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Half a Mind

By Keith Eric Grant, PhD, NCTMB

"It's like the yin and the yang. Technology and spirituality or technology and social change should be in balance, and they are not in balance today. The accelerated pace of technology is tipping the scale. So, we seek instinctively and sometimes even desperately to regain our equilibrium. As a result, people feel a little left behind; they feel overwhelmed, even disoriented or alienated. The onslaught of technology has inspired an unprecedented search for meaning, a yearning for community, a hunger for spirituality, a desire for deeper relationships, and really a desperate need to understand it all."

- *John Naisbitt*³

In searching to fulfill our kinesthetic and interpersonal selves, some of us have diffused inward through the membrane surrounding the domains of massage, almost as if an osmotic pressure drew us forth. For those conversant with the lymphatic system, consider it a type of Starling's Equilibrium. The permeable nature of entry into part-time massage practice originally drew me to transit back and forth between high-tech and high-touch. Should the membrane surrounding entry into practice be made less permeable by raising entry requirements, the flow of those such as myself will likely divert to other venues.

Cliff Korn's March 2002 editorial [www.massagetoday.com/archives/2002/03/11.html] touched on attitude differences between part-time and full-time massage professionals. I am going to revisit some of the considerations he raised in that article, and touch on an additional consideration: demographics.

Here in California, 193 massage schools are supervised by the Bureau for Private Postsecondary and Vocational Education (BPPVE) under the Department of Consumer Affairs. In contrast, the American Massage Therapy Association (AMTA) Web site lists 28 schools in California, a few of which wouldn't fall under the BPPVE jurisdiction. One conclusion that can be drawn from this discrepancy is that the vast majority of California massage schools are teaching modular programs with initial segments shorter than the

500-hour AMTA entry criterion. At a recent panel discussion at De Anza College in Cupertino, Les Sweeney, executive vice president of the Associated Bodywork & Massage Professionals (ABMP), noted that the average initial module length of ABMP member schools in California is 175 hours. I believe such schools exist in a very particular ecological niche in terms of their economic and social benefits.

On the economic side, these short-term career-training modules are not eligible for federal financial aid. Such aid requires accreditation and a minimum program length of 600 hours. Taking on the extra costs, record-keeping requirements, and job-placement minimums associated with accreditation and financial aid would force most of these small schools to either grow or close. What these schools serve well, and thrive in meeting, are the needs of pay-as-you-go, adult profile learners. Many of these adult learners are seeking career transitions or augmentations, an example of the latter being sports trainers adding massage skills to their toolkits. A characteristic pattern I have seen over more than a decade of teaching in a modular program is for students to use the initial module for immediate-but-limited entry into the massage profession. They then use their practice earnings to continue with further modules over a period of several years, improving their business and marketing skills as the scopes of their practices grow.

A recent report by the National Center for Educational Statistics summarizes a number of the differences between those entering postsecondary training with adult career experiences, and those who might take such training immediately follow secondary schooling.⁹

"Not only will the number of adults seeking higher education increase, but adults have different priorities than younger people who have just graduated from high school. The present educational system is only marginally geared towards serving adults with work, family, and community responsibilities. Institutional adaptations will need to be focused around accommodating adult time schedules and educational needs.... The context of learning also differs between adults and children. While children are, for the most part, full-time students and learners, adults are learners on top of other full-time roles. Adults most often will apply this learning immediately to their lives, as opposed to children who are preparing for their future. When adults choose to add this role to their lives, they are constrained by work, family, and school; in contrast, children's boundaries are typically home and school."

An Australian report on lifelong learning also notes the growing reliance on self-employment and balancing the requirements of multiple jobs.¹

"Work arrangements are changing. There is rising part time and casual employment, and greater use of outsourcing arrangements and labor hire firms. Self-employment is growing, and increasingly individuals are managing a 'portfolio' of jobs."

What emerges from this discussion is that California supports a pattern of modular schools with early entry training that is a near-optimal match for adult learners in career transition or augmentation. I believe such schools are in the forefront of an emerging paradigm for the 21st century; they fulfill a role of facilitating development of meaningful life work for students juggling significant other responsibilities.⁴ As compared to their larger counterparts with longer single programs, modular schools are more oriented to the attitude profile of adult learners - who have been noted to be more self-directed; bring in more life experiences, be more goal-oriented; demand more immediate relevancy of material; and be more focused on immediate application than younger learners.^{6,7}

There are also synergies between these modular career-training programs and their surrounding communities. The general manager of a southern California school estimated recently that 15 percent of its students are learning skills to support home care of ill or aging family members. Because of the short-term, modular nature of individual training sections, the classes also serve a function for those undertaking self-directed career exploration. Such career exploration is a learning process embedded in a larger context of growth and personal exploration.⁵ Such exploration is often triggered by life transitions; it forms an essential adaptive response to an era of rapid social and economic change. Entering massage training can be a result of self-reflection and a desire to help others more directly, with the decision still to be made whether a total career change will take place.^{2,8} While these community functions of modular training are far from sufficient to support a massage school in themselves, they augment and enrich the vocational training environment that can be offered.

In his editorial, Cliff Korn noted that full-time massage practitioners seemingly place more emphasis on networking, and certainly on being more represented at conferences. Overall, I believe this is a difference not in the importance placed on networking, but in the manner in which it is accomplished. For the part-time practitioner, continuing education often is achieved while on vacation from other jobs, partially depleting what remains for family activities. Every training activity must stand on multiple legs. Multiple-day or weeklong workshops often have higher payoff in both usable skills and more in-depth networking than shorter conference interactions. For some of us, massage is a multitasking experience. We give it our all during our segments of participation, but on the average, have only half a mind to give.

"If you have half a mind, that's all it takes."

- *Motto of Hash House Harrier running clubs*

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