

Educating for Change: Reflecting on the Teaching Scholar Construct

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"The great thing in this world is not so much where we are, but in what direction we are moving."¹

Life is about change. As a professional in this field for over 25 years, it is clear that our profession is truly about change. We have experienced tremendous change in the past 3 decades, and through these changes we have experienced amazing growth. One major area of growth and change has been in athletic training education. The recent landmark decision to transition the athletic training degree to the entry-level master's has elevated our profession as we march forward into the changing health care environment. Through the careful deliberations prior to the decisions, much discussion revolved around salary, employability, and health care reform; little discussion evolved around how this change might impact our teaching. As a scholar of educational research, it is important that we think about our teaching and how it too may be impacted by this change.

As we begin to challenge ourselves to envision how this might impact our future, I encourage you to consider Einstein's quote regarding insanity; we cannot continue to do the same thing over and over again and expect different results.² As we transform our programs, we need to critically reflect on what has worked in the past and what has not, rather than simply taking what we did at the undergraduate level and move it to the graduate level. Critical reflection stimulates creativity and promotes change. An undergraduate education serves a very different purpose than a graduate level education. Our engagement and expectations of our students will likely look different. Our teaching certainly should look different. We must look beyond the content and techniques we used in the past to design innovative, inspiring educational programs that truly challenge students to become lifelong professionals in athletic training. There is an emerging body of literature about how students learn, and as scholars, we cannot dismiss these important findings. Teaching and learning is a reflexive activity, and if we do not step back and look at how we teach, we will likely fall short in our new programs.

This construct of the teaching scholar has been met with mixed enthusiasm. Some professionals believe that, if we are discipline experts, we should be able to teach what we know, but teaching in and of itself is a discipline itself. What complicates this dilemma is that many athletic training professionals are in

academic appointments that necessitate strong teaching and research to secure tenure and/or promotion. Although typically well trained in the mechanics and processes of research, many faculty have little or no training in teaching. As concerns about accountability regarding teaching in higher education escalate, scholars find themselves in a unique dilemma discovering that teaching truly extends beyond being a content expert yet have little time to develop their teaching skills. In his cutting edge text, Zull discusses the challenge that emerged:

[B]ut most of us were just scholars and researchers. No one had ever explained teaching and learning to us, so we just mimicked the way we had been taught. This wasn't good enough anymore.³

Although there is no doubt in my mind that most faculty have truly good intentions regarding their teaching, it is a critical issue for discussion. "Good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher."⁴ Faculty need to engage with students to promote higher levels of learning across the discipline. As we face emerging constructs in health care, such as interprofessional education and evidence-based practice, we as faculty must embrace these areas rather than fear the change. We cannot let our deep passion for our research line and content expertise dismiss these critical issues which contribute to quality patient care. Learning how to teach these concepts effectively rather than superficially addressing the material in a cursory fashion to meet the competencies is essential to the future of our profession.

Clearly, learning to teach takes time, and not many professionals I have encountered have extra time, but there are valuable resources available on campuses across the country to facilitate excellence in teaching. Kolb said, deep learning, learning for real comprehension, comes through a sequence of experience, reflection, abstraction, and active testing.⁵ Athletic training education is ideal for this type of rich teaching. It is time to embrace not only the change in degree level but to actively embrace the need to change how we teach. We need to become scholars of teaching so that our students can enter the workforce ready to connect theory to practice in a meaningful, productive way. We need to critically reflect on how we have been teaching and how this may change as we advance our

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Full Citation:

Peer KS. Educating for change: reflecting on the teaching scholar construct. *Athl Train Educ J*. 2015;10(3):203–204.

degree level to the master's level. Continuing to do what we have been doing will not bring about the desired changes that we seek with the degree change. The true change will come from the adaptations we make in the classrooms to connect our disciplinary knowledge with the best evidence in the field and deliver it in a way that truly makes sense to the student.

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