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The “ANZAHPE Way”: Nurturing health professionals, educators, learners and researchers in the next 50 years

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Abstract

In this paper, we argue that Australian & New Zealand Association for Health Professional Educators (ANZAHPE) is a nurturing organisation and envision what cultivating this means for its future. We use communities of practice and social learning to examine ANZAHPE’s evolution as a nurturing association. We describe two ANZAHPE innovations, the unique conference presentation format called the “personally arranged learning session”, or “PeArLS”, and a new professional development program called “ANZAHPE Online”. We then reflect on how these function as nurturing structures in which members embody ANZAHPE’s philosophy of community learning. From these examples, we draw out future directions for the association.

Keywords: health professional education; nurturing; community of practice; social learning; professional development; association; organisational culture; sustainability

Introduction

If you don’t know where you’ve come from, you don’t know where you’re going
(Maya Angelou in Cordova, 2014)

The Australian & New Zealand Association for Health Professional Educators (ANZAHPE) is an inclusive community of health professional educators with a mission to develop educators’ practice, scholarship, research and leadership. Other articles in

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this series position ANZAHPE as multi-professional, inter-professional, inclusive, non-hierarchical, innovative and collaborative. We argue that there is an “ANZAHPE way” that is *nurturing*. We take the view that nurturing is an inherently social and educative way of being that guides ANZAHPE activities, fosters an evolving creative community and underpins ANZAHPE’s growth as an organisation. Although nurturing can be classified as a feminine characteristic (Hofstede, 1980, 2011), this does not do justice to the rich characteristics of nurturing exhibited by ANZAHPE members for one another and as an organisation. Regardless of gender or gender characteristics, the role of members as health professional educators is focused on caring and cultivating, mentoring and guiding the next generation of health professional educators and scholars. The strength of ANZAHPE comes from its members, who nurture the organisation in return so that it continues to thrive. This nurturing culture is a defining element of ANZAHPE that may not be so essential to other professional associations.

In this paper, we adopt communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) as a theoretical framework to examine ANZAHPE’s evolution because it allows us to reflect on what is and envision ANZAHPE’s future as a nurturing organisation. Then, we describe and reflect on two of ANZAHPE’s nurturing offerings, and from this, we draw out future directions for the association. But first, to understand where we are going, we begin with the history of the organisation.

The origins of the ANZAHPE way

In 1969, the first Australian and New Zealand Association of Medical Educators conference took place in Sydney, when health professional education did not exist as a scholarly discipline anywhere in the world. When the organisation that was to become ANZAHPE began on 11 August 1972, health professional education relied on the transmission of information from clinicians and scientists to students and trainees, predominantly. This unproblematic view of teaching was supported with written examinations and clinical vivas to ensure that the transmitted material had been retained.

At about the same time in Europe, the Association of Medical Education Europe (AMEE) was in the process of being formed with support from the World Health Organization and the Centre for Medical Education at the University of Dundee (Wojtczak, 2013). In the United States, medical education was guided by deeply rooted traditions supported by organisations such as the Association of American Medical Colleges, established in 1876 (<https://www.aamc.org/>). These organisations were focused on the medical profession and medical schools, with a goal to promote scientific rigour that, perhaps, overshadowed developing and supporting practices that might nurture collaborative communities.

At a debate in 1971 that foreshadowed the Australian and New Zealand association’s birth, its expectant father, Bill McCarthy, described his vision for the Association as:

A broadly based group of people with a common interest in the educational processes of any of the health professions generally, to function largely as a catalyst for communication and development of medical and paramedical education (Finucane & Spiers, 1997, p. 2).

McCarthy's vision for the Association was multi-professional, despite the medico-centric phrasing, including the term "paramedical" that was characteristic of this time. From its beginning, the Association sought to nurture the development of health professional education as a self-examining scholarly discipline in Australia and New Zealand through collaboration and communication among peers.

In the 50 years since McCarthy articulated his vision for health professionals, educators and researchers, ANZAHPE continues to nurture the development of, and recognition for, the scholarly discipline of health professional education in Australia and New Zealand. ANZAHPE has been co-designed and nurtured by its membership. In 2010, an important and overdue step occurred when the Association changed its name from the Australian and New Zealand Association of Medical Educators (ANZAME) to the Australian & New Zealand Association for Health Professional Educators (ANZAHPE). As a community of enthusiasts, we have shaped a new path, distinguishable from the hierarchical norms of our origin disciplines, to share and develop the emergent collective practice and scholarship of health professional education that has shaped ANZAHPE. ANZAHPE has grown both in member numbers and the range of the activities and opportunities it offers. Activities include an annual conference and a scholarly journal aimed at sharing practice and promoting quality educational research. The advent of the fellowship scheme in 2015 provided a process to assess and recognise members' scholarly achievements. To further promote recognition and professionalisation of health professional education, we established a mentoring scheme, open to all members, in 2021. Members of the fellowship scheme and other educational leaders volunteer to nurture colleagues in our association who seek to develop their scholarship, leadership and fellowship skills. Evaluation of this program suggests that mentors were also nurtured and extended through their involvement in the scheme.

Theoretical underpinnings of the "ANZAHPE way"

Developing expertise in the practice and scholarship of health professional education might be viewed by some as an individual's responsibility and a predominantly cognitive activity associated with the acquisition of skills, knowledge and attitudes. However, individual learning can also be viewed as a socially situated activity involving active participation in meaning-making by an individual with other people and the world around them (Sfard, 1998). When learning is supported by social engagement, it can be fostered as a collective and creative activity performed as a community (Wenger et al., 2002). We use this expanded definition of learning as a socially situated activity to explain how ANZAHPE supports its members to engage in building innovative practice and the scholarship of health professional education. Members are nurtured when they are invited

to participate in practices of scholarship that are historically rooted and maintained and renewed by our associations' cultural norms and expectations. Importantly, ANZAHPE emphasises opportunities for its members to build and maintain social connections. This nurturing approach to member engagement can be explained using social cognitive theory since this theory posits that learning takes place in social contexts that are dynamic and involve interactions with other people and the world around us (Bandura, 1986, 1989). Moreover, social cognitive theory emphasises the role of personal actions and experiences, the impact of actions and interactions with others, and the influence of environmental factors on a person's behaviour. As such, complex and critical interaction exists between a person's behaviour and their social environment as both are malleable and shape each other. The social learning environment of ANZAHPE can be explained further by the concept of "communities of practice" (Lave & Wenger 1991; Wenger et al., 2002) because "communities of practice are formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavour" (Wenger-Traynor & Wenger-Traynor, 2015, p. 1). Consistent with this idea, ANZAHPE members share the domain of health professional education practice and scholarship and interact regularly with respect and trust to foster a sense of belonging and commitment among members. By nurturing the collective growth of its members, ANZAHPE is supported by its membership to be adaptive and resilient. The vision and values of the Association are maintained and renewed, to reflect the evolving interests and needs of its members and changes in the world they are operating in, by those who opt to step into official ANZAHPE roles over time. By providing reflective spaces, members can interact to identify possible concerns, explore challenges, build skills and exchange solutions.

Providing reflective spaces at the annual conference

As a community of practice, ANZAHPE exists within the broader milieu of healthcare services, academic institutions and accrediting and regulatory bodies across Australia and New Zealand, and its members participate in a range of professional activities within these different organisations. A feature of the ANZAHPE community is the opportunity to engage with each other in nurturing spaces and practices. These spaces are reflective and require certain conditions to enable members to engage fully and to enable and afford learning (Kumagai & Naidu, 2015). First, a reflective space requires a sense of safety, confidentiality and a balance of power and privilege. A second requirement is a conscious intention to make a space that is separate from the "distractions and exigencies of daily life" (Kumagai & Naidu, 2015, p. 285). Third, a reflective space requires a respect for the transformative nature of such a space. ANZAHPE drives initiatives that provide reflective spaces for our members, with these three characteristics.

One initiative that provides reflective space to ANZAHPE members is the ANZAHPE conference presentation format: "personally arranged learning session" (PeArLS) (Schwartz & Heath, 1985). A PeArLS presentation is the self-proclaimed "jewel in

the crown” of the ANZAHPE annual conference. A PeArLS is a presentation where “the presenter and participants are equals who gather to discuss a common problem” (*ANZAHPE 2022 PeArLS Style Guide*: <https://anzahpe.org/Conferences>). In a 45-minute session, the opening provocation is brief and supported with the presentation of a challenging question or issue. The remainder of the PeArLS is discursive and emergent, with the presenters working to pull together shared learning at the end. Power asymmetries are intentionally lowered to support a safe and collegial reflective space to develop. This reflective space allows ANZAHPE members, with any number of years of experience, to come together and to engage in dialogue, critical reflection and idea generation. As a signature feature of the conference, presenters who facilitate a PeArLS seek to nurture ideas to learn with colleagues outside of their immediate workplace and discipline. Presenters encourage participants to make new connections to the topic and with each other by sharing different ways of knowing. The generative activity within a PeArLS fosters connections with others because the ethos of “doing work together” creates palpable enthusiasm and energy. In contrast to a physical pearl, the work produced during a PeArLS is not shiny nor perfectly formed, but rather it is a newly formed imperfect work with opportunity for learning beyond the conference. This creativity brings people back to the format year after year. PeArLS represents an example of a formal practice configured by the organisation to create a reflective space that privileges the co-construction of ideas and allows time for safety to be established so that transformative learning can flourish. Creating reflective space during a PeArLS is supported by the session guidelines as they reflect the nurturing ideals of the Association and are characterised by the conditions suggested by Kumagai and Naidu (2015). These ideals and conditions are translated into interactions that take place during a PeArLS to instantiate and remake the dynamic community that is ANZAHPE. The reflective space created during a PeArLS has generated new practical initiatives, including the mentoring scheme and pedagogies such as intellectual streaking (Bearman & Molloy, 2017).

Responding with ongoing professional development and networking

As a community of practice, ANZAHPE responds to the professional development and networking needs of its members. While the need for both activities have been tacitly understood and practised by ANZAHPE, recently both have become more purposefully enacted. For example, at the annual conference in 2019, ANZAHPE members became sensitised to the importance of sustainability in health professional education. Following up on this awareness, the ANZAHPE committee of management developed a specific portfolio for professional development to provide monthly, virtual educational opportunities to members throughout the year. This initiative sought to remedy the sustainability concerns around the resource intensive annual conference with limited impact as a one-off annual activity, the considerable cost of the long distance travel and the associated carbon emissions. In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic presented the opportunity to provide professional development to ANZAHPE members in an

online format called the ANZAHPE Online Professional Development Programme (ANZAHPE Online) using video conferencing software (<https://zoom.us>). ANZAHPE Online provides members with professional development events that nurture connectivity throughout the year. Events include keynote presentations with question-and-answer sessions about practice and research from members and international guests, debates led by members of the fellowship scheme, and extended sessions called “master classes”, led by renowned scholars in the field of health professional education (<https://www.anzahpe.org/Professional-Development>).

The majority of ANZAHPE Online events occur at the same time every month. This regular schedule of events is a deliberate attempt to establish the habit of engaging in professional development activity with other members. Presenters make use of break-out groups to value and empower participants to share their expertise with one another. Presenters also gain benefit from participating in a briefing session and considering evaluation feedback.

While being the focal event on the ANZAHPE calendar, the annual conference is also the major financial event for the association. ANZAHPE has never been a profit-oriented organisation despite the fact that the culture of an organisation can be seen as “the intangible mechanism contributing to profitability” (Cawood, 2008, p. 28). ANZAHPE has focused on being financially sustainable to ensure we can maintain our core function of nurturing development of health professional educators. Despite the loss of income from the cancelled conference in 2020 due to the pandemic, ANZAHPE maintained its commitment to nurture its members by initiating ANZAHPE Online. Events included presentations by members who were local experts and who may not have previously facilitated discussions with such large audiences. The online events also extended our ethic of care beyond Australia and New Zealand to include members in South East Asia, Timor-Leste and Papua New Guinea. Events were also recorded so members could view a missed session.

Another important by-product of the success of the ANZAHPE Online programme is an awareness of the need for more networking opportunities among members. In response to this need, less formal discussion-focused sessions called “networking events” were established in 2021 to allow for connectivity among members based on needs expressed by members in their evaluation feedback. Specific networking sessions were embedded in the ANZAHPE Online schedule to demonstrate our commitment to the nurturing of all members, with special attention to the career needs of new members.

Nurturing the ANZAHPE way into the future

From its origins, ANZAHPE has placed deliberate emphasis on nurturing the development of health professionals, educators and researchers. In the preceding sections, we have described the nurturing nature of ANZAHPE, its practices and its community. We have used the term the “ANZAHPE way”, which cultivates multiple

open communities of practice that together progress the domain and practices of health professional education, with the collective goal of improving the education of students learning professional practice.

Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002) identify seven practices organisations can undertake to cultivate communities of practice able to advance a domain of knowledge and its shared practices. These include embracing evolution, supporting open dialogue between inside and outside perspectives, inviting different levels of participation, developing both public and private community spaces, focusing on value (for members) and combining familiarity and excitement when creating a rhythm for the community. From the above stories of our practice, we can see that the ANZAHPE way cultivates or nurtures its communities of practice through a flexibility found in opening leadership roles to all members, supported by effective communication, and allowing creative responses to challenges. ANZAHPE embraces the multiple diversities of its membership, removing traditional hierarchies and encouraging open dialogue. ANZAHPE creates formal and informal structures for membership collaboration but also seeks external collaboration, building stronger networks for members. In all its activities, ANZAHPE focuses on value for members but also value for others, particularly students and other potential members. ANZAHPE recognises the benefit of creating a rhythm of annual and monthly events but also the excitement of social occasions where we value our individual and collective achievements. The ANZAHPE way nurtures communities of practice. ANZAHPE has well evolved communities of practice focused on scholarship, mentorship and professional development as well as many special interest groups.

Understanding our history points the way to achieving our future. ANZAHPE nurtures many aspirations, including building health professional education as a discipline with local and global influence on health professional education practice, workforce and theory. We manage our association with active thought and planning open to growth and change while maintaining its nurturing culture. The sustainability of the Association relies on nurturing the business of ANZAHPE in partnership with working to achieve organisational strategic goals and priorities. The active dialogue among the executive office, and elected board members, and the consultative annual general meeting are central to sustaining and nurturing the ANZAHPE way.

The ANZAHPE way reminds us to embrace and navigate different ways of knowing, diverse pedagogies and the breadth of research practices by fostering new inclusive health professional education discourses. We aim to nurture the coming generations of leaders who are health professionals, educators and researchers through a culture of mentorship. We hope to create recognised and valued career pathways for health professionals, educators and researchers. We pursue educational practices that will improve the health practice received by all, but urgently at this time in history, the health of Indigenous Peoples. Articulating this vision for the future can focus our leadership and members on fostering the growth of new knowledge and practice. We invite all who are interested and

share our values to join us in our collective endeavour to improve learning, teaching and practice and to continue to evolve the “profession” of health professional education.

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