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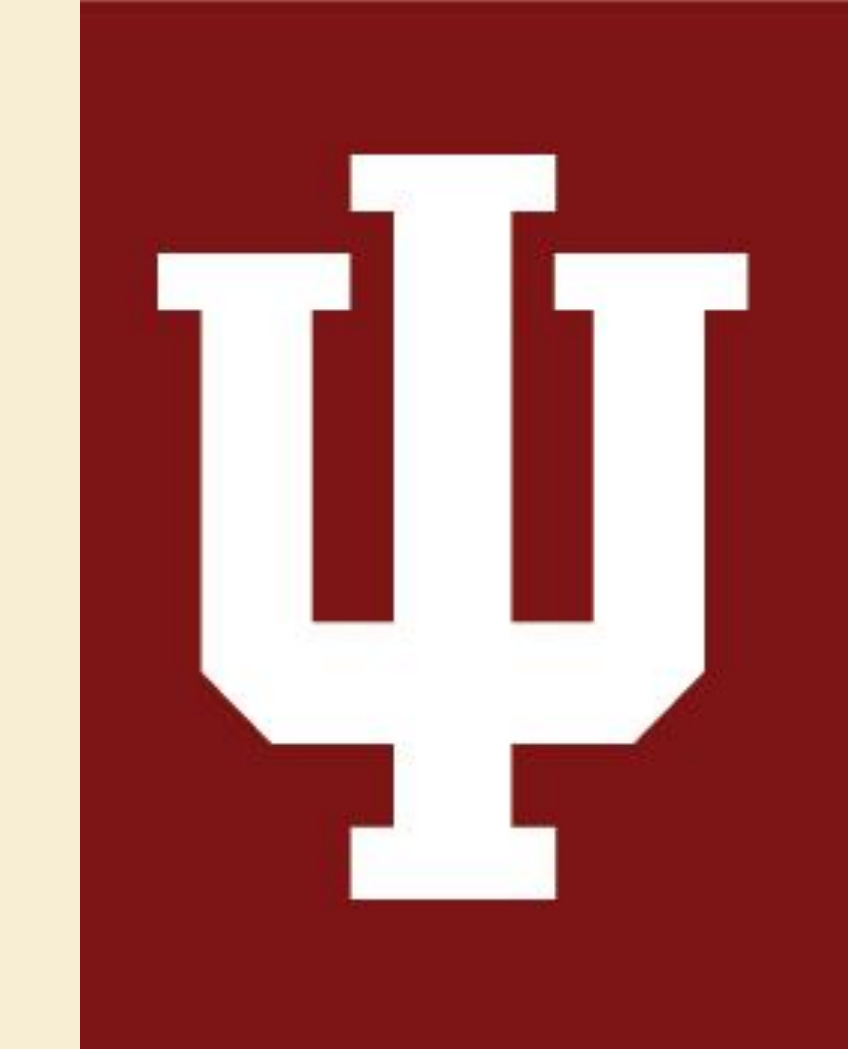
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What Should Massage Education do More of, Different, Start, and Stop? Massage Education Stakeholder Views from the 2017 Alliance for Massage Therapy Educational Congress

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INTRODUCTION

The therapeutic massage and bodywork field seems poised at a professional precipice regarding the direction of its education and practice. Will the massage field ...

- professionally align itself to work with and in medical healthcare settings and practice?
- remain as is with no definitive and recognized professional credential or qualification for work with and in medical healthcare settings and practice?
- shift completely away from alignment with or complementary to medical healthcare settings and practice?

Progress toward one direction or the other seems arrested perhaps due in part to the diversity of options and opinions coupled with unsystematic discussion, vision, and decision dissemination from multiple field stakeholders.

PURPOSE

The Future of MT and Bodywork Forum was held July 27, 2017 during the 2017 Alliance for Massage Therapy Education (AFMTE) Educational Congress in Tucson, Arizona. A systematic approach was developed to gather the thoughts and opinions of massage education stakeholder forum attendees during an exercise following the principles of the World Café.

The purpose of the World Café forum exercise was to systematically collect, organize, and report what massage therapy education stakeholders believe is most important for foundation massage education, continuing massage education and massage employment to move the field forward, in a positive direction.

METHODS

Design

Data collecting exercise:

- Three, concurrent 30-minute Breakout Group Sessions in three different adjacent rooms:
 - Continuing Education
 - Employment
 - Schools
- Participants rotated for 3, 2.5, 2, and 1.5 minutes between four tables and answered room specific questions ([Table 1](#)).

Participants

Participants were attendees at the Congress and included individuals engaged and involved in each of the Congress's stakeholder organizations (Associated Bodywork & Massage Professionals (ABMP), Alliance for Massage Therapy Educators (AFMTE), American Massage Therapy Association (AMTA), Commission on Massage Therapy Accreditation (COMTA), Federation of Massage Therapy Boards (FSMTB), Massage Therapy Foundation (MTF), National Certification Board of Therapeutic Massage & Bodywork (NCBTMB) and Academic Collaborative for Integrative Health (ACIH) & American Organization of Bodywork Therapies of Asia (AOBTA) and represented massage therapists, students, educators, and employers.

Analysis

Participants recorded responses on large post-it notes which were reviewed by each of that round's participants who awarded importance points with 6 blue and 3 orange dots each worth 1 and 3 points, respectively. The post-it notes with comments and point allocations were transcribed into a data spreadsheet and analyzed for descriptive statistics and top scoring comments from each room.

Table 1. Participant Questions per Room and Type

	Continuing Education Room Questions	Employer Room Questions	School Room Questions
Different	What are the ways in which the massage and bodywork field currently conducts Continuing Education that should be done DIFFERENTLY to improve the field's chance of future growth & prosperity?	What are the current Employment opportunities in the massage and bodywork field that should be done DIFFERENTLY to improve the field's chance of future growth & prosperity?	What are the current SCHOOL related practices and policies that should be done DIFFERENT with regard to training entry level massage and bodywork practitioners in the future?
More	What are the ways in which the massage and bodywork field currently conducts Continuing Education that should be kept and done MORE to improve the field's chance of future growth & prosperity?	What are the Employment opportunities in the massage and bodywork field that we should have MORE of in the future to improve the field's chance of future growth & prosperity?	What are the current SCHOOL related practices and policies that should be kept and done MORE with regard to training entry level massage and bodywork practitioners in the future?
Start	What are the things the massage and bodywork field should START doing that are currently not being done related to Continuing Education to improve the field's chance of future growth & prosperity?	What are Employment opportunities in the massage and bodywork field that we should START doing that we are currently not doing to improve the field's chance of future growth & prosperity?	What SCHOOL related practices should we START doing that we currently are not doing related to training entry level massage and bodywork to improve the field's chances of future growth and prosperity?
Stop	What are the ways in which the massage and bodywork field currently conducts Continuing Education that should STOP in the future to improve the field's chance of future growth & prosperity?	What are the current Employment opportunities in the massage and bodywork field that should be STOP to improve the field's chance of future growth & prosperity?	What are the current SCHOOL related practices and policies that should STOP with regard to training entry level massage and bodywork practitioners?

RESULTS

The 1 hour and 45 minute forum exercise occurred after lunch the conference's first day. One-hundred thirty-four individuals registered for the conference. N=85-90 attendees participated in exercise Rounds 1-3. Ninety, 87, and 85 participants provided comments and point allotments in the CE, Employment, and School rooms, respectively ([Table 2](#)).

Table 2. Comment and Point Counts per Round, Room, and Question Type

	Comment Counts (%) N=674	Point Counts (%) N=3744
Round 1	269 (40%)	1344 (36%)
CE	60 (22%)	430 (32%)
Employer	97 (36%)	421 (31%)
School	112 (42%)	493 (37%)
Round 2	209 (31%)	1195 (32%)
CE	70 (33%)	397 (33%)
Employer	65 (31%)	428 (36%)
School	74 (35%)	370 (31%)
Round 3	196 (29%)	1205 (32%)
CE	66 (34%)	487 (40%)
Employer	54 (28%)	374 (31%)
School	76 (39%)	344 (29%)
Difference Comments	161 (24%)	866 (23%)
CE	43 (27%)	280 (32%)
Employer	54 (34%)	303 (35%)
School	64 (40%)	283 (33%)
More Comments	208 (31%)	1075 (29%)
CE	49 (24%)	422 (39%)
Employer	66 (32%)	328 (31%)
School	93 (45%)	325 (30%)
Start Comments	178 (26%)	919 (25%)
CE	63 (35%)	280 (30%)
Employer	53 (30%)	314 (34%)
School	62 (35%)	325 (35%)
Stop Comments	127 (19%)	884 (24%)
CE	41 (32%)	332 (38%)
Employer	43 (34%)	278 (30%)
School	43 (34%)	274 (31%)
CE Room	196 (29%)	1314 (35%)
Different	43 (22%)	280 (21%)
More	49 (25%)	422 (32%)
Start	63 (32%)	280 (21%)
Stop	41 (21%)	332 (25%)
Employer Room	216 (32%)	1223 (33%)
Different	54 (25%)	303 (25%)
More	66 (31%)	328 (27%)
Start	53 (25%)	314 (26%)
Stop	43 (20%)	278 (23%)
School Room	262 (39%)	1207 (32%)
Different	64 (24%)	283 (23%)
More	93 (35%)	325 (27%)
Start	62 (24%)	325 (27%)
Stop	43 (16%)	274 (23%)

- Online Voluntary Forum Exercise Participant Descriptor Survey
 - Various generic affiliations (current and ever) such as massage field and education field
 - Respondent's age
 - Highest level of education
 - Years (if any) involved in the massage field and education field
- Participant Specifics (n=65)
 - Mean age = 51yrs (range 23-73 years)
 - Mean massage experience = 21years (range 1.5-45)
 - Mean education experience = 16yrs
 - Various affiliations (mean=5) including:
 - massage therapist (86%)
 - foundation massage educator (42%)
 - CE provider (60%)
 - school owner (22%)
 - massage organization board member (32%)

Participants had rich experience from which to draw responses to prompts and assign importance value.

- Exercise Specifics
 - Total unique comments = 674
 - 59 large post-it notes sheets each containing 2-30 (median=11) comments
 - Total Value Points = 3744 (total sticker dots affixed = 2240)
 - 5% unassigned points
 - 18% of comments had no value dot assignment
 - 35% of comments score ≥5
 - 8% of comments score ≥12

Forum exercise enjoyed robust participation and generated data.

- General Exercise Results ([Table 2](#))
 - The most comments and point assignments generated in Round 1
 - More had highest count & point proportions
 - Start and Stop comments were evenly distributed among Rooms
 - School had highest comment proportion
 - CE room had highest point proportion

Decreased participation over three Rounds could indicate loss of enthusiasm for the exercise as it went on or more focus/accuracy with practice.

Top 5 scoring comments from each room were selected as top scoring comments (Table 3) due to the potential for artificial importance inflation from varying per round and room comment and participant numbers.

- Top Scoring Comments ([Table 3](#))
 - Highest proportion = Stop comments
 - 75% of Stop related to foundation and continuing education
 - Lowest proportion = Start comments
 - Employer comments focused on non-education related employer practices such as employee benefits, treatment, and fit into employer business model.

Stop comments made up the smallest proportion of total comments (19%) (Table 2) yet largest top scoring proportion (36%) (Table 3).

Start, More, and Different comments each made up a smaller proportion in top scoring comments than in general but the Start comment proportion dropped twice as many percentage points as did More and Different portions (8 vs. 4 percentage points).

Top scoring comments are "categorized" as collected despite which question they actually answer (i.e., Stop comments appear in the Different categorization).

Table 3. Top five scoring comments from each round per room (N=45). Top scoring comments range in scores 13-51.

	Room	Comment
Start	CE	Self-care classes/ergonomics
	Employer	Higher pay for degrees/education beyond the basics Mentorship opportunities
	School	Increase massage program hours and program length Focusing on self-care. Instructors they teach what they live (emotional and energetic) Created higher Ed pathway: AAS to BS to MS to PhD Promote teacher cert. for their instructors Professional attire and behavior
Different	CE	CE provider teacher education Stop inventing your own technique
	Employer	Reciprocity of licensure bet states Support research efforts Offer benefits More cash for therapists w/ specialized training
	School	More (supervised) internships/externships/clinic hours Accreditation is the norm Don't pass everyone
More	CE	People skills diversity of options standardized one approval Business CE's practice More EB research integrated in course material Apprenticeship for specialization (sports) More evidence based content Providers attend ongoing CE programs to improve teaching skills
	Employer	Affiliated with health care environment Principle based learning vs technique-based learning Therapist friendly scheduling Mentoring training program 1 st 3 years Build bridges MD and Hospitals
	School	Critical/creative/thinking skills integrated into curriculum
Stop	CE	Stop random regulating (CE providers) non-portability of CE credits between states Recertification need to be less complicated Interorganizational fighting about CE oversight Stop online hands on instruction Approving everything Stop approving unqualified instructors/courses like online unsupervised practice
	Employer	Under paying therapists Overworking therapists (no breaks/ 7 hours of massage) Booking massage on the hour (every hour) Selling product requirements Dumbing down the curriculum Ignoring evidence based research Inconsistent grading or passing students that don't meet the requirements Unqualified instructors in classroom (no experience training teaching skills) Moving students to T.A. and teaching roles prematurely Training for less than ELAP standard
	School	

CONCLUSIONS & NEXT STEPS

Take-Aways

- Systematic process to collect, organize, analyze, and disseminate opinions and value placement during a meeting/conference setting with large numbers of people has been developed and successfully implemented in a massage therapy field stakeholder population.
- Top scoring education comments seemed focused on improving assessment and standards for students and instructors.
- Stop question proportion differences from general to top scoring comments perhaps indicates stakeholder's unified frustration in how the profession currently operates with regard to foundation education, CE's, and employment.
- The disproportionate reduction of Start question proportion from general to top scoring comments may reflect stakeholders belief that it is more important to improve current practices rather than beginning new initiatives.

Future Work

- Publish / disseminate findings to massage field stakeholders (manuscript currently under review with *IJTM*).
- Apply qualitative methodology to this and other data collected during the exercise and forum.
- Replicate exercise process and data collection, organization, analysis, and dissemination in other, larger massage field stakeholder conferences settings for more diverse perspectives.
- Exercise replications with focused interest on education should consider framing employment related questions from the standpoint of education to make therapists more employable or better, more valuable employees.

Concluding Thought

- Related regulatory policy changes would likely elevate the massage field in general and also in the view of peer fields, the public, and healthcare provider professions.