

*Editorial: 80 Years and Counting: Looking Backward and Forward*

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This year, the APTA Academy of Education is celebrating its 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary. This editorial provides a welcome opportunity to take a brief glimpse at how we started 80 years ago and where the Academy and physical therapy education might be journeying over the next few years. It seems completely appropriate to invoke the name of Janus, a god unique to Rome’s pantheon. Janus, with one head looking backward and one looking forward (Figure), was credited with being able to see the transition from “past to present to future”.<sup>1</sup>



Over the past 18 months or so, the Academy leadership examined archives and formally established July 1941 as its founding date by vote of the Board of Directors in April 2020 (2020-BOD-06). There are many dates that might have been used as the Academy’s ‘birth’ since it is trickier to identify the birth of an organization than the birth of a child. We based our decision on archival documents from 1941 and 1942. The 20<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the American Physiotherapy Association (July 1941) and publication of the upcoming programming in *Physiotherapy Review* (the precursor to PTJ) listed programming titled: “Problems of Physical Therapy Schools,” indicating a gathering of physical therapy educators discussing common concerns.<sup>2</sup> Also in

1941, APTA (then the American Physiotherapy Association or APA) was asked to use the title “Section” from the Section on Physical Therapy Schools.<sup>3</sup> This change was reflected in the 1942 annual conference program and publication of upcoming conference programming, using “PT Schools Section” to identify their programming.<sup>4</sup>

The APA did not formally recognize the existence of sections during the early meetings of the PT Schools Section. APTA’s “100 Milestones of Physical Therapy” lists its 1941 milestone as “First **Special Interest Sections** Meet at Annual Conference” [emphasis in mine].<sup>5</sup> The often cited vote taken at the 1945 annual conference that a School Section should be developed<sup>6</sup> appears not to be the founding of the PT Schools Section but the beginning of its efforts to be formally recognized by the APA. Sections, as components, were not incorporated into APTA Bylaws until 1948.<sup>7</sup> As additional evidence of the fluidity of the ‘birth’ of an organization, the Rules of Governance of the PT Schools Section were not finalized until 1948, or thereabouts based on archival documents. Thus, in 2021, we can look back over 80 years as a community of stakeholders whose purpose was then (and continues to be) to advance physical therapy education and, ultimately, patient care. The Academy hopes to expand its ‘backward’ view over time. The Academy is engaged in a long-term plan to conduct an in-depth review of the Academy’s archived documents. The goal is ultimately to create an accessible timeline of documented Academy history and key events.

Roman god Janus – with his two heads – is able to see the transition from “past to present to future”.<sup>1</sup> Wouldn't it be great if he could tell us what the next 5-10 years of physical therapy education and the Academy of Education have in store? I believe physical therapy education will undergo unprecedented change over that time. The foundations of both PT and PTA education have been vibrating for a while. Programs and institutions (among many other concerns) face growing evidence that supports the need for curricula based on contemporary learning theories<sup>8</sup>, mounting concern about the graduate indebtedness, continuing underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic Latino PTs and PTAs<sup>9</sup>, and the projected surplus of physical therapists as supply outstrips demand in the face of continuing PT and PTA program proliferation.<sup>9</sup> Now throw in the COVID pandemic and stir the pot. COVID-related demands forced physical therapy education to ‘pivot’ to online/hybrid strategies and to reconsider what and how much content students absolutely needed in such circumstances. It doesn't take a god to recognize that our successes (albeit under duress) will change the face of physical therapy education. The programs and institutions that, unlike some, have blinded themselves to the writing on the wall are no longer in a position to argue that alternative delivery models cannot work. Those involved in physical therapy education will not be able to ignore the compelling challenges that we face around program sustainability, responding to the learning needs of students overburdened by stress and financial obligations, and supporting faculty as clinicians, trained academic educators, and scholars. How do we respond constructively to these complex and interactive challenges while meeting our mission to build “a community that advances the profession of physical therapy to improve the health of society”?<sup>10</sup>

Even before the COVID earthquake, the Education Leadership Partnership committed to development of a long-term strategic plan for the future of physical therapist professional and post-professional education.<sup>11</sup> The partners (Academy of Education, ACAPT, and APTA) will be seeking broad-based feedback on the emerging plan through 2021 before setting priorities among the myriad of recommendations. Pivotal among those recommendations is development of competency-based education approaches to learner performance assessment – a substantive shift in how we think about education outcomes. In 2022, the Academy will sponsor the first Physical Therapist Assistant Education Summit that should provide direction to and recommendations for those involved in PTA education on the long overlooked (and long overdue) challenges faced by PTA education. CAPTE, led by its new Director, will be looking at both DPT and PTA program standards – perforce in the context of a changing external environment and internal demands. It will be incumbent on those of us who lead physical therapy education to help steer programs, academic and clinical faculty, and other stakeholders through these upcoming tumultuous years. It isn't sufficient for the Academy of Education and ACAPT to embrace ‘better together’. We are already working harder but we need to work smarter. We must better define (for both ourselves and our communities of stakeholders) who we each are, which of us is best equipped to do what, and where collaboration can optimize costs and outcomes. Hang on because the ride has already begun; you won't get to the destination unless you get onboard.

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