

# Selected professional health education associations' convention and conference themes, analyzed thematically, from 1975 to 2009

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## Abstract

Annual conventions and conferences are held by a plethora of professional groups and organisations. Participants in this process include organizations representing healthcare educators. The American Association for Health Education (AAHE), the American Public Health Association (APHA), the American School Health Association (ASHA), and the Society for Public Health Education (SPHE) are four of the most significant professional health education groups in the United States (SOPHE). Thematic content analysis was used to assess the data, which was then grouped by year, place, and association. Data gathering and analysis in the context of topic research is discussed.

**Key Words:** Professional Associations, Historical Research, Thematic Content Analysis, Textual Analysis, Qualitative Method.

## Introduction

The emergence and importance of professional organizations and the history of health education are significant but understudied subjects in the literature. A professional's access to and ability to use resources is frequently constrained by the materials that are available, how well those resources have been curated and presented, and how well we can actually access or get copies of those resources.

## Purpose of Study

There are four major health education professional associations in the United States: the American Association for Health Education (AAHE), American Public Health Association (APHA), American School Health Association (ASHA), and Society of Public Health Education (SPHE). The purpose of this paper is to provide a list of data and a historical review of annual meeting themes for these four organizations (SOPHE). Health

education conference topics from 1975 to 2009 were analyzed as part of this comprehensive assessment.

## Background

Qualitative research allows for a more in-depth study of the data that is being analyzed. Qualitative research, according to Polkinghorne<sup>1</sup>, is mainly concerned with the collection of data and not so much with how to analyze the findings. Data collection and data analysis, as well as help for data interpretation, are often sought for by researchers. <sup>2</sup> Methods created for one field of study may not be readily transferred or applied to another for a variety of reasons, including researchers' use of intuition while working with their data. A research approach may not have precedent in the literature since it requires a combination of research stages to get the desired findings (as was the case in this study). This study was an exception. Perspective may be gained via historical study. According to Best and Kahn<sup>3</sup>, history is more than just a list of dates and locations; it's an account of how people, things, and places have interacted across time and space. All subjects of study may benefit from a historical research technique since it incorporates their beginnings, development, theories, personalities, and crises. To put it another way, Wiersma<sup>4</sup> defined historical study as the critical investigation into past events in order to generate an accurate account and interpretation of those events. As a result of its complexity and breadth, historical study cannot be reduced to a single methodology or approach. <sup>5</sup> History, according to Barzun and Graff, is more of a way of thinking than a topic in and of itself.

## Methods Research Design

According to Busha & Harter<sup>7</sup>, the basic steps of historical research include a rigorous collection and organization of information, data, or evidence; verification of the authenticity and veracity of

information and its sources; critical analysis of the data; selection, organization and analysis of the most relevant collected evidence (data synthesis); and development and recording of conclusions in a meaningful manner. In the present investigation, we made every effort to adhere to these guidelines.

## Data Collection

For this study, researchers examined health education literature, examined the websites of professional groups' employees, and spoke with historians and archivists who had either worked for or been affiliated with such organisations in the past. Data was requested on conference and convention topics from 1975 to 2009, as well as the location and state where each event was held. Table 1 included the data that had been sorted and arranged.

## Data Analysis

The words and phrases employed in a message are subject to textual analysis, which is a qualitative and non-traditional component of content analysis. It was important to note that both implicit and explicit interpretations of chosen phrases were examined in this study. When it comes to coding implicit phrases, the system was built on a fairly subjective approach. It is important that the words and phrases chosen convey some recurring meaning or grouping in the data. What is the definition of a group or a category in the context of coding? In other words, did the words and phrases have a deeper meaning? For a word or phrase to be deemed part of a category, how many times need it be used in context? It's impossible to follow a set of rules here since this is a qualitative investigation. We used the term "textual or theme content analysis" to describe our approach to data analysis in order to define our technique. This approach is distinct from other forms of content analysis that often concentrate on counting the frequency of terms. 11-13 Data patterns (themes) may be found, analyzed, and reported using thematic analysis. In its most basic form, it provides the means to organize and describe data sets. When it comes to the processes and techniques for doing thematic analysis, there is little consensus. 14 Data were sorted by organization, year, conference subject, and location prior to the study. (As seen in Table 1) It was a painstaking process to organize and categorize the many themes. Accordingly, a procedure of categorizing data and making associated notes has to be undertaken. Category development was informed by a variety of sources, including but not limited to the researchers' work experience and personal values as well as other studies. a number between 15 and 16 As important as these criteria were in the conceptualization

process, effort was taken to verify that each category was accurate and not modified to fit the data into a certain category. Table 2 contains the results of this literal textual analysis. Table 3 provides a more subjective look at the topics.

## A Study of Ideas

Braun and Clarke's six-step technique was used to perform the theme analysis. 14 The first step is to familiarize yourself with the facts. Data for Table 1 was collected and organized by both writers for this review. Creating the first few codes is the next step. Each author independently evaluated and coded the data. Themes (codes) were compared and debated at the meeting. The codes were translated into grouped data in step three. Data that had been grouped into groups was then categorized. It's time to go back and see whether the themes that arose from the previous phases are still accurate, so we'll evaluate them in step four. For example, might linkages between groups be discovered after the data had been grouped? Do you think there were any additional subcategories? The labeling of categories is the fifth step. The last step is to make connections between the topics and existing works of literature. 14

## Results

There must be a preservation of data and information related to professional health education organizations to provide a stable foundation for the future. Members of the four professional groups included in this study may neglect or dismiss mechanisms for data preservation as insignificant. Gathering and organizing historical data should be done on a regular basis. Other sources claim that an archive of health education professional organizations' historical papers and articles 16 Table 1 shows data from 1975 to 2009 organized by professional organization (year), conference or convention topic, and location (city/state). A meeting's organization, date, topic, and location were the initial data coding categories. It was imperative that we collect as much information as possible, therefore we consulted several sources. AAHPERD/AAHE conference themes were covered in a variety of ways between 1970 and 1985. AAHE archives and an article by Richard K. Means and Ann Nolte<sup>17</sup> provided a historical summary of AAHPERD/AAHE events and activities during the course of their 50-year history. Keyword and concept analysis was carried out on each conference topic to define its content or theme. Preventative, change, collaboration and unity are some of the primary terms and concepts in Table 2.. A more subjective study by the four professional organizations resulted in a number of separate groupings or categories for the conference

subjects. Human rights, global health equality, and international health were also major topics of discussion during the conference. To name a few of the more practical topics that arose: personal responsibility; marketing and lobbying; health education professionals as community or public health workers. In the framework of each professional organization, a few things were apparent. About 75% of the ASHA conference subjects dealt with the family, children and teenagers for example. As part of the organization's mission to "protect and promote the health of children and youth by supporting integrated school health programs as a foundation for school success," this emphasis is being put. 18 Towards achieving ASHA's purpose of promoting the health, safety, and well-being of children, young people (and their families), professionals from many fields work together to preserve and develop these individuals' well-being. 18 The conference subjects of the other three organizations were not focused on population-specific concerns. This means that AAHE, one of AAHPERD's five professional organizations, is unable to establish its own annual conference subject, which limits its ability to benefit from a convention theme. There is no evidence of AAHE's goals and vision in these issues, as one would expect. 19 Many sports-related themes have been discussed by AAHPERD, such as teamwork, movement and the baton as well as distance. Before recently, there haven't been any specific health or health-related topics. It's surprising that the sports-themed motifs don't represent AAHPERD's purpose and vision statements. 20 In part, this may be due to how the conference or convention theme was picked. Annual meetings may be devoted to topics that have no connection to AAPERD's stated vision or aim, such as personal preferences or platform issues. To be sure, the Alliance's intended name change seemed to be linked in with the 2007 theme of "Valuable, Viable, and Visible." There were more health-related or healthcare-related topics chosen for the annual SOPHE and APHA conferences than any other category. Other political and policy-related issues were brought to light over the course of the conversation. These issues align with the aims of the organizations, as indicated in their mission and vision statements. 21 and 22 A few of the themes in Table 3 have anything to do with what city the conference is taking place in. Themes based on current events or popular culture were also included. Popular culture examples included phrases like "Liberty, Justice, and the Pursuit of Happiness for All" and "Midlife Crisis". Movies like "Back to the Future," "Supersize Me," and "2001: A Space Odyssey" are instances of this pattern.

## Discussion

Historical research provides an analytical framework or approach that ought to be present in any analysis of popular culture. Gathering data, collecting information, observing and analyzing historical change over time can provide a foundation for understanding the history of the health education profession in the United States. Clinton Strong 23(p.34) said "the depth of a field, its traditions, and even its present comes from its history." A concerted effort should be made to develop and maintain an empirical database<sup>16</sup> to document important events, developments, and experiences that occur as the health education profession continues to develop. This material can help provide future generations with an opportunity to develop a working knowledge of the past, present, and even the future of health education. In the current study, data were collected from a wide range of sources in order to develop as complete a data set as possible. Data were organized into table format including the organization, year, theme, and location of the annual meeting. Textual or thematic content analysis focused on identifiable themes and patterns. Themes that emerged from the data were organized to form a comprehensive collection. As noted by Leininger, 24(p. 60) the "coherence of ideas rests with the analyst who has rigorously studied how different ideas or components fit together in a meaningful way when linked together." Our method of analysis demonstrated the following advantages over conventional content analysis: (1) it provided a convenient and reasonable means of finding meaningful themes in the text; (2) the themes emerged from the data rather than be imposed by the researchers; and (3) the techniques revealed the relative importance and interrelationships among the conference or convention themes. While some of the professional associations included in this study utilized their selected conference themes more effectively than others, the findings in this study suggest that there are a number of potential benefits that have not been realized in the past. Associations should look to the identification and selection of conference themes that have more of a connection to the mission and vision, more impact on the potential conference participants, set the desired tone for an event, or potentially help to sustain the organization. Each of the professional health education associations included in this study use a different process to identify and select their conference theme. It should be the goal of each organization to develop and create an exciting conference which stimulates discussion, fosters the exchange of ideas and knowledge, and generates more informed understanding of the relevant issues for the profession. According to Margaret Mead, "the choice of a conference site is extremely important. The site should have distinction and style and should provide the kind of setting that can

be used to shape as rapidly as possible the developing conference ethos.” 25(p. 49) To some extent, all four of the professional health education associations utilized location or some special or unique feature for the selected location as a focus of their conference theme, however, SOPHE seems to have utilized this approach more frequently. An effective theme also appears to be valuable as a marketing tool or to foster brand identification or loyalty. Potential benefits of a theme can include garnering attention for the association, conveyance of the association vision or mission, its’ purpose or specific goals. Themes can aid marketing efforts, highlight location, situation, or events, emphasize social issues, focus on issues and concerns of the membership, or provide organizational structure for the conference. We offer a number of guiding questions for developing an effective conference theme. These include: Is the selected theme appropriate for the association, its membership, and potential conference participants? Is it clear and concise? Is it timely? Does it demonstrate creativity, cleverness, or uniqueness? Is it reflective of or compatible with the association’s vision, mission, purpose or goals? Does it reference the host city or special features of the host location?

## Conclusion

This project provided a listing and historical review of annual meeting themes for four of the major professional health education associations (AAHE, ASHA, APHA, & SOPHE). It utilized a qualitative, historical research approach that described a set of procedures for thematic content analysis. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first written compilation and analysis of professional conference themes across professional associations in health education. If a reader should find discrepancies in the data, please contact the lead author. Each of the professional health education associations included in this project maintain some form of historical archives. We hope that this article is viewed as a contribution to these data repositories and that at some point in the future, a collaborative health education archive can be developed that is comprehensive and inclusive of the entire profession. While very little literature exists to provide guidance related to the conceptualization, development and selection of effective conference themes, it seems to be clear that conference themes have a place in the planning and development of an annual meeting or convention. However, the selection, identification, marketing, and utilization of themes appear to impact the image of the association and the perceptions of the association members and conference participants. Therefore, the leadership and members of these associations and others are

encouraged to use this preliminary study to advance the health education profession.

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