thus those we should adopt in practice.

The participants were all 11 of the Learning Advisors from the Student Learning Centre at the University of Otago in May 2011 and 2013. Some participants worked solely as Learning Advisors, while others had additional responsibilities; some were new Learning Advisors, while others had more than 10 years of experience. All participants were also joint researchers and authors.

Our collaborative philosophical inquiry covered the following six stages (see Golding, 2014 for more details):

1. Theorise the pedagogical aims, principles and values of Learning Advisors based on our professional understanding of being a Learning Advisor.
2. Identify possible metaphors for learning advising.
3. Elaborate what each metaphor entails for learning advising.
4. Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of each metaphor, based on how congruent they are with the pedagogical aims, principles and values of a Learning Advisor.
5. We refine our account of the pedagogical aims, principles and values in order to better explain the strengths and weaknesses we identified,
6. Evaluate the overall strength and weakness of each metaphor in relation to the refined pedagogical theory of learning advising.

The researcher-participants reached agreement at each stage. For example, at stage 3 we agreed on the entailments for each suggested metaphor.

The Community of Inquiry involved two main discussions in 2011 and in 2013, separated in time to allow for reflection. Most participant-researchers were involved in both discussions, but some left the University after the first discussion, and some other participant-researchers joined. The first author acted as facilitator and moderator. The following are the steps we took for our inquiry:

- We started with a discussion in 2011 involving all six stages of the philosophical inquiry process.
- The first author compiled the suggested metaphors and their respective strengths and weaknesses in a draft article.
- The first author also drew on the literature about Learning Advisors to identify any missing metaphors, or strengths and weaknesses, and to develop a refined understanding of the principles of learning advising, which were then added to the draft article.
- The draft was circulated to all participant-researchers, and we had a second discussion in 2013 to review all six stages of the inquiry process. We added to, confirmed, clarified and evaluated the metaphors, strengths and weaknesses, and refined our account of the pedagogical aims, principles and values of Learning Advisors.

- We continued our second discussion until we reached agreement and saturation for each stage of the inquiry; until we had reached agreement on our understanding of the pedagogical theory of learning advising, and exhausted suggestions for new metaphors and new strengths and weaknesses.
- Based on the second discussion, the article was revised by the first author and then circulated for final confirmation by the participant-researchers, before submission for publication.

This article reports the results of this collaborative philosophical inquiry. In particular, we report our evaluation of the metaphors for Learning Advisors - which metaphors we evaluated as strong and which as weak, and our reasons for this evaluation.

Given this is philosophical, not qualitative research, our evaluation should be judged according to philosophical standards, not according to the standards of qualitative research. Our evaluation is acceptable if there are strong arguments in support. Our claim is that you should accept our evaluation of the strong and weak metaphors for learning advising, not because it is based on reliable methods, but because it is based on reasonable arguments.

## **The results of our inquiry: Our evaluation of brighter and dimmer metaphors**

In order to evaluate how well the metaphors for Learning Advisors illuminate the practice of learning advising, we needed an initial account of learning advising. So, we started by theorising the pedagogical aims, principles and values of Learning Advisors, based on our professional training and understanding.

The main aim of a Learning Advisor, we claim, is to support and improve student learning. Learning Advisors assist students to develop the skills, confidence and understanding needed to flourish as independent learners. They also enable students to play the university 'learning game' by assisting them to understand and meet university expectations such as academic integrity and critical analysis. Learning Advisors also value equity and inclusivity (AALL, 2010; Bartlett 2005; Cameron, 2012; Percy & Skillen, 2001) – they aim to provide learning support and development for all students. But this value is in tension with their value of sustainability – Learning Advisors aim to provide on-going learning support within the limits of their resources.

In order to meet these aims, there are three main pedagogical steps for learning advising: A Learning Advisor, 1) assesses the learning goals of a student, then 2) formulates advice for that student, and finally 3) supports the student to achieve their goals.

In the next stage of our collaborative philosophical inquiry we identified potential metaphors for guiding Learning Advisors, and which we list and evaluate in the rest of this section.

Although we give only one title for each metaphor, this stands for a family of related metaphors. For example, we list 'builder', but our evaluation is relevant to 'plumber' or any other similar 'tradesperson' metaphors. Also, we discuss only those metaphors that could encompass all three main pedagogical steps that Learning Advisors take. We omit metaphors that captured only one of the steps, such as 'detective' (which only captures the first step of assessing learning needs), 'translator' of academic requirements (which only captures the second step of formulating advice), or 'model of learning' (which only captures the third step of how an advisor enables students to learn).

We present the results of our evaluative inquiry about the metaphors for Learning Advisors in an iterative, developmental sequence in the following sub-sections. We first present one or two related metaphors and evaluate how strongly or weakly they illuminate the practice of learning advising. Next, we clarify these weaknesses by illustrating one or two of the pedagogical aims, principles and values of Learning Advisors that were ignored by these metaphors, and we add these to our refined account of learning advising. Then, to capture the more refined account of learning advising, we offer stronger, more sophisticated metaphors, which we evaluate and then use to refine our account of learning advising, and so on. We present each metaphor using bold, italicised headings, and we sometimes also give a list of the entailments for this metaphor. We devote more words to the metaphors that were most common in the learning advising literature, and we start with the weaker metaphors and develop to the stronger metaphors. We use bold headings without italics to present each refinement of the pedagogical theory of learning advising.

### ***Fixer***

This metaphor entails that Learning Advisors serve a remedial function, fixing ‘broken’ students who cannot, for example, write clearly. This is a commonly used metaphor for Learning Advisors (Carter & Bartlett-Trafford, 2008), which often has negative and low-status connotations, such as the mechanic doing the dirty work under the hood, or Mrs. Mop in the background, cleaning up the mess so the real academic teaching can be done by others (Bishop, Bowmaker & Finnigan, 2009).

It might seem plausible for Learning Advisors to see themselves as ‘the fixer’, especially when they provide support for educationally disadvantaged students. Yet we argue that this sort of metaphor is not appropriate to guide Learning Advisors, because it has several entailments that are incompatible with their aims, principles and values, and these weaknesses outweigh the strengths. The fixer metaphor:

1. Entails an unsuitable model of learning where we can only learn if we are deficient in some way. This model ignores the learning that happens by enhancing our capabilities, and improving on our successes.
2. Disempowers students by entailing that students are passive and need Learning Advisors to mend them.
3. Entails that learning advising is peripheral and unimportant, “a menial adjunct to the ‘real work’ performed by academics” (Crasswell & Bartlett, 2001). As Chanock (2005) puts it, there is a silent ‘mere’ attached to this metaphor (p. 14).
4. Stigmatises Learning Advisors and their students. It entails that learning advice is only for ‘dummies’.

### ***Counsellor***

Rather than fixing students, this metaphor entails that a Learning Advisor counsels students about their learning needs. One strength of this metaphor is that the interaction between Learning Advisor and student can resemble that of a counsellor and client. However, the

main weakness is that it entails a pastoral (and remedial) relationship whereas learning advising is primarily academic (Carter, 2010; Chanock, 1995; Crasswell & Bartlett 2001). So, even though learning advising has historical roots in counselling services (Hilsdon, 2011), ‘counsellor’ is a weak, dim metaphor for modern Learning Advisors (p. 14).

To clarify why these two metaphors were weak, we needed to refine our account of the aims, principles or values of learning advising:

*Learning Advisors employ a developmental model of learning*

Learning Advisors operate with a developmental model of learning rather than a deficit, remedial model. Learning Advisors enhance learning for all students, rather than fixing only the broken learners. Learning Advisors can assist with learning needs when students have very few academic skills, and with learning goals when students already have a high level of competence. Other researchers (for example, Chanock, 2005; Crasswell & Bartlett, 2001; Hilsdon 2011) also agree that developmental metaphors are brighter and stronger for Learning Advisors than remedial metaphors.

*Learning Advisors provide central academic support*

Learning Advisors provide essential academic support for all students, rather than merely mending a few failing students on the periphery of the real academic work (Bartlett, 2005; Strauss, 2013; Verity & Trowler, 2011). Learning Advisors provide essential learning support for issues central to every discipline, such as writing or critical thinking, goes well beyond a superficial tune-up of study skills. For example, when Learning Advisors teach referencing at the undergraduate level, they are teaching students how to think and write in an academic context, not merely where to put the brackets in a citation.

Next we suggest stronger, brighter metaphors that are more congruent with this refined account of the aims, values and principles of Learning Advisors.

***Builder***

This metaphor entails that Learning Advisors analyse a student’s needs and goals and then build or construct student learning. The builder is a stronger, brighter metaphor than the fixer or counsellor, because it is compatible with Learning Advisors’ developmental principles, rather than being remedial. It also helps Learning Advisors to understand how they can enable student learning: by providing a firm foundation, scaffolding and structure and tools so students can learn more effectively. Nevertheless, there is an important weakness: The builder metaphor entails that Learning Advisors do the work for their passive students, which is inconsistent with their pedagogical principle of empowering students. We clarify why this is a weakness by adding a further aim or principle for learning advising:

*Learning Advisors enable active students*

Learning Advisors enable students to be active in their own development, rather than being

passively developed.

### ***Doctor***

Instead of building learning, this metaphor entails that a Learning Advisor diagnoses learning issues and then offers a cure. For example, a student might come to a Learning Advisor complaining about referencing, but after ‘examining’ the student and their writing, the advisor’s diagnosis is a misunderstanding about critical analysis. The Learning Advisor-as-doctor can then prescribe a course of treatment (“do these exercises to practise paraphrasing”) or referral to a specialist (“go to the librarian to learn about Endnote”).

The main weakness of the doctor metaphor is that it tends to be a medical version of the fixer, and has all the drawbacks of this remedial metaphor. Learning advising is better understood as developing capabilities rather than healing illness.

### ***Teacher***

An alternative to the doctor metaphor, which is still stronger than the builder, is the teacher metaphor. The Learning Advisor teaches general issues related to learning (rather than a discipline). However, if ‘teacher’ is understood as ‘expert instructor’ or ‘the sage-on-the-stage’, this metaphor entails more weaknesses than strengths. This version of the teacher metaphor:

1. Entails a prescriptive curriculum to be taught, which is incompatible with what Learning Advisors do. Learning Advisors respond to individual student needs and goals rather than imposing predetermined learning objectives or teaching a ‘subject’ (although there is a body of academic knowledge and skills that Learning Advisors do teach).
2. Entails that the Learning Advisor is the expert, which for many students means someone unapproachable. This is incompatible with the practice of learning advising. Many students come to a Learning Advisor because they are more approachable than a lecturer. Although Learning Advisors do have more academic skills than their students, and are experts in how to enable learning, this expertise should not involve the power imbalance that the teacher metaphor entails.

We do not imply that all conceptions of teaching entail these weaknesses. Other metaphors such as ‘coach’ or ‘guide-on-the-side’ capture brighter teacher-metaphors, and we discuss these later.

To better explain the weaknesses of the doctor and teacher metaphors, we refine our understanding of learning advising by adding two new aims, principles or values:



### *Learning Advisors empower students*

Learning Advisors offer expert advice to empower students to reach their learning goals, rather than telling students what to do. They provide a safe environment (Bartlett, 2005) in which students can work out how to develop their learning, and do not dictate what students must do.

### *Learning Advisors foster independence*

The ultimate aim of a Learning Advisor is to foster independent learning. To do this they have to offer assistance without dependency; offer advice, while mentoring and encouraging students to self-advise.

In light of this refinement of learning advising, we can strengthen some of the previous metaphors by adding 'mentorship'. For example, Learning Advisors do not merely offer metaphorical building advice or metaphorical medical advice, they also mentor students so they learn to be their own builder (builder-mentor) and their own doctor (doctor-mentor). We also suggest that 'architect' is a stronger, brighter metaphor more congruent with this refined account of learning advising.

### ***Architect***

This metaphor entails that Learning Advisors offer plans that can enable students to achieve their learning goals. Students come to the Learning Advisor to design something new, to 'build' some learning, not to fix a problem. The Learning Advisor-as-architect helps them to shape their goals, and then to design a plan for building these goals, which the student-as-client can reject or tweak (unlike the advice from the Learning Advisor-as-doctor which tends to be treated like a command).

One weakness of the architect metaphor is that the Learning Advisor-as-architect gives advice and then leaves their student-client to get on with the job. This is inconsistent with the partnership that Learning Advisors offer students, and, to clarify why this is a weakness, we need to refine our understanding of learning advising:

### *Learning Advisors partner students*

Learning Advisors partner students in a two-way relationship. The earlier metaphors such as doctor and teacher, where the Learning Advisor tells the student what to do, underplay the role of the student. The architect metaphor underplays the role of the Learning Advisor, entailing that they offer advice and nothing else. Instead, Learning Advisors work with students to enable them to achieve their learning goals. With very novice students this partnership may resemble that provided by a coach who tends to tell students what to do, but who nevertheless supports them to achieve what they want.

### ***Coach***

This metaphor entails that Learning Advisors work in partnership with students to coach and

train them so they are better able to meet their learning goals. The strength of this metaphor is that the Learning Advisor-as-coach has an empowering relationship with students, focussed on developing independence. However, there is still a weaknesses because of the power imbalance — a coach tells us what to do for our own good (“drop and give me five”).

## **Guide**

The guide is a stronger, brighter metaphor than the coach; it captures the strength of the partnership offered by a coach without entailing the weakness of the power imbalance. The guide metaphor entails that a Learning Advisor partners students so they find their way through unfamiliar academic territory and eventually learn to travel on their own. The Learning Advisor is an active mentor rather than the passive guide who just carries the gear, but not as controlling as the tour-guide leading the student along a prescribed path. The Learning Advisor-as-guide is more like the guide for a student-quest, who enables students to get where they want to go, and achieve great things.

One important strength of the guide metaphor is that it explains the three main steps of learning advising: The Learning Advisor-as-guide 1) assesses student learning needs and goals (“where do you want to go and what do you want to see?”); 2) formulates advice (“If you want to go there you will first have to travel through...” and “You need crampons here”); and then 3) supports the student in achieving the goals (“Can you see the hidden path?” and “Now we need to practice abseiling”). The guide metaphor also entails all the pedagogical aims, principles and values of a Learning Advisor: A Learning Advisor-as-guide provides developmental advice about central academic concerns by helping students to navigate their academic learning; they partner and empower their students, so the students become independent learners able to guide themselves.

This metaphor is also strong because it is consistent with learning advising being a two-way partnership, rather than a one-way exchange where Learning Advisors tell students to do something, or offer them advice to take or leave. The guide explores *with* their students. Students bring knowledge that the Learning Advisor does not possess, such as their knowledge of the field of study, the Learning Advisor brings specialist skills and understanding of academic navigation, and together they move forward. The Learning Advisor assists the student to see the hidden obstacles on the path to their goal, and together they find the best way to get there. After being guided in this way, the student will also develop the skills and understanding needed to go on alone.<sup>2</sup>

## **A concluding view**

Being a Learning Advisor is a complex, multi-faceted practice that needs illumination. To provide this illumination, and to contribute to the growing literature about learning advising, we evaluated the metaphors commonly employed to understand this practice. Our method was a collaborative, iterative process of philosophical inquiry.

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<sup>2</sup> See Golding (2013) for more on the educational metaphor of a guide, which was developed independently of this study.

Our main conclusion was that some metaphors for Learning Advisors were stronger and brighter than others, based on their congruence with our account of learning advising. Although each metaphor illuminated some aspects of what Learning Advisors should do, the metaphors earlier in the article were dull, while the later metaphors were brighter. The brightest metaphors for illuminating the practice of Learning Advisors, the metaphors most congruent with the pedagogy, were the doctor-mentor, builder-mentor, architect, coach, and guide. The dullest metaphors, so dull they should be rejected entirely, were the fixer and counsellor. In between were metaphors with a balance of strengths and weaknesses, the builder, doctor and teacher.

If Learning Advisors understand their practice (tacitly or explicitly) through the lens of the weaker metaphors, their practice will be incompatible with the pedagogy of learning advising. Instead they should explicitly view their practice in light of the stronger metaphors, using them as personal theories of learning advising. These strong metaphors give a handy summary of unwieldy pedagogical theory, and Learning Advisors can use them to translate their complex pedagogical aims, principles and values into everyday practice. For example, if a Learning Advisor adopts the metaphor of guide as their personal theory, they will focus on empowering students to reach their own learning goals. They will ask themselves: Where does the student want to go, and how can I help them to get there? When deciding how best to assist students, they will avoid doing the work for them – the Learning Advisor-as-guide helps the student navigate, but the student must go on the learning journey for themselves. While we concluded that some metaphors were dull and should be discarded, we also concluded that there was not one best and brightest metaphor that should be used by all Learning Advisors in all circumstances. This was inevitable for a complex practice like learning advising (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Sfard, 1998). If Learning Advisors employed only one metaphor, their practice would become rigid and they would lose essential flexibility. Learning Advisors are better to employ a collection of bright metaphors that offer different, complementary perspectives, tailored to their particular circumstances which can guide them in diverse situations.

As a final consideration, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this theoretical and philosophical study and to identify areas for further research. First, we acknowledge that our evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the different metaphors is contextually and personally influenced and may not hold for all Learning Advisors in all contexts. Second, the brightest metaphors should be seen as handy tools rather than literal descriptions of learning advising. Third, we evaluated metaphors for the relationship between Learning Advisor and student, but did not shed light on how Learning Advisors work directly with staff or at an institutional level. Fourth, we did not explore how students, staff and institutions might have different perceptions of Learning Advisors, depending on the metaphors adopted. Last, it would be useful to extend this philosophical research by completing an empirical study that examines what happens when the bright metaphors are put to use in the day-to-day practice of Learning Advisors.

What Learning Advisors do change from advisor to advisor, from situation to situation, and even within one short consultation with a student. We hope that our evaluation of the bright and the dim metaphors for learning advising will prove useful for understanding and guiding this complex but under-researched practice.

We found the process of creating, discussing and evaluating metaphors valuable for our reflective practice as Learning Advisors, so perhaps creating personal metaphors may be more valuable than adopting someone else's. If this is true, then readers may be better off

treating this article as a prompt for creating and evaluating their own metaphors, rather than a smorgasbord of approved metaphors. Regardless, we hope our evaluation is suggestive and will stimulate Learning Advisors to identify, test and evaluate the metaphors they use to understand and guide their practice.

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