

Transitioning from Face-Face to Online Learning: Creating Safe Spaces for Academic Advisement in the Face of a Global Pandemic

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The recent COVID -19 pandemic has forced many institutes of higher learning across the globe to consider alternative modes of providing quality learning for students. However, developing and implementing safe spaces for academic advisement in online platforms that allow college students to explore their environment in an open and curious manner is challenging. The view that unsafe spaces put college students at risk for departure if they experience disengagement and a lack of support led this paper to explore how college students make sense of safe and unsafe advisement spaces, and how this understanding affects the ways they achieve academic success. Utilizing the PALEO framework, this paper contributes to existing knowledge on academic advisement by theorizing and offering practical ways to create tools that extend the capacity to solve problems during a global pandemic. The implications for re-imagining and coping with this new normal is discussed.

Introduction

The recent COVID-19 pandemic has forced many institutes of higher learning across the globe to consider alternative modes of providing quality learning for students. This has presented challenges for academic advisors and students who are transitioning from face-to-face advisement to online advisement, thus exposing the growing inequalities and other issues of social justice in higher education. For many universities, this has contributed to the increased utilization of virtual spaces such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Skype, and Google Hangouts to meet these challenges (Sahu, 2020).

In this article, we refer to academic advising as the intentional ways in which faculty members who have been

assigned students to advise as part of their professional responsibilities, facilitate students' appropriate course selection, exploration of the value of general education, institutional policies, and educational and career plans.

Research posits that academic advisors with a better understanding of varied technological modalities of advisement establish stronger relationships with their students (Kalamkarian, 2018; Kilgour, et. al., 2018; Kilzilcec et. al., 2017; Richardson, 2013). There is a wealth of research that discusses the effectiveness of technology as a service delivery model (Kruger, 2005; Rose, 2020, Tamakloe & Agbenyega, (2017). However, there is a dearth of research on how safe spaces are created in a socially just manner for utilization of technological modalities that prevent putting students at risk for departure (Campbell, 2013; White, 2015; Workman, 2015). Regrettably, prior research has shown that many academic advisors have not had formal training in the use of virtual learning modalities to advise students, and further, contrary to socially just education principles, they generally do not have the requisite skills to create safe spaces for quality learning to take place on virtual learning platforms (Clausen, 2017; Flink, 2019; Sloan, 2019). Social justice education is concerned with access to quality education for all students and ensuring their physical and psychological safety is imperative to creating safe spaces as it pertains to the core values of advising (Mamelli et al, 2018). Hence, researchers argue that creating safe spaces for

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academic advisement through advising in virtual spaces is a social justice issue that needs urgent attention so as to give opportunity to all learners to thrive in their academic work.

Using students' reflections during transition from face-to-face advisement sessions to the use of different modalities during the COVID-19 global pandemic, this paper examines college students' relationship building and interaction within their advisement spaces. Thematic analysis of the data identified themes that suggest that college students felt safe in spaces that presented them with the best opportunities to achieve academic and personal success. These are the technology mediated spaces where they interacted with their academic advisors, expressed opinions freely, reacted positively towards guidance and choice of careers, and relationship building with their advisors without too many uncertainties, keeping in mind the barriers created by not having advisement face-to-face and at other spaces.

Adoption and Implementation of Technology Mediated Tools in Learning Spaces

The global adoption and implementation of technology mediated tools in learning spaces in higher education during the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed more problems of socially unjust education. Socially just education is one that caters to the diverse learning needs of learners in its community rather than being comprised of competing factions with very unequal distributions of resources and opportunities (Reay, 2012). Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the growing inequalities in higher education. The literature points to many socially unjust education challenges including inadequate resources, poor academic advising quality, the widening gap between policy and practice, and the lack of thoughtful collaboration in creating safe spaces on the part of educators to meet the needs of college students (Myers, Trull, Bryson & Yeom, 2019). Studies have shown that the key to effective delivery of socially just education is based on teacher effectiveness of which thoughtful collaboration in creating equitable and safe learning spaces in academic advisement is a part (Mitchell, Wood, Witherspoon, 2010; Perna et.al., 2006).

The purpose of this article is to contribute to the existing knowledge about college student development by offering insights into ways to implement academic advising practices in safe spaces that can lead to effective learning where social justice is the desirable goal. This study draws on the PALEO model developed by Nancy Clark (2017) to explore the complexities of safe spaces, specifically how to better support all students' advisement through thoughtful collaborative practices that improve professional capabilities that are needed for virtual learning. Educational reformers

have argued that collective efforts of college advisors and students with shared beliefs make social justice education more effective (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Applying the model to deepen our understanding of safe spaces highlights the critical areas of relationship building that need to advance in order to enhance students' development as they become global citizens. This is a critical component of supporting adult learning principles and providing opportunities for socially just educational experiences.

Creating safe spaces is an important component of academic advising (Sykes & Gachago, 2018). A safe space involves educators with varying skills and competencies coming together for a common purpose, to challenge students to take risks (Robbins, 2014; Robins, 2012). The purpose of creating collaborative safe space is to engage in shared meaning making which leads to socially just education and unlocking the potentials of quality learning. It is by placing collaborative safe spaces at the center of academic advising that we bring together different areas of expertise to support all students.

Creating Advising Safe Spaces: A Social Justice Issue

Indeed, the value of social justice education is evident in ways that problematize unsafe spaces that lead to college student departure (Osman, Ojo, & Hornsby, 2018). In higher education institutions, academic advisors utilize collaborative safe space creation practices. They also restructure the ways they work together in academic advising and in relationship building that are conducive for teaching and learning. Academic advisors are often challenged by co-constructing knowledge due to institutional barriers and different personalities in the workplace (Esposito, Pasquini, Stoller, & Steele, 2011). According to Freire (1970), "Leaders who do not act dialogically, but insist on imposing their decisions, do not organize the people--they manipulate them" (p. 96). In this sense, academic advisors and students are beginning to understand that on entering a collaborative safe space, an advisor not only gets something from others when they have a shared understanding, but that the space of relationship building itself reworks the participants' thinking processes and advising behaviors to reimagine their entire academic advisement structure.

Many academic advisors are finding it increasingly challenging to cope with not only the rapid technological transformation imposed by COVID 19, but also by practice requirements, understanding collaborative safe spaces, and responding to students' diversity in ways that infuse social justice into advising sessions. Academic advising for college students connects to creating collaborative spaces to help

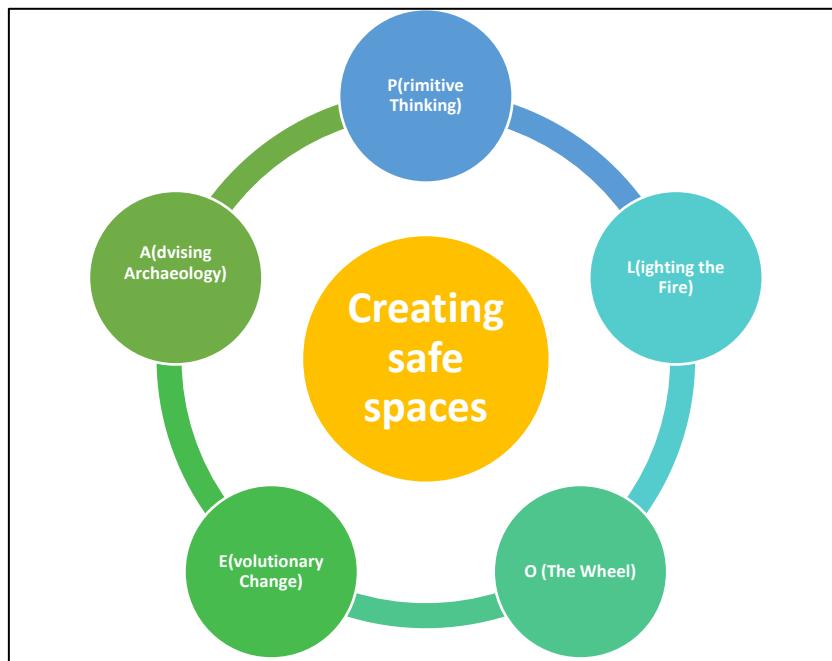


Figure 1. A framework for collaborative safe spaces based on Clark's PALEO model (Clark, 2017)

nurture the capabilities of academic advisors that enable graduating students to be effective in their chosen careers. (Mitchell, Thomas & Smith, 2018). Thus, it can be argued that while academic advisors gain an understanding of their capabilities on their own, their ability to collaboratively create safe spaces can determine how socially just they are in practice.

In addition, those preparing college students who are adult learners are expected be cognizant of the fact that poorly prepared college students can be a risk for social injustice (Page & Margolis, 2017). The absence of collaborative safe spaces can lead to both academic advisors disconnecting from one another and to disjointed educational programs, exposing students, particularly those at risk for attrition (Juneau, 2011).

Conceptual Framework: The PALEO Model

In order to provide a deeper understanding of creating collaborative safe spaces in higher education this article uses Clark's (2017) PALEO model for advising and working with others as the underpinning framework. Clark's (2017) PALEO (Primitive Thinking, Advising Archaeology, Lighting the Fire, Oil the Wheel, and Evolutionary Change) framework describes five domains of academic advising (Clark, 2017). According to Twomey (2013), the model was developed with the purpose of guiding organizational effectiveness and enhancing the day-to-day practice of academic advisors to succeed through understanding early human development, and how the profession has evolved

over time. When applied to creating collaborative safe spaces in advising, the five principles of the model are intended to direct attention to the interconnectedness of human development, the interaction within and the evolution of the teaching profession.

In a critical sense, the PALEO model is based on developmental research that foregrounds the ways that human behavior is linked to past and present processes (McClellan, 2010). According to developmental researchers, attention must be directed to the individual's capacity to create tools and the ability to use those tools to solve problems of practice (Drake, 2011; Wayman, 2012; White, 2015; Young-Jones et al., 2013).

Applying the concepts of PALEO to academic safe spaces

Primitive Thinking. Clark (2017) explains primitive thinking as the unexpected challenges people face that cause them to withdraw out of discomfort or fear instead of confronting. This explanation bears resemblance the COVID-19 pandemic which led to unexpected challenges, specifically the transition from face-to-face to online advisement. During the transition from face-to-face to online advising in most courses advisors and advisees were resistant to dealing with new technological changes which inadvertently created a culture of animosity between academic advisors and advisees. As researchers who are interested in creating safe spaces, we collaboratively situated ourselves in our shared belief in the principle that adult

learners are goal oriented. Because college students are focused on how their learning helps them reach their goal, we consulted our advisees to ask what works best for them. We challenged ourselves to quickly orient ourselves to social justice, to tailor our advising to the technological needs of our advisees, and to improve our practice. This provided a deeper understanding of an individual's symbolic strength as it relates to others and involves the assemblage of the safe space needed for advisement. When advisors are unwilling to recognize the shortcomings in their own practice, they miss opportunities for improvement (Spight, 2015; Stoves 2014).

Advising Archaeology. Clark (2017) explained advising archaeology as standing on the shoulders of giants for past discovery. This includes assessing theories, consulting research, and incorporating technological practices into academic advising. As a result of the current COVID-19 pandemic academic advisors in higher education are facing the challenge of providing quality advising experiences, engagement opportunities, and building relationships with their students. Based on the belief that adult learners arrive with a reservoir of knowledge, we utilized their expertise to learn about creating safe spaces on Zoom and Skype. Students provided quality ideas for providing a space where they could not only talk about their feelings during an advisement session but also participate in group advising where they could interact with their peers during these uncertain times. That was a critical component of advisement that would have been missed if we had not tapped into our students' prior knowledge. We also sought out resources on developing relationships with advisees and their families as they were home with families who were going through COVID-19 related issues such as fear, uncertainty, and job loss. Some of these students were also faced with the challenge of working outside the home with colleagues who were not necessarily sympathetic to the precautions of this global epidemic. We also consulted with colleagues who had been advising using technological modalities in other higher education institutions in order to gain a more global understanding.

Lighting the fire. In Clark's (2017) view, lighting the fire refers to the critical moments of the paleolithic period, where fires brought light and warmth to spaces of socialization. This aligns with how we came together as a team during a global pandemic to tease out ways in which we could lighten up dark moments in our students' lives. To set a positive tone during advising sessions, we invited students to share any glows in their lives. When students were in groups, they initiated the glow time before discussions to share highlights that were shining a light on their dark moments. Some students brought family photos to share, which created a photo-elicitation moment; some sang, and others created

innovative pedagogical tools such as making poems using their program outline or potential future careers. This gave students hope that there is always light at the end of the tunnel. This connotes the adult learning principle of self-directedness (Taite, Klein-Collins, & Steinberg, 2011). Students were able to self-direct these collaborative group sessions in ways that created safe spaces for them to take risks and share their struggles with peers and advisors.

Evolutionary Change is concerned with the invention of tools and adaptation of methods to meet the changing needs of society. This aligns with the adult principle of relevance in learning. Adults learn what is relevant to them. Another critical component that we missed as advisors during the COVID-19 pandemic was the fact that most students had families and had to take away time from their family responsibilities to meet in these virtual spaces. This is a change for the students. In this article, we argue that change is the only constant in life. As humans have evolved through the adaptation process, we have learned how to survive over time. Human beings are able to develop tools that equip them with the capacity to solve problems. As academic advisors, we embraced this constant flow of change during the COVID-19 pandemic to collaboratively create safe spaces to present our students with opportunities for academic and personal success. PALEO advising was developed as a framework for advisors to be intentional in their work with students and to make connections through human connectedness. We have made frantic efforts to build relationships with our students and their families through virtual spaces so that they can develop trust and take comfortable risks during advising sessions that extend to their classrooms and into their future careers.

Oil the Wheel. Clarke (2017) believes that the more advisors share ideas amongst themselves, the more likely they are to empower novice advisors to gain confidence. During the global pandemic, we disseminated outcomes and shared our advising techniques for creating safe spaces with colleagues on other campuses. When outcomes of implemented programs are disseminated, similar programs on other campuses will eventually embrace advising as a professional discipline. (Thompson & Prieto, 2013).

By implication, the safe space in which an individual is situated is especially vital when we expect them to implement collaborative practice. It is important to note that safe spaces can enable a strong sense of "belonging that instigates and enhances collaborative efforts by advisees and advisors alike" (Young-Jones, Burt, Dixon, & Hawthorne, 2013). Through collaborative engagement, advisors can improve their skills while enhancing their practice. The quality of advising interaction between a student and an academic advisor is a key factor in college persistence and retention for that student (Bennet, Cataldi & Chen, 2018).

The study

This research with advisees was conducted at two universities, one on the East Coast of the United States and the other in Melbourne, Australia where creating collaborative safe spaces is a part of college students' first year experience continues through their college courses. This study acted as a module in a first year advising course that aimed to prepare students for academic success and navigating college. The main approach to teaching the course module was collaborating in a safe space that allowed college students to learn the same with, from, and through their advisors and peers. Ethics approval was sought from the university at the center of the study and all participants signed consent forms. Through a collaborative reflection session, advisees worked with the researchers in collaborative groups via zoom to formulate the following research questions to guide the study:

- (1) How can we create collaborative safe spaces during a global pandemic?
- (2) What are the challenges to creating an effective collaborative safe space as perceived by college students?

Methodology

Participants

The participants were 45 college students enrolled in the first-year inquiry program and other courses (40 females, five males) and (30 Caucasians and 15 students of color). The module for this study was aimed at reflecting on safe spaces. Convenient sampling procedures was used to invite participants to be part of the study.

Researchers employed a collaborative inquiry approach. According to Donohoo (2013), collaborative inquiry is enhanced by collegial systematic analysis of educational practice when research techniques are applied. Furthermore, Stoll (2010) explains that collaborative inquiry creates a linkage between learning communities to "deconstruct knowledge through collaborative reflection and examination, co-constructing it through collective learning from their experiences" and reconstructing it through joint action (p. 474). Creating safe spaces is particularly useful in this research as we aimed to jointly develop college students' awareness of safe spaces through technology mediated approaches. The methodological process empowered the advisees, through a co-construction, to use their own experiences, ideas, and knowledge to increase the relevance of their new learning space while transitioning from face-to-face to online advisement (Donohoo, 2013). As our research efforts were aimed at effecting change in the ways that college students were challenged during a global pandemic

to learn with, though, and from others in virtual spaces, we adopted a five-stage data collection and analysis approach.

Framing the problem was the first stage. We divided the 45 college students into five groups to identify a meaningful focus, a shared vision around challenges encountered with safe spaces during virtual advisement sessions, and an inquiry question. The group questions were then discussed jointly to arrive at the research questions for the study.

Collecting data. We asked the students to determine the type of evidence we could collaboratively and individually collect and where to collect that evidence. The students suggested documenting their own learning in their discussion groups, through written reflections, and keeping personal online journals as data sources. We, the researchers, added an interview dimension so that we could gain insights into the students' perspectives regarding creating collaborative safe spaces. We also interviewed the students about their experience with virtual learning and advising when they transitioned from face-to-face to online. Examples of interview questions were: *what did you gain from the virtual advising experience? What do you think others gained from you? What challenges did you encounter during virtual advising sessions?, and What strategies did you adopt to resolve conflicts during virtual advisement sessions?*

Analyzing evidence: A collaborative data analysis technique was used to thematically analyze the data. We workshopped the PALEO model with the students during the last two weeks of the semester and asked them to analyze the data by chunking key ideas under the various concepts. Data analysis was performed jointly during virtual advisement sessions in the last week of the semester. The students in their various collaborative learning groups were given access to all the data set after it was hand transcribed verbatim (interviews and online journal entries). The data set was anonymously organized after which the students read the data several times, described it, and then classified key ideas under the PALEO model as categories from which themes were extracted for interpretation. We later conducted independent analysis and aligned these with the students' analysis. Because we used the PALEO model to guide the analytical framework, the students' analysis was mostly consistent with those of the researchers.

Celebrating and sharing. We then shared our findings with the students and celebrated our joint discovery of the ways to and the of issues of creating collaborative safe spaces.

Future directions and follow up actions: In the follow up actions, we discussed how this learning can be translated into the students' future careers. We also encouraged the students to keep personal journals and document their experiences throughout the following semester so that their experiences can be compared.

Table 1. Alignment of Findings with PALEO Framework

PALEO	Themes	Relevant extracts
Primitive Thinking	Dealing with unexpected challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advisors who are uncomfortable using technology may be adamant using different technological modalities • Being careful about taking risks to create safe spaces • Unwillingness to use different approaches • Trusting others and survival instincts to be able to create opportunities for growth • Be at par with recent technological changes
Advising Archaeology	Researching cross-cultural relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Researching theories • Tapping into what others are doing in the time of crises • Involving families • Collaborating with other advisors • Reading published materials on current issues affecting the field
Lighting the fire	Brainstorming ideas for implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advisors do not want to learn from others because of discomfort • Too much reliance on what they know • Not including students in planning • Create a community during online advisement • Demonstrating competence of different modalities builds trust in and creates a safe space • Advisors talking at students without giving them a chance to engage
Evolutionary Changes	Reflective Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dialogic reflection • Collect feedback for improvement • Create new methods and modalities to meet the current needs of advisees • Be transparent
Oil the wheel	Sharing Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build respectful relationships • Create acceptance through disseminating of research • Build a professional community through collaborations

Findings and Discussions

Due to the large number of participants we categorized the findings according Clark's (2017) PALEO Framework without individual comments. Table 1 presents the summary of key findings extracted from the data generated.

The findings as summarized in Table 1, implicate issues of primitive thinking, advising archaeology, lighting the fire, evolutionary changes, and oiling the wheel. In terms of advising archaeology, promoting effective academic advising, and social educational outcomes through creating collaborative spaces advisers must recognize and value the individual. As argued by scholars, building advisee relationships can be threatened by the way that advisors are perceived within a collaborative space (Mandel & Herman, 2008; Omar et.al., 2016). In this study, advisees were worried about how some of their peers and advisors created unsafe spaces in advisement sessions as a result of constructive disengagement. They believed that shared communication and feedback built on trust with advisees and advisors can accentuate creating safe spaces.

The advisees also perceived power differential in group advisement sessions as a threat to creating collaborative safe

spaces. We argue that approaches to creating safe spaces through virtual modalities such as Zoom, Skype, Teams and Hangouts are not based on conscious design but rather emerge from unconscious ways directed to a certain type of socialization and collaboration. There is a wealth of research that posits that group threat is related to a feeling of possessing unequal power and influence which can disrupt collaborative safe spaces, thus perpetuating injustice (Ream et.al 2014; Grant, 1992; Harrison, 2015). Similarly, when there are hegemonic tendencies in virtual spaces, some advisees in a collaborative space may feel as though their interests are toppled by others (Cortez, 2014; Sherwood & Kendall, 2013). It stands to reason that recognition and celebrating community building as a team effort can foster safe spaces (Helm, Coronella, & Rooney, 2018). This can be achieved through dialogic communicative practice (Jackson, 2020). The lack of engagement in dialogue can result in arguments driven by a status threat or a desire not to be perceived as less than another. In this study, as the advisees worked in group situations, those who experience threat appeared to be defending their position or simply withdrawing their participation from the group. This is consistent with previous research suggesting that in advising, when team

members refuse to listen to the advisors and the advisors discount their advisees' opinions, they face a threat and are resistant to change without reason (Thornhill & Yoder, 2010).

The findings in this research also point to situations where some advisees assumed roles of power to intimidate members in these technological spaces which resulted in a perception of not sharing by others. In collaborative advising practices, output judging performance on individual basis can instigate authoritative views and methods instead gauging efforts on collective outcomes of the group can increase effective ways of creating collaborative safe spaces. (Gonzales, Kanhai & Hall 2018; He & Hutson, 2016; Strahorn, 2011). In this sense, when guiding students to be responsible future citizens, specific attention must be paid to reducing status threats when providing feedback (Clark, 2017). Other possible ways to enhance advising archaeology and efficacy in creating safe spaces is by allowing advisees in collaborative teams to provide peer feedback on their own performances in course design and program completion design.

Safe spaces increase when students feel that they are learning and improving, especially when attention is paid to this improvement (Clark, 2017) as members of a group individually engaging their thinking process using the same brain networks that they use for thinking about others (Andre & Duncanson, 2019). As status is about one's relative position within a community such as a professional group or social club, based on what is valued by that community (Clark, 2017), it is important to identify each person's strengths and to offer them the opportunity to contribute to the collaborative team according to their expertise.

Secondly, the findings of this study indicate that significant changes in the form of transitioning from face-to-face to online in other professional practice generates resistance (primitive thinking). Danemark, Ekstrom, and Jacobsen (2005) argue that "the nature of society as an open system makes it impossible to make predictions as can be done in natural science" (p. 179). This is the case where it is not possible to predict what might happen when transitioning from face-to-face to online advising. For the student advisees in this study, primitive thinking was uncovered by not knowing what barriers would emerge from others in their group advising, conflict between group members, role and performance confusion, increased emotional exhaustion as well as fear and anxiety (see Table 1). Thus, advisors would need to be adequately prepared to deal with primitive thinking when creating safe spaces. A previous study has shown that reflective practices can increase desire for working with others in creating collaborative safe spaces (Munthe, 2003). Assisting advisees to develop program plans, strategies, or map out course

structure can enable a feeling of clarity about how collaborative teams function to produce desired outcomes. This does not mean that everything will work out as planned, but planning does decrease group members' fear of uncertainties if carefully planned and tweaked to meet specific goals.

Studies found that establishing clear expectations of what might happen when transitioning from face-to-face to online spaces can decrease primitive thinking and enhance the collaborative process (Baker, & Clark, 2010; Renshaw, 2002). Primitive thinking can also be decreased by clarifying concepts and agreeing on group norms with clear objectives at the start of creating collaborative spaces. Increased certainty among advisees can lead to effective collaborative practice. This is supported by Le, Janssen & Wubbels (2018) providing adequate information on the structure of courses, roles expectation, and how/when things should be done can increase a sense of certainty.

This study identified issues related to evolutionary changes. It is argued that daily challenges require surviving elements or tools to meet the needs of changing times. Because of the recent global pandemic, advisors are coming to terms with rapid technological shifts and a tense political climate in order to meet advising needs of students and to evolve as a discipline. Healthy collaborative teams can help with these efforts with an increase in lighting the fire, oiling the wheel, and relatedness (Clark, 2017). Recognizing individual empowerment is important for collaborative teams to function at their maximum potential; it is also important for group members to provide options, that allow group members to choose, participate, and contribute according to their expertise. Advisors must channel the fire to seek out virtual tools that foster social justice in creating safe spaces.

Academic advising thrives when building relationships in safe spaces. The findings of this study implicate the importance of managing relatedness threats efficiently in online advising. Issues of relatedness (see Table 1) resonate around disengagement of some peers, seeking help from others in determining how to choose or change courses, what to do with the courses, and how to do it, as well as the desire to collaborate with like-minded people, learning from, *with*, and *through* others and dialogic reflection on online practices. In fact, advising that involves advisors from different cultures (for example, in this study, Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria, and Australia), whose varying beliefs and values can be especially challenging. Some scholars argue that inclusion or exclusion in creating collaborative safe spaces express an individual's affiliation to or rejection from a cohesive group (Bolton, Smith & Bobou, 2019; Carleton, Richter, & Asmundson, 2011). Similarly, Checkoway (2002) suggests that individuals can be more layered than they

appear at the outset, showing a relevant metaphorical and important element of social relationships and self-esteem. It is possible to create safe spaces for advising by ensuring that team members are empowered to share personal stories of their values, reflections, beliefs, and previous advising experiences. In addition, open conversations and joint reflection can increase relatedness in collaborative teams (Bjørnsrud & Nilsen, 2019).

Through this research we are reiterating that the quality of advising interaction between a student and an academic advisor is a key factor in college persistence and retention. For many years, research has shown that academic advisors have followed effective advising strategies that provide safe spaces for students and have positively impacted students' retention and persistence to graduation (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Drake, 2011; Tinto, 1999; Tinto, 2007). In advising, safe spaces consist of appropriate physical aspects, trust, respect, lack of judgment and censorship, willingness to share, and high-quality listening (Kisfalvi & Oliver, 2015).

Multiple studies have shown that retention and persistence to graduation are results of personalized (safe spaces) and caring advising models. Furthermore, academic advising, when purposefully planned to include safe spaces for students, plays an important role in supporting students' academic success (Vianden & Barlow 2014; Pascarella & Terenzini 2005; Uddin, 2020). Puroway (2016), recommends adjusting academic advising practices to include safe spaces for different populations of students irrespective of race, gender, sexual orientation, and class status to help them succeed academically (Puroway, 2016; Grites 1981).

NACADA's *relational* core competency, one of the three core competencies, refers to cultivating productive ways for advisors to relate to their advisees (NACADA, 2017). The use of safe spaces in advising cultivates environments and relationships that prompt students to be themselves and provides opportunities to engage in open and meaningful ways. Advising practices that utilize safe spaces maximize students' sense of belonging, confidence, identity formation, and increased student success through their academic engagement, performance, and persistence. Mitchell et al. (2010) noted that providing culturally responsive advising is not just about caring about the culture of the student, but also about understanding the ways in which academic advising offices can become safe spaces where each student feels welcome and free to share. Humanistic, holistic, and proactive advising styles provide safe spaces for students to share, which leads to positive student outcomes (Museus & Ravello, 2010).

If academic advisors' collaborative practice is to attain academic success for students, then positive social connections must be taken into consideration as a fundamental need. Studies have found that increased safe

connections between collaborative advisors by allowing students to establish buddy systems, through ongoing mentoring and support can act as a reward mechanism and avoid threat to developing relationships (McCoy, Luedke, Lee-Johnson & Winkle-Wagner, 2020). Facilitating sessions on technological advancement to develop and establish trust through joint reflection can have a substantial impact on relatedness of the technological tools with which advisors work (Turner & Crane 2016; Williams & Otre-Cass, 2017).

Finally, in this study the college students reported issues of fairness as they work together in collaborative teams and with their advisors online. These issues include the lack of contribution by others, allocating the same reinforcement to groups despite different levels of contribution by team members, and transparency. Perceived unfairness in creating collaborative spaces can pose a significant threat to the discipline of advising (Kraft-Terry & Kau 2016; Dejarnette, 2018). Advisors who adopt transparent practices in terms of how group members will be rewarded are productive and cohesive (Jones & Hansen, 2014; Paul, Smith & Dochney, 2012; Vaikukanathan, 2019). Without fair exchanges, advising students online can deteriorate and become disorganized, leading to departure (Gravel, 2012; Hart, 2012). For fairness to stay strong and boost the morale of the collaborative team of advisors, group norms must be established Shatz & Ansberg (2020) revealed insufficient attention of advisors in organizing collaborative work such as facilitating activities online and establishing group norms.

The advisee's perception of unfairness also emerged from a lack of clear guidelines and expectations provided during online advisement sessions. In preparing students to navigate college and their future careers, students can be allowed to set up collaborative teams and identify rules of accepted behavior that members would follow during online advisement. Being attentive to fairness in preparing college students for their program alignment, navigating college and future careers, such as how to treat each other with dignity in collaborative groups, is a powerful to counter fairness threat (Erlich, & Russ-Eft, 2013; Wang & Consteneda-Sound, 2008). Interestingly, the perception of fairness is key to academic advisement just as it is to creating collaborative safe spaces, so even a slight reduction in the sense of fairness may go a long way to lead to apathy in teams.

Implications

In this study, we are suggesting that using the PALEO Advising framework (Clark, 2017) to examine safe spaces in academic advising can lead to unpacking complex human relational factors that facilitate or inhibit creating safe spaces in higher education. It is argued that a perceived sense of Primitive Thinking, Advising Archaeology, Lighting the

Fire, Evolutionary Change, and Oil the Wheel, can empower individuals to work with others in collaboration to create safe advising spaces (Lee, 2018). In this sense, the PALEO framework is useful for advisors of college students in unprecedented times as well as adult learners to be reflective practitioners to consider, identify, and analyze domains that drive human behavior in collaborative safe spaces (Barrett, 2010). Safe spaces thrive on positive human relations. Thus, in revisiting Nancy Clark's PALEO model, three key principles are worth noting:

1. that, in creating collaborative safe spaces, the brain will treat social threats and rewards with the same seriousness as physical threats and rewards (McClellan, 2007).
2. that the ability to create innovative tools and strategies to solve problems and effectively collaborate in safe spaces with others is mostly reduced by a threat response and enhanced under a response of empowerment (Ford & Ford, 1989).
3. that the threat response is more common and intense and more often than not, needs to be carefully minimized in social interactions to enhance safe spaces (Fox, 2008).

Therefore, two implications are important here. Firstly, knowing the drivers that can result in threat response when creating collaborative safe spaces, advising teams can help academic advisors develop critical values necessary for college students to minimize threats. Secondly, being cognizant of the factors that lead to mutual satisfaction for advisees can assist academic advisors in preparing college students to motivate others more effectively by tapping into things that motivate them intrinsically (Kendall, 2019).

Conclusion

Based on this work, we conclude that academic advisors will work best in collaborative teams to create safe spaces for students to lead and be led by others only if they are interested in the team composition and when goals to be attained using virtual spaces are made clearer (Clark, 2017). The act of creating collaborative safe spaces for college students who feel threatened, disconnected, treated unfairly or at risk for departure can be a futile endeavor, which can endanger social justice. When academic advisors create nurturing environments devoid of primitive thinking, they can equally enhance academic success in virtual spaces. In addition, establishing advising archaeology through clear outlines of what the group is to do and the outcomes to be achieved, valuing the expertise of students, and infusing evolutionary changes and the sense of oiling the wheel and lighting the fire, can make authentic collaborative spaces (Munthe, 2003). Above all, problems associated with creating safe spaces in virtual environments such as lack of

communication, apathy, lack of technical know-how, and domination can be minimized through the building of respectful relationships. In fact, respectful relationship is a significant tenet of advising adult learners in a safe space as well as developing the college student in which collaboration by mutual respect, trust, effective communication, understanding and honesty underpin adult learning practices.

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