Within the educational, philosophical, scientific, and sociological literature, much discussion—sometimes conflicting and often exotic—occurs about the essence of knowledge and the nature of scholarship. One recurrent theme that emerges is a disjunction between the academic world and the world of practice. Evidence of this disjunction also occurs in casual discourse that involves sharp distinctions with the use of such jargon as the academy and the real world. The disjunction suggests a two-sided arrogance.

St. Exupery (1943/1971) portrayed one side of this arrogance in the following fictional exchange: A little prince travelled through space to land on a planet whose sole inhabitant was an older man. Conversation began with the man's offer that he was a geographer and soon progressed to this clarification: "A geographer is a scholar who knows the location of all the seas, rivers, towns, mountains, and deserts" (p. 62). The prince, silently musing that he had finally met someone with a real profession, plied the geographer with questions about the planet. The man had no answers. Dismayed, the little prince exclaimed, "But you are a geographer!" To which the man replied, "Exactly... but I am not an explorer... It is not the geographer who goes out to count the towns, the rivers, the mountains, the seas, the oceans, the deserts. The geographer is much too important to go loafing about. He does not leave his desk" (pp. 63–64). This character intimated that the scholar's work among his books is important and that true knowledge rests in a special place.

Duncan (1993) portrayed the other side of the arrogance in a novel within which one youth's metaphorical comments to his friend resonate with the same geographer—explorer disjunction:

I understand what you're driving at. But it's just book talk, Natasha. Student and professor talk. A campus is a flat little world, sweetie babe. And when you sail over the edge, you really do fall off. By which I mean it's weirder and uglier than you think out there. By which I mean that I speak from experience. (p. 383)

This character intimated that book learning is not real and that experience alone leads to the knowledge worth having.

This kind of dichotomization is an issue for occupational therapy when it cuts the connections between the academic and clinical worlds. Sometimes, the disjunction manifests itself in harmless ways, as in this personal comment made to one of us who was earning a PhD while simultaneously working in the clinic: "I'm feeling a little sad, because you are turning a corner." Although harmless, this statement was telling. A second illustration seems apt. In readying an article for an occupational therapy practice magazine, the other of us was told to drop her mention of an educator who consults in her setting so as to, in the editor's words, "avoid the academic feel." Although the deletion had no major effect, it spoke of the disjunction.

Distinctions such as academician versus clinician, basic versus applied science, or research versus practitioner degrees are not helpful. The profession is more apt to thrive if respectful dialogue links occupational therapists possessed of varying credentials, strengths, and interests.

This article offers reflections that make connections rather than disjunctions. Neither of us claims to have charted the vast literary terrain on this subject; each of us speaks from an honest sampling of the literature and from experiences in both the academy and the clinic; and each of us values the connections that can be made between the academic and clinical worlds.

Suzanne M. Peloquin, Beatriz C. Abreu

Suzanne M. Peloquin, PhD, OTR, is Associate Professor, Department of Occupational Therapy, School of Allied Health Sciences, The University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston, 301 University Boulevard, Galveston, Texas 77555-1028, and is Consultant, Department of Occupational Therapy, Transitional Learning Community at Galveston, Galveston, Texas.

Beatriz C. Abreu, PhD, OTR, FAOTA, is Director of Occupational Therapy, Transitional Learning Community at Galveston, and a Clinical Associate Professor, Department of Occupational Therapy, School of Allied Health Sciences, The University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston, Galveston, Texas.

This article was accepted for publication July 27, 1995.
The Meanings That Associate With Higher Education

One aim in pursuing a college degree is the acquisition of knowledge (enlightenment); another is the freedom (emancipation) that follows such learning (Barnett, 1990; Shulman, 1986). Although advanced degrees are well-known validations of learning, the pedagogical aim of higher education is less understood (Shulman, 1986). University degrees date from medieval times, when candidates were tested for their moral and mental fitness as masters, or teachers. The bachelor’s degree developed as a step toward this mastership, with bachelor meaning novice. By the 15th century, the term master was used for graduates in grammar and the arts, and doctor (from the Latin docere, a verb meaning to teach) for graduates in theology, common law, and medicine (Shulman, 1986).

The historical origins of university degrees base the ground shared by occupational therapists: an acquisition of knowledge sufficient to permit its teaching. Interestingly, the examination that precedes the granting of the advanced degrees—a presentation followed by its defense within a dialogue—aims to test the ability to teach (Shulman, 1986). One meaning of higher education, then, is personal development as a potential teacher.

The common capacity—docere (to teach)—derived from higher education is the ability to share knowledge, propose hypotheses, and dialogue with others. As a consequence of higher education, occupational therapists use these functions in various arenas of practice; the call to teach is answered by clinicians among patients, consultants among clients, educators among students, researchers among assistants, and managers among personnel. This call—docere—unites all therapists.

A second aspect of higher education begs reflection: the process of acquiring it. Because education rests on a form of inquiry linked with schools, one so engaged is named a scholar. But the kinds of degrees granted to those who show requisite scholarship are many, with an odd mix of letters conveying each title. For example, excluding medical doctors, any encyclopedia mentions doctors of art (DA), business administration (DBA), divinity (DD), education (EdD), fine arts (DFA), humane letters (LHD), jurisprudence (JD), laws (LLD), letters (DLit), music (DMUS), philosophy (PhD), physical education (DPE), sacred theology (STD), and science (ScD or DS). The master’s and bachelor’s degrees reflect a like variety that invites dispute about the worth of one over another.

Given the many subjects in which persons become learned enough to teach and given the diverse degrees that persons earn, it seems remarkable that one elitist meaning for the academy is invoked. Likewise, given the various roles, functions, certifications, and specializations of therapists in the clinic, it is impossible to attach any one meaning to the real world. It seems more helpful for therapists to focus on their shared bonds: occupational therapy and the call that is docere.

One last reflection seems important to this discussion of higher education. Scholarly inquiry occurs outside of schools. From Sarton’s (1961) novel about life on a campus, the character Caryl, who was renown for her scholarship, described her father as “a scholar of sorts...yes, I think one might call him that, though his profession was farming and he had no education to speak of” (pp. 196–197). There is truth to this fiction. Persons can educate themselves to a high degree, thereby achieving the enlightenment and emancipation of higher education.

It seems arrogant to claim that those in or from the academy hold a monopoly on scholarship. Some degree programs may surpass others in the excellences that experts name, but no one can guarantee that a scholar will emerge from the most prestigious program. If farmers can become scholars, it follows that scholars can thrive in many arenas, academic and clinical. If farmers can be scholars, it seems arrogant to say that those who spend time with “books of the world” dodge reality. To declare oneself either too important to leave one’s desk or too busy with real-life matters to read a book is to disregard the fact that books and experiences both yield knowledge of the world.

The Meaning of Advanced Knowledge for Occupational Therapists

Given the aims of higher education, any occupational therapist who seeks advanced knowledge supposes that it will in some way enlighten and emancipate occupational therapy. Therapists currently seek knowledge at the doctorate level in adult education, anatomy, biopsychology, counseling psychology, cultural anthropology, curriculum development, developmental psychology, education, educational leadership, educational psychology, exercise physiology, family science, health education, higher education, human development, medical humanities, motor behavior, neuropsychology, occupational science, occupational therapy, physiology, planning, psychology, public health, rehabilitation psychology, special education, therapeutic studies, urban education, and vocational education (Peters, 1995). They become masters of new subjects that enrich occupational therapy.

Hope for such enrichment arose early in this profession’s history when Dunton (1919) argued the need for more knowledge: “Why does one form of work, say carpentry, appeal to one man and not to another, when they are apparently of similar mental caliber and from the same social level” (pp. 30–31). Therapists still grapple with the question, and as they seek answers to this one and others, they delve into cognate fields as diverse as anthropology and zoology (Rogers & Mann, 1980). Dunton’s comment is but one affirmation of the profession’s reliance on cognate fields. A cursory review of the articles published within this journal during the past year shows the merit of such learning.

The hope of enrichment from an
advanced degree in occupational therapy is similar, but Rogers and Mann (1980) noted this distinction about the knowledge, skills, and attitudes studied in such a program: They are "directly applicable to the missions of occupational therapy" (p. 466). The distinction fades, however, with the view that any therapist who infuses occupational therapy with knowledge is engaged in a process of application.

Furthermore, persons can advance and apply their knowledge in ways not coupled with earning an advanced degree. Therapists who become administrators, case managers, clinical educators, clinical specialists, consultants, claims reviewers, patient advocates, and supervisors also become masters of new knowledge and engage in its application, thereby enriching the profession in valuable ways.

What meaning for advanced knowledge can promote connections between the academy and the real world? This reflection may help: Knowledge advances occupational therapy in many ways, but each uses an application akin to dialogue. New learning makes a new language that evokes the dialogue. This scholarly profession unites and starts the conversation. The meaning of advanced knowledge for occupational therapists is a dialectic that enriches occupational therapy.

**Credentials as Opposed to Professions**

Credentials affirm credibility; they justify a person’s use of the title “doctor” or “registered occupational therapist” by claiming the successful completion of a course of study, related examination, or both. To some, credentialing is one of the emancipations of higher education because it leads to such benefits as promotion and tenure in the academy and higher salary and better positions in the real world. Given the requisite credentials, a person accrues privileges meant to match the effort spent in earning them. But there is an arrogance in making credentials—whether degrees or certifications—the sole basis for respect or collaboration.

If any one distinction must be made for the sake of fostering connections it is this: When it comes to common bonds, the professions of persons matter more than their credentials. A familiar meaning attaches to the word profession while linking it to higher education. Professing occupational therapy is the act of claiming to have knowledge of or skill in practice and thus declaring oneself proficient. An older meaning for the word profession, however, derives from taking religious vows (Oxford English Dictionary, 1989). In this sense, the profession of occupational therapy means the declaration of faith in or allegiance to its practice and thus a declaration of one’s commitment. We believe the latter meaning worth reclaiming.

A focus on commitments instead of credentials is one way of identifying what business we are in, a question posed in Bing’s (1995) foreword to the profession’s historical text. Surely, a focus on profession eases the disjunction between the academic and clinical worlds. Occupational therapists profess that occupation is therapeutic, that therapy is art and science, and that practice is reflective. This profession is a radical bond that transcends the manifold distinctions among practitioners.

**Bridging the Two Worlds**

Scholars profess that inquiry leads to enlightenment, that learning frees the mind, and that knowledge invites dialogue. This scholarly profession unites all those who search for knowledge and truth, regardless of their field or discipline. A fundamental compatibility also links those who profess to be occupational therapists and those who profess to be scholars. Both treat knowledge as a form of conversation; both make their practices reflective.

Parham (1987) described the unifying function of reflection in occupational therapy: "The kind of thinking involved in the reflective process is a thread that runs through practice, theory, and research" (p. 558). Barnett (1990) argued that reflective practice is not and should not be a “woolly piece of rhetoric” because “it signifies an idea of real value to the world of thought and to the world of action” (p. 76). The idea can translate into powerful collaborations between the academic and clinical worlds.

Therapists who value the dialogue and partnerships possible among practitioners from these worlds have options for advancing occupational therapy and causing reflection. These may fall into discrete categories of action, each a form of dialogue that respects the unique contributions of the other: (a) collaborating on scholarly or clinical projects that link both worlds, (b) practicing or consulting part time in the partner’s world, (c) mentoring the partner, or (d) creating a practice that links both worlds (Abreu & Neville-Jan, 1995).

More specific examples of bridging activities may be helpful. Because we both have pondered or lived these particular connections, and because therapists with doctoral degrees are typically nested in the academy, we offer the following bridges that therapists with doctorates can make with the clinical world:

- **Faculty practice.** Faculty members and clinicians can establish practice plans between universities and clinical and community settings within which they work part time.
- **Private practice.** Faculty members and clinicians can create a private practice that allows them to use their expertise in various settings.
- **Clinical consultation.** Faculty members can work in clinics, offering consultation in either direct or indirect care.
- **Educational consultation.** Clinicians can serve as consultants for academic programs and projects.
- **Education.** Faculty members can help with fieldwork education; clinicians can help with classroom instruction.
- **Grant writing.** Faculty members and clinicians can collaborate on grant-related projects.
- **Mentoring.** Faculty members and clinicians can mentor one another in their divergent roles and functions.
• Publications. Faculty members and clinicians can collaborate in the publication of many reviews, feature articles, case studies, and position papers in peer-reviewed and non-peer-reviewed journals.

• Presentations. Faculty members and clinicians can present papers together in a large number of arenas.

• Basic and applied scientific inquiry. Faculty members and clinicians can work together on theory building, theory testing, and other research projects.

Conclusion

Barnett (1990) argued that although one can hold more limited meanings for higher education, all learning is a journey. If therapists can think of professional practice as a journey that will lead them through both academic and clinical worlds, they are more apt to assign equal status to the geographer (scholar) who has charted the terrains and the explorer (clinician) who has travelled them. Those who embark on the journey use the maps of the geographer and the chronicles of the explorer. They pause to ponder both. They take valuable direction from each and spend little time in disputes over who is the more valuable professional.

Should we make meaningful connections between the academic and clinical worlds? Listen once again to Parham (1987):

If we are to be recognized in the health care system and in our larger society as real professionals deserving of autonomy, we must seize whatever opportunities are available that will enable us to take responsibility for the future of occupational therapy. For some of us, those opportunities will arise in practice; for others, in education, political action, or research and scholarship. Regardless of the arena in which we make our contribution, we all need to think like professionals. (p. 555)

We can gain enlightenment and emancipation from dialogues that link the academic and clinical worlds. Given our many credentials, strengths, and interests, we may need to add the forging of meaningful connections to our list of common professions. Making meaningful connections is a responsibility that we must take and an opportunity that we should seize. The issue is—shall we?

Acknowledgment

This article evolved from a presentation given at the Commission on Education’s Doctoral Network during the 1995 AOTA Annual Conference and Exposition.

References


