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Original Research

The Role of Legitimation in the Professional Socialization of Second-Year Undergraduate Athletic Training Students

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Abstract

Context: Professional socialization during formal educational preparation can help students learn professional roles and can lead to improved organizational socialization as students emerge as members of the occupation's culture. Professional socialization research in athletic training is limited.

Objective: To present the role of legitimation and how it influences the professional socialization of second-year athletic training students.

Design: Modified constructivist grounded theory and case study methods were used for this qualitative study.

Setting: An accredited undergraduate athletic training education program.

Patients or Other Participants: Twelve second-year students were selected purposively. The primary sample group (n = 4) was selected according to theoretical sampling guidelines. The remaining students made up the cohort sample (n = 8). Theoretically relevant data were gathered from 14 clinical instructors to clarify emergent student data.

Data Collection and Analysis: Data collection included document examination, observations, and interviews during 1 academic semester. Data were collected and analyzed through constant comparative analysis. Data triangulation, member checking, and peer-review strategies were used to ensure trustworthiness.

Results: Legitimation from various socializing agents initiated professional socialization. Students viewed trust and team membership as rewards for role fulfillment.

Conclusions: My findings are consistent with the socialization literature that shows how learning a social or professional role, using rewards to facilitate role performance, and building trusting relationships with socializing agents are important aspects of legitimation and, ultimately, professional socialization.

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Joanne Klossner, PhD, LAT, ATC, contributed to conception and design; acquisition and analysis and interpretation of the data; and drafting, critical revision, and final approval of the article.

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