

The Pillars of the IJTMB—Exploring TMB Education

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This editorial is the final in a three-part series discussing the pillars of the *International Journal of Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork*: research, practice, and education. Highlighting the need for scholarly discourse, this piece aims to inspire therapeutic massage and bodywork (TMB) educators to share their creative approaches to educational matters. The author advocates for a united effort to share knowledge and practices that will enrich TMB education and, ultimately, professional practice.

KEYWORDS: Massage therapy; education; scholarship of teaching and learning

In this issue, we conclude our discussion of the three pillars of the *International Journal of Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork* (IJTMB)—research, practice, and education. In our March 2024 issue, we examined research methodologies, methods, ethics, and knowledge translation in the context of massage therapy and bodywork.⁽¹⁾ In June 2024, we examined practice as the beginning and end of research and shared ideas for topics practitioners could write about.⁽²⁾ In this issue, we take a look at therapeutic massage and bodywork (TMB) education.

TMB EDUCATION

TMB education spans a diverse spectrum, influenced significantly by geographical and regulatory variables. Scope and depth of training in this field can vary widely depending on the jurisdiction. Variation manifests in several key aspects: the number of training hours required, the content covered, and the competencies that students are expected to master. Such differences are closely tied to the regulatory and governance frameworks that oversee the practice of massage therapy

within different regions. Legal and institutional requirements ensure that the education provided aligns with local health-care standards and safety practices.

Additionally, quality and consistency of massage therapy education are often measured through external accreditation processes. These processes play a crucial role in maintaining educational standards by providing a benchmark against which programs can be evaluated. Accreditation helps ensure that the training programs offer a comprehensive curriculum that prepares students effectively for professional practice. It also reassures the public and health-care professionals about the reliability and professionalism of trained therapists. Thus, through the interplay of diverse educational models, regulatory requirements, and accreditation standards, TMB education strives to uphold the integrity and efficacy of this health-care practice.

Despite these variations, there is little scholarly discourse about TMB education, with a few notable exceptions. Menard⁽³⁾ evaluated the quality of massage education in the United States through the lens of program accreditation and its impact. Munk et al.⁽⁴⁾ shared their assessment of the use of World Café to collect the opinions of educators for decision-making. Baskwill et al.⁽⁵⁾ studied the experiences of educators as a baseline for massage therapy education prior to the implementation of a new program accreditation process. These three articles discuss some of the discourse about TMB education, and there is a vast potential for publication and scholarly discussion in this pillar of the IJTMB.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR SCHOLARSHIP OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN EDUCATION GENERALLY

Scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL)⁽⁶⁾ represents a vital framework for

enhancing educational practices across disciplines, including TMB. As a scholarly approach, it provides a structured way to document, analyze, and disseminate the often implicit and undocumented pedagogical innovations that educators introduce in their classrooms. While educators frequently experiment with new techniques or adjust their methods in response to student needs, changes are seldom shared beyond the confines of their own teaching environments. By formalizing these practices through SoTL, educators can elevate routine adjustments into contributions to a broader academic dialog. What may seem like an everyday adjustment to one educator could, through this scholarly lens, be transformed into an innovation for others. This section below presents ideas for SoTL projects that can not only enrich individual educational practices but also collectively advance the field of TMB education. Below are issues and ideas common to much of higher education. (Specific TMB education ideas are in the next section.)

- **Academic integrity** represents the commitment to honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and the courage to act, even amidst challenges.⁽⁷⁾ With the continual evolution of technology, including artificial intelligence, upholding these principles requires both vigilance and adaptation to ensure that new tools are used to enhance learning without compromising ethical standards.
- **Delivery modes** in education describe the various methods through which content is delivered to students. These include traditional face-to-face classes, hybrid (a combination of online and in-person instruction), fully online, remote (students are not on campus), synchronous (real-time instruction), and asynchronous (self-paced learning) formats.
- The **COVID-19 pandemic** has significantly impacted students transitioning to post-secondary education, affecting their academic preparedness, mental health, and adaptation to new learning environments. Institutions have had to innovate rapidly to address these challenges and support incoming students.
- **Open Educational Resources** (OERs) are freely accessible, openly licensed text, media, and other digital assets used for teaching, learning, and research

purposes.⁽⁸⁾ OERs help reduce the cost of educational materials for students and provide educators with adaptable teaching tools.

- **Virtual simulation** involves using computer-generated simulations that replicate real-world processes or environments for training and educational purposes. This technology is particularly useful in fields where hands-on experience is crucial but difficult to facilitate physically due to cost, safety, or accessibility.
- Addressing **complex student needs** involves recognizing and responding to the diverse academic, emotional, and social challenges that students face. Educators and institutions must adapt their resources and strategies to effectively support all learners, particularly those who may require additional assistance or accommodations.
- **Educational technology** encompasses the use of digital tools and software to enhance the learning experience, including learning management systems, mobile apps, digital portfolios, and interactive multimedia resources that facilitate both teaching and learning.
- **Education innovation** refers to the implementation of new ideas, methods, or products to improve teaching and learning outcomes, ranging from curriculum design and teaching approaches to integrating technology and adopting new pedagogical theories.

Consider writing about your experiences on any of the topics above. These are not only of interest to TMB educators but all higher education professors and instructors. Sharing your strategies or challenges gives you both a way to share your struggles and successes and lets others know they are not alone. Educators are developing innovative ways to engage students in their learning and creating ways to make education more accessible. What are you doing in these areas? Who could you inspire with your creativity and experience?

OPPORTUNITIES FOR DISCOURSE SPECIFIC TO TMB EDUCATION

In addition to the topics for consideration above, there are several topics specific to TMB education that would be of interest to

TMB educators around the world. Arguably, educators in other health disciplines would also be interested.

- **Teaching the application of therapeutic massage** focuses on the critical skills of palpation, appropriate pressure application, and non-verbal communication skills. These are challenging skills to learn and a dialog as to how we support students would be beneficial.
- The **importance of ethical touch**, guidelines for preventing sexual abuse, and the necessity of obtaining explicit consent is another potential topic. It is vital for establishing safe environments and ensuring that both clients and therapists understand the boundaries and expectations within therapeutic settings. How are we teaching these values?
- **Evidence-informed practice** involves integrating clinical expertise with the best available research and patient preferences. In massage therapy education, this means teaching students how to apply research findings effectively to practice and encouraging ongoing engagement with emerging studies to continually refine therapeutic approaches.
- **Socializing governing bodies** refers to the process of demystifying the role and function of regulatory organizations for practitioners. How do educators remove fear and build understanding and trust between therapists and governing bodies, promoting compliance and proactive engagement with regulations?
- **Ethics and professional judgment** are cornerstone concepts in massage therapy, encompassing the moral obligations and decision-making processes critical to practice. Educating on these topics ensures that therapists uphold the highest standards of integrity and make informed choices that prioritize clients' well-being.
- **Interprofessional education** fosters collaborative skills by teaching health professionals from various disciplines to learn with, from, and about each other. A collaborative approach enhances teamwork and understanding across specialties, improving patient outcomes and integrated care practices.
- **Work-integrated learning or field placement** involves practical training where students gain hands-on

experience in a professional setting under supervision. Practice-based education is crucial in massage therapy education, as it allows students to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world contexts, enhancing their skills and professional readiness.

Within TMB educational institutions, educators find creative ways to help their students learn. And yet, we all seem to do this in silos, not thinking what we are doing would be of interest to anyone else. Imagine the progress we could make if we were to share our resources and inspire one another.

SUMMARY

As we conclude this exploration of the pillars of the IJTMB—research, practice, and education—it is evident that the profession of TMB holds many opportunities for enhancement and growth. In this segment of the series, the critical need for continuous dialog about innovative teaching methodologies and a robust scholarly approach is highlighted. In addition, the vast potential for scholarly contributions and the impact of shared knowledge in shaping the future of TMB education has been discussed. By embracing the challenges and opportunities presented, educators and practitioners alike can forge a path toward a more integrated, evidence-informed, and ethically robust practice. This collective endeavor will undoubtedly enrich the professional community and enhance the quality of care provided to those we serve. Let us continue to share, learn, and grow together, inspired by the wealth of knowledge and experiences within our profession.

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