Connecting With Your Students in the Year 2011: Text Messaging in the Classroom

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INTRODUCTION

Millennial students are here to stay and have populated our classrooms and athletic training rooms. This population differs from many of us and the students we have taught in the past. They have matured in an era dominated by technology where it is believed that to motivate students' learning, technology and multimedia access must be integrated into all facets of education.[1-2] As athletic training educators (ATEs), we must understand the millennial generation audience in order to effectively interact with them and engage them in the learning process.[3] Monaco and Martin[3] suggest that "educators must understand their millennial generation audience. By understanding the millennial student and how they learn, the educator will be more successful in creating a learning centered environment." [46] One specific item they address is the need for creative content delivery, engaging students, and using technology,[3] a concept consistent with the findings of others.[1-2] The purpose of this column is to challenge ATEs to start thinking about new ways to engage students in 2011 and integrate technology into the classroom, such as text messaging and Twitter©, which students are already using in their personal lives.

We know how important electronic communication is to this generation. Technology has changed how this generation communicates and receives information,[1-2] and as educators we should try to embrace technology to promote communication and learning.[3-5] However, we tend to default to what we know when it comes to teaching strategies, including lectures, group work, etc. Maybe it is time for us to trying something new, something "high-tech." In conjunction with this idea, some educators are trying new teaching strategies such as using text messaging, Twitter© and other social media sites, and different high-tech tools in their classrooms.[6-8] Of course, there is an ongoing debate about using technologies like text messaging and Twitter© as they may promote poor grammar and a decrease in "proper" writing skills.[9] However, as Barker[9] identifies, text messaging is not as awful as we think for students and the future of the English language. Students will still be provided with multiple opportunities to practice formal, academic and professional writing, as long as it is woven into the curriculum. The text messages they send will not deter their writing if they are taught how and when to use each skill set.

Instant messaging (IM), chat rooms, short message service (SMS), and text messaging (TXT) typically include the use of abbreviation and slang with the lexicon constantly evolving. In fact, these forms of interpersonal communication used today by millennial students are similar to the medical abbreviations we use in the classroom and athletic training room. Medical abbreviations are how we communicate with other healthcare professionals. Text messaging shorthand is how we communicate with our friends and family. Learning the standard medical abbreviations is like learning a new language for students. Does LOC stand for level of consciousness or loss of consciousness? For some ATEs, text messaging shorthand is a foreign language. To the ATEs, "10X" probably means "10 times" while, to the millennial students, this probably means "Thanks." Luckily, whenever an ATE has no clue he or she can Google© it. We have provided a list of common text message abbreviations (Table 1) for a quick reference and a list of online abbreviation libraries (Table 2) for you to explore the language of TXT more.

In an attempt to relate to our students, we thought we would try speaking our students' language, the language of TXT and "tweeting." After all, we require them to speak our language to

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pass our classes; the least we could do is try their language for a class period. Based on our experience with text messaging our students, we offer you some ideas for teaching through TXT and ways to integrate Twitter© into your classroom. You may feel you need the Rosetta Stone© to decipher the language, but we recommend you sit down and connect with one of your millennial students if you need help speaking their language. We are not suggesting you drastically change your teaching style, just think about new ways to engage your millennial students in the classroom.

TXT MSG N D CLSRUM?

Allow students to text message in the classroom, really? The first thing many of us do as educators is tell our students to make sure their phones are off and put away before each class. However, we think there should be a CFD (see Table 1). Could we conduct a whole class or lesson through TXT? WOT if u triD 2 review a basic knee eval UzN both TXT n med abbrs (AKA: What if you tried to review a basic knee evaluation using both TXT and medical abbreviations)? Whether you like the HOPS or HIPs method, you could ask students "what is incl w/in 'H' portion of ur eval"? Hopefully your students would TXT back about the CC, PMH, & HPI. You could ask about S/S of common knee injuries. How do you DDx btwn an MCL, LCL, ACL, or PCL injury? What is the most common MOI for each injury? What is the normal ROM for the knee? When do athletes need an X-Ray or a MRI? When do they recommend FWB, PWB, or NWB?

The use of TXT abbreviations integrated with medical abbreviations may be difficult, but not impossible. A more practical way to use cell phones and TXT in the classroom includes resources such as the website www.polleverywhere.com, which allows educators to set up quick and easy real-time polls in their classrooms. A question can be posed to the class and the students TXT their response to the special number. Questions can be written as multiple choice or open-ended questions. This form of communication increases student engagement and participation, especially in larger classes where students may not want to raise their hands in class. Students are going to have their cell phones in class; we might as well incorporate them into the lesson.

Besides TXT in the classroom, Twitter© has been growing as a communication and educational tool used in higher education.[8,10-11] It is seen as a tool to make the class more interactive, increase engagement, and hopefully hold students' attention during the class. Some educators are experimenting with Twitter© during their lectures to allow students to post questions and comments along with the lecture. These "back-channel" discussions allow questions that the professor may never have considered, allows the voices of more introverted students to be heard, and provides student input into the direction of the class session.[8,11] There are some challenges to having a back-channel discussion occurring simultaneously with your lesson, but it is a form of communication and engagement students may be open to and respond to rather than the traditional teacher-centered class. Consider Twitter© another tool in your teaching strategies toolbox.

If you are not brave enough to try Twitter© live in your classroom just yet, you can still benefit from tweeting. Twitter© can be an effective way to share information with students in your class while not in the classroom. For example, while you are rereading the assigned text for Monday's class over the weekend you could tweet about what you found most important in the reading. You could also ask students to post what they thought were the key points in the reading. Twitter© can be used to share new stories and current events related to your courses. Sample[11] also suggests using Twitter© as a "platform for reflective thinking," allowing students to tweet about what they are taking away from that day's lesson.

With Twitter© only allowing 140 characters per post, having students use this technology does teach them something about focused and concise writing.[11-12] Imagine giving students a journal article to read and then summarize in 140 characters or less. Students will not be able to hide with that short of a summary. Gone is the fluff we sometimes get in writing assignments. Maybe tweets are the abstract writing assignment of the future?

The Chronicle of Higher Education has posted a series of articles on how, and why, to use Twitter© in the classroom (see Cordell, 2010; Sample, 2010). These resources, along with many others on the web (see Table 3 for a list of some of our favorites), provide a good starting point for those interested in using Twitter© in and out of the classroom. Another great resource are your students; they are already tweeting about our classes and linking it to their Facebook©, so they can be a valuable resource if you wish to experiment with this technology.

If you are a fan of the TV show Grey's Anatomy you might recall a 2011 episode where Dr. Bailey starts using Twitter© in the operating room as an educational tool. Bailey has her interns update her Twitter© account during the course of her surgeries. Of course, something then goes wrong during a complicated procedure and her Twitter© followers are there to offer advice to solve the problem. Other hospitals and doctors from around the world help the team at Seattle Grace save the patient through Twitter©. This leads to the question - could Twitter© be part of the future of evidence-based practice in athletic training? Imagine, if you will, your student develops his or her clinical question and tweets it. The student receive replies from his or her classmates, students in other athletic training education programs, certified athletic trainers working in the field, and the leading researchers in that specific area. Your student could then take those ideas and investigate the research on the subject before proceeding with his or her intervention. If nothing else, having your students tweet about clinical problems (without violating HIPAA or FERPA) can provide a learning tool for the entire class to promote discussion about injuries observed during their clinical rotations.

CONCLUSION

In all seriousness, Facebook©, Twitter©, text messaging, and other forms of technology-enhanced communication are here, and they are here to stay. As ATEs, need to embrace technology and become creative with our lessons and how we engage students. Gone are the days of throwing together a PowerPoint© and embedding a video and then saying you integrated technology into your lesson. We are now teaching in their world and it time to start communicating with students through technology that they use every day and that is meaningful to them. We are constantly forcing students to adapt to how we think and function, touting the line that "change is good" and that being "adaptable is a characteristic of an athletic trainer." Therefore, isn't it time we adapt to them and how they express themselves?

Table 1. Texting Messaging Abbreviations and Meanings.[13-14]

Abbreviation/Acronym	Meaning
AKA	Also Known As
ASAP	As Soon As Possible
BRB	Be Right Back
BTW	By The Way
GTG	Got To Go
IDK	I Don't Know
LOL	Laugh Out Loud
ROTFL	Rolling on the Floor Laughing
TTFN	Ta-Ta for Now
TTYL	Talk to You Later
AIUI	As I Understand it
CFD	Call for Discussion
FWIW	For What It's Worth
GTBOS	Glad to Be of Service
IMO	In My Opinion
IYSWIM	If You See What I Mean
TIA	Thanks In Advance
WRT	With Respect To
WB	Welcome Back
WYSIWYG	What You See Is What You Get
LMK	Let Me Know
RUOK	Are You Ok?
R	Are
B	Be
B4	Before
4	For
L8	Late
L8R	Later
PLS	Please
PCM	Please Call Me
C	See
THNQ	Thank You
2DAY	Today
2MORO	Tomorrow
WAN2	Want to
WOT	What
Happy/Smile	:)
Confused	%-)
Sad	:(
Laughing	:D
Shocked/Surprise	:-O
JK	Just Kidding

Table 2. Online Abbreviation Library

Name	URL	Features
TechDictionary.com	http://www.techdictionary.com/	Collection of text messaging terms searchable by term or key word.
TextMeFree.com	http://www.textmefree.com/text-abbreviation.html	Small collection of SMS text messaging abbreviations
PBSparents	http://www.pbs.org/parents/childrenandmedia/mediaglossary-lexicon.html	Collection of online and texting acronyms designed for parents.
Innocent English	http://www.innocentenglish.com/news/texting-abbreviations-collection-texting-slang.html	An extensive collection of texting and Twitter© abbreviations, chat shortcuts and text slang in alphabetical order.
Lingo 2 Words	http://www.lingo2word.com/	Collection of acronyms, emoticons, text message dictionary and a text message translator.

Table 3. Teaching with Twitter©

Name	URL	Features
How to Become a Twitter Teacher (TT) in 23 Steps or Less?	http://www.kapilbhatia.com/blog/how-to-become-twitter-teachertt-in-23-steps-or-less/	Step-by-step guide getting started with Twitter© and lots of other good resources. Watch the "Twitter in Plain English" video.
A Teacher's Guide to Twitter	http://onceateacher.wordpress.com/2009/02/18/a-teachers-guide-to-twitter/	Great blog with excellent resources.
Twitter Tweets for Higher Education	http://web20teach.blogspot.com/2007/08/twitter-tweets-for-higher-education.html	Resources and tools directed more towards the use of Twitter© in the college and university setting.
50 Ways to Use Twitter in the College Classroom	http://www.onlinecolleges.net/2009/06/08/50-ways-to-use-twitter-in-the-college-classroom/	Project ideas and lots resources.

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