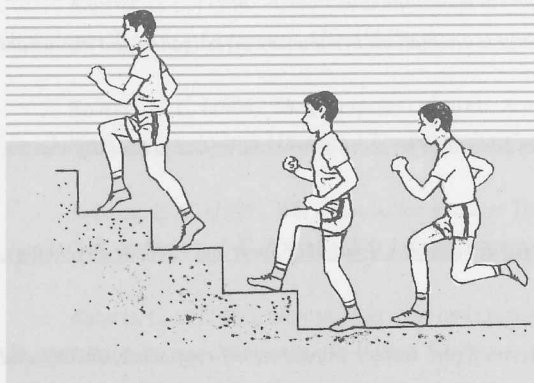




Development of Physical Education Curricula in Hong Kong: Towards 1997

香港體育課程發展：**邁向 一九九七**



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本文通過分析和比較香港與廣州的體育課程，建議香港未來的體育課程，應作出若干改革。香港與廣州的體育課程，有頗多相異之處。在內容方面，香港的體育課程，缺少了中國傳統體育項目。在課程組織和評鑑方面，香港的課程給予校本發展的空間較大。一般來說，香港課程的深層價值取向，在於協助學生養成個人的積極生活模式；然而，執行的過程，卻多偏重學生運動技能的提升。香港未來體育課程發展，在「一國兩制」、「五十年不變」的原則下，應該「改革」而非「革命」；它應有四個路向：1) 發展「全民運動」；2) 促進學生的體適能；3) 考慮加入中國傳統體育項目；4) 改善課程的組織和設計。香港體育課程可貴之處在於其校本化。校本課程要求教師同時扮演執行者、設計者和發展者的角色；這一點是香港體育課程值得保留的地方。

1) Introduction

In 1997, Hong Kong will become a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of China. In order to make the transition go smoothly, much work is ahead. This paper attempts to analyse and compare PE curricula in Hong Kong and China, and to suggest directions for future development of PE curricula in Hong Kong schools.

Between Hong Kong and China, a common set of curricula does not exist. It is because schools differ in type, size, and location. In China it is particularly the case, as it should not be too far from truth that curricula in the north west regions differ quite substantially from those in the south east regions. Because of this, key words in this paper are loosely defined, so that "PE curricula" refer to those implemented in typical or "mainstream" schools in Guangzhou and Hong Kong.

Reasons for choosing Guangzhou are obvious. In Hong Kong the majority of the population is Cantonese, and that these two places are geographically close. More importantly, people in these two places had traditionally shared similar culture and values.

2) An Overview of the PE Curricula in Hong Kong Schools

Curricula in Hong Kong schools are categorized in three different levels. They are sixth form, secondary, and primary and kindergarten. On many occasions, they are further categorized into junior and senior secondary, and lower and upper primary.

Aims of the curricula are in general stated in global form, so that all possible aims PE has a potential to fulfill have been mentioned (note 1). This keeps interpretations open to the curriculum deliverers. The provision of this flexibility has both advantages and disadvantages, regardless of the fact that aims of most PE curricula are usually stated in this manner. It is envisaged that unless there are some aims that can explicitly be made dominant over others, the manner in which aims of PE in schools are stated would remain unchanged for some time.

Content of PE curricula at primary level covers mainly "physical play" at lower primary, and modified organized sports activities at upper primary levels. At lower primary level, PE lessons are to keep students active, and enjoy being active, in physical activities. At upper primary level, basic skills of various sports activities are taught. This aims to equip students with basic skills and abilities in learning more complex skills at secondary level.

At junior secondary level, PE lessons will again be used to teach basic sports skills in a more "formal" manner. For example, in teaching basketball, teachers will use balls of official size and weight, and teach rules governing the sport. At senior secondary level, more advanced skills and tactics are taught. This is to prepare students for life-time participation in the sports in which they feel confident to be involved after graduation from schools.

At sixth form level, PE is in a very difficult situation, in which there has been very little guide to teachers in conducting PE lessons. Students at this level have put much emphasis on getting better results in public examinations. They expect PE lessons to provide them with some time and space to relax. This psychological constraint has made quite many of them unwilling to learn anything "formal" in PE lessons. On the other hand, however, teachers and the society are unable to accept this. Teachers expect students to learn more sports skills so as to make it more likely that students could further develop their life-time sports, whereas employers want healthy employees rather than good performers in sports. Students are expected to be able to monitor their bodily conditions, and design and implement their own fitness programmes so as to keep themselves physically fit (note 2). Such fitness obviously relates more to health than to sport.

These constraints are difficult to resolve, but the Curriculum Development Institute (CDI) and the Curriculum Development Council (CDC) have been making effort to tackle the difficulties. At present, implementation of PE curricula at sixth form level is distant from satisfactory, as it has been lacking consensus on direction for development. In this respect, the leadership of the CDC and the CDI would play a very important role in shaping the direction (note 3).

Decisions on organization of content and on ways in which the content be taught are based on the situations of the schools, as well as on teachers' expertise and judgment. In fact, PE teachers are quite free to decide what are to be taught, and how. Because of this, curriculum in one school can be quite different from that in others. Thus, in some schools, teaching of team games might have occupied most of the curriculum time, while in other schools it could be dance, or something else. At present, this phenomenon is under review (note 4).

Methods of assessments in PE are usually determined by teachers too. Since there are few "national" norm tables and standardized tests for reference, teachers are used to design their own assessment systems. However, in the process of designing their assessment systems, teachers would make reference to some standardized tests and norm tables used elsewhere.

As teachers are having a decisive role in curriculum development in PE, their characteristics do play an important part in shaping the PE curricula. PE teachers in general are good at sports. They can benefit from sports so that they are keen on sports. In the curriculum development process, their enthusiasm on sports has made the "what" and "how" aspects of sports skills acquisition a major source of influence of the process.



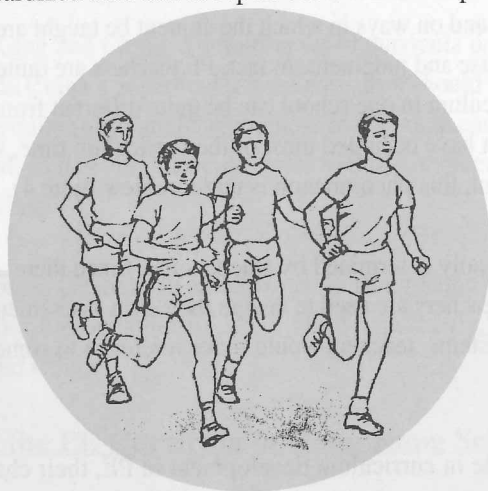
The whole range of PE curricula seems to have some inherited values, that it is expected to strive to enable students to develop an active *life-style*, of which the extent of regular and proper participation in sports in students has been viewed as an indicator. However, as there is a general belief that if students are to participate properly and regularly in sports, they must, rightly or wrongly, have acquired a good proficiency in sports skills. Subsequently, *teaching sports skills* has become the most important aspect in curricular processes in PE. Furthermore, as results in sports competitions seem to be good indicators of sports proficiency in students, a pursuit of *successes in sports* competitions as emphasis of PE is reinforced. Thus, despite the fact that there are voices urging for a shift of emphasis of PE in schools from a "elitist" to a "sport-for-all" orientation, and that there is a growing number of schools which are able to maintain a balanced weighting on teaching and learning sports skills, physical fitness, knowledge, and attitudes in students through their PE programmes, winning in sports competitions has remained as the major criterion for success in PE (note 5).

3) A Brief Introduction to the PE Curricula in Guangzhou Schools

In Guangzhou, curricula are divided into two major levels, primary and secondary, and can further be subdivided into four, namely, lower and upper primary, and junior and senior secondary. Aims of the curricula are, once again, stated in global form. However, unlike that of the PE curricula in Hong Kong, aims of PE curricula in Guangzhou have included a development of Communist ideology, as well as a maintenance of cultural heritage in students (note 6).

In fact, the traditional and dominant conception on PE has been that it is for promoting general physical fitness in students, so that PE is mainly for exercise for health. On the other hand, however, in contemporary China there is a general expectation from the society that PE is best able to contribute to a pursuit of sport excellence, so that achievements in international sports events can be enhanced. Subsequently, the PE curriculum has included different types of western organized sports, and students are accessible to these sports at their school age. This enables an early identification of potential elite athletes who are going to compete in international sports events. The PE curriculum has to include some unique Chinese sports, such as Wushu, for a maintenance of cultural heritage.

There are textbooks for PE. The textbooks are prepared by the Government. They make suggestions on the contents and procedures of every single PE lessons. For example, for junior secondary one, there is a PE textbook covering sixty-six lesson plans. In addition, there are standardized norm tables for national use. Teachers are expected to conduct standardized tests and to report cases whenever potential elite athletes have been identified.



4) *A Comparison of the PE Curricula in Guangzhou and Hong Kong*

PE programmes in Guangzhou and Hong Kong schools differ in many aspects. Table 1 shows an oversimplified tabular juxtaposition of the programmes.

Table 1: A Juxtaposition of PE Programmes in Hong Kong and Guangzhou

	HONG KONG	GUANGZHOU
Aims	stated in global form, thus include almost all possible aims PE has a potential to fulfill.	stated in global form, thus include almost all possible aims PE has a potential to fulfill
Content	mostly organized sports (western)	mostly organized sports (western and Chinese)
Organization	school-based and teacher-based	usually in accordance with highly-structured guides, such as textbooks.
Assessment	based on self-selected methods and criteria	based on standardized tests and norms.
Dominating Inherited Values	for personal growth (development of an active life-style)	for fitness and sport excellence
Major Source of Influence	Subject Matter (the "what" and "how" aspects of sports skills acquisition)	Societal expectations
Major Criterion for Success (see also note 5)	Performance in sports competitions	Identification of elite athletes for national teams

It must be appreciated that to a very large extent school PE programmes in these two places have been influenced by the contexts within which they are developed. There are different aims, despite the fact that these aims are both stated in global form. The Hong Kong curriculum does not regard a transmission of Communist values and a nationalist morality as one of its aims.

Thus, in Hong Kong, PE curricula in schools do not include Chinese traditional sports, such as Wushu. This is an aspect that need to be considered in great care (note 7).

Approaches to organization and delivery of the curricula also differ. In Hong Kong, teachers are dominant in the process of curriculum development. Based on their expertise and judgment of the school contexts, teachers design unique PE programmes for their students. In Guangzhou, there are highly structured, sophisticated textbooks, as well as nation-wide standardized tests and norm tables, so that teachers are more implementors than developers of curricula.



Certain values have been inherent in the curricula. In Hong Kong, PE curricula are to strive for personal growth in students, and the focus seems to have been placed on enhancing active life-style in them. Unfortunately, uplifting students' proficiencies in sports skills as one of the many dimensions for assisting students to develop active life-style has become dominant over others.

5) A Discussion on Future Development of PE Curricula in Hong Kong

Although the delivery of PE in Hong Kong schools is problematic, it may not need a radical change of the basic values of the curricula. Given the fact that the Chinese Government has promised to keep Hong Kong basically unchanged for fifty years, and to uphold the principle of "one country two systems", we should first consider to improve the existing curriculum rather than to transform it. It is unwise if we imitate others without careful considerations of our own contexts as well as the strength and weaknesses of the existing curricula.

Indeed, in considering the future development of PE curricula in Hong Kong, we learn a lot from Guangzhou. First, we need to re-examine the inherent values of our curricula. As a highly urbanized society, Hong Kong has an expectation on its people that they must be able to develop an active life-style for maintaining both the mental and physical health in them. However, such a development, which usually achieve through that of a habit of participating regularly and properly in sports activities in people, does not require high level performances of sports skills in them. Rather, it requires people to have mastered some basic sports skills, as well as a reasonably good physical fitness. Owing to the fact that in school PE, an emphasis on a pursuit of successes in sports competitions does not contribute very much to a promotion of the "sport-for-all" ethos, a retreat from such an emphasis, as well as an adoption of a real "sport-for-all" orientation in PE programme delivery should be urged.

On the other hand, having been investing in the curricula, the society expects students to maintain a good health for maximizing production and minimizing societal expenses for medical care. Therefore, physical fitness, especially health-related physical fitness should be the focus of attention.

However, forces shaping PE curricula to develop towards other directions have remained very strong. Firstly, the whole PE teaching profession has been rather sport-oriented. Teachers are more willing to put effort in promoting elite sport than "low level" sport. Moreover, this tradition has made teacher training focus more on sports teaching than on other aspects, such as a promotion of health-related fitness in students. Thirdly, as there is a general belief that successes in international sports competitions may enable Hong Kong to develop an identity that is favourable to a fulfillment of the "one country two systems" principle, the Hong Kong society generally values highly successes in sports competitions.

An ideal scenario is that PE curricula fulfill all these. However, given the limitations of time allocation and teacher expertise this seems quite impossible. As the provision of the nine-year compulsory education has been offering every student the right and obligation in participating regularly in physical activities in schools, PE curricula can and should focus more on promoting the "sport-for-all" ethos than on pursuing "sport excellence", so that they contribute to long term benefit of the society. This implies that in Hong Kong, promoting physical and mental health through a development of active life-style in students as one of the major inherent values of the PE curricula should be maintained, even though much more needs to be done in order to better achieve them.

Another valuable feature of the Hong Kong curricula is that they are school-based. If properly educated, teachers can and should act as both curriculum developers and implementors. High-profile interventions of the Government, such as publishing textbooks for practical PE lessons, may lessen this strength. Thus, support

from the Government should only be logistic and should focus on enhancing professional development in teachers.

Nevertheless, the Hong Kong curricula should not avoid taking up the responsibility in maintaining and promoting desirable cultural heritage. Some Chinese traditional sports, such as Tai Chi, are perhaps good for maintaining good health in people. Furthermore, they do not consume much space and resources from schools. An inclusion of this kind of sports in the PE curricula should seriously be considered, and the decision on when to start the exercise should be made in scrutiny (see also note 7). At this moment, teacher training does not allow this being put into practice. Furthermore, possible political and societal implications should also be taken into account if this kind of sports is to be introduced in the curriculum. However, if this is regarded as desirable, some preparation work can be carried out. This may include some negotiations with institutions involved in PE teacher training, and some school-based research projects. The principle could be that the exercise should start nice and small.

6) Concluding Remarks

Curriculum development is an on-going negotiation process. Its very nature is political, rather than merely technical and practical. For carrying out curriculum work beyond school and classroom levels, a consideration of data derived from the society, rather than those from the subject matter, will be of greater importance. The case presented here is a good example illustrating this.

Note 1: For details, please refer to the syllabuses produced by the Hong Kong Curriculum Development Council (CDC).

Note 2: Please refer to the Hong Kong CDC Sixth Form Curriculum Guide issued in 1993.

Note 3: In early 1995, the CDC Sixth Form Co-ordinating Committee formed a Sixth Form Physical Education Working Group to follow the matter.

Note 4: An adoption of the concept of "Modular Curriculum" may help to improve the situation. A paper entitled 《論中學體育科課程全面單元化》 had been prepared for consultations. The revised version of the paper will be submitted for publication in this journal in the near future.

Note 5: It should be noted that the claims made here are based on personal observations only. In fact this aspect is worthy of some in-depth studies.

Note 6: Please refer to 《廣東省中學試用課本,1987》及《廣東省小學教師教學用書,1991》.

Note 7: A paper arguing for an inclusion of "tai-chi" in the PE curriculum had been prepared by Mr. Chow Chiu-woo, one of my colleagues at the CDI. The revised version of the paper is submitted for publication in this journal.

*This is a revised version of a paper submitted to members of the Curriculum Development Council (CDC) Physical Education Subject Committee (Secondary) and Sixth Form Physical Education Working Group for consideration.