

## **The Values of Physical Education Trainees in Singapore**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The issue of the relationship between values and the pursuit of national goals is a common issue in Singapore. The purpose of this study was to examine how the prevailing value systems that guide the decision making of Singaporeans might be implicated in the presentation of physical education programmes. It is argued that personal values represent a common mediating influence on the pursuit of goals associated with sport and physical education and as such represent an important element in maintaining the culture of physical activity in sport as it exists in Singapore.

A conceptual design based on the Values Model developed by Schwartz (1992, 1995) was used to analyse of individual value systems of physical education trainees at the National Institute of Education. Preliminary findings suggest that values associated with Self-Enhancement and Openness to Change are more positively representative of a physical education and sport culture than values linked with traditional beliefs concerning Self-Transcendence and Conservation. These findings highlight the potential conflicts that confront the teacher, who wishes to promote both sub-cultural values and national values.

Presented at the AARE-NZARE Conference, Monday 29<sup>th</sup> November

### **INTRODUCTION**

It has been argued that the destiny of a nation may lie in its culture and the expression of the fundamental values that define the national culture (Zakaria, 1994). Economic productivity in Singapore, for example, has been attributed to the management of activities influenced by an over-arching paradigm based on communitarianism or 'traditional Asian' values (Clammer, 1993; Heng, 1993; Kwok, 1993). At a state level, Singapore promotes 'Shared Values' (Singapore Government, 1991) and 'Family Values' (Ministry of Community Development, 1994). The promotion of Shared Values represents a form of cultural development, designed to inculcate values that balance individual initiative and community norms. These values emphasise five beliefs:

- to place the nation before the community, and the society above the self;
- to uphold the family as the basic building block of society;
- to resolve major issues through consensus instead of contention;
- to promote racial and religious tolerance and harmony;
- to have regard and community support for the individual.

The Five Core Family Values (Ministry of Community Development, 1994), which have also been promoted, can be interpreted as principles reflecting various forms of altruism. The principles selected were - love, care, and concern; mutual respect; filial piety; commitment; and responsibility.

As stated, these national values reflect only a narrow perspective on life, but they the areas that are perceived as most crucial and demanding the most concern. However, despite the espousal of a communitarian ideology, it can be suggested that the underlying assumptions, upon which economic development has been based, in reality, reflect an alternative alignment to principles of a predominantly individual orientation in the pursuit of material gain. These implicit assumptions may, in fact, be more powerful than the explicitly stated objectives of the state. They may represent the true orientation of the people.

Recent research suggests that values form an integrated structure (Schwartz, 1992) and so the identification of a small selection of 'core values' is an endeavour that leads to important omissions. There is little of apparent relevance amongst the explicitly stated values that can be applied to the agonistic aspects of the culture of sport. As sport performs the joint-functions of social unifier and avenue for competitiveness, it may be argued that it shares, with economic activities, a similar characteristic of being required to harmonise individual and collective interests simultaneously.

The values and value priorities that emerge from an integration of personal experiences, socialisation, and the contextual elements that define the society, are associated with the decision to enter into, and commit to, the sport culture in Singapore (Aplin, 1999). Likewise, the ideational foundations of participation in, and commitment to physical education in Singapore are most likely to be manifest within the schools and the teacher training system.

How might this paradigm of communitarianism be reflected within applied to the field of sport and the field of physical education? As a first stage, it was decided to identify the values and value priorities of PE trainees. An experimental design was created to achieve this aim. It was assumed that the values of the trainees would reflect something of both the implicit characteristics of sport and PE, and of the explicit characteristics of the espoused national values. As a second stage, it was decided to establish the congruence of values associated PE and Sport with values associated with national values. This step could only be attempted with the aid of descriptive methods described later. It was hypothesised that the value priorities of PE trainees would be different from national values promoted by teachers in general.

In order to investigate and determine which values are prioritised in leading the motivation of individuals towards sport-related and physical education-related goals, the Schwartz Values Survey was used. It represents an instrument with proven reliability and validity in the examination of distinct individual-level differences. Schwartz (1992) asserts that values serve as guiding principles used in the pursuit of desirable goals, and are structured in a hierarchical form to enable certain 'priority' behaviours to prevail at the expense of others.

## **METHOD AND PROCEDURE**

With the aid of descriptive statistics, the value priorities of trainee PE teachers (Aplin, 1999) were compared with the value priorities of practising classroom teachers (Chang, 1994). Teachers are assumed to represent the carriers of the prevailing national values of a country most closely than any other group (Schwartz, 1992).

### SAMPLES

#### **a. Teacher Sample**

Utilising the Schwartz (1992) model, Chang (1994) studied the dimension of individualism/collectivism among 183 teachers in three primary and two secondary schools in Singapore. No information was available on age distribution or the gender ratio.

## b. PE Trainee Sample

A total of 134 PE trainees (91 males and 43 females) participated in this study. Mean age was 25.2 years (SD=2.96) years. These individuals were post-graduate students, who had selected physical education teaching as their vocation. The participants had been included in the pilot study of research into values associated with the pursuit of sports excellence in Singapore (Aplin, 1999).

### PROCEDURES

Participants were administered the Schwartz Value Survey (1992), which assesses values and value priorities, by the principal investigator. Consent was obtained and all students were verbally assured of anonymity and requested not to sign their survey form. The inventory took approximately 20 minutes to complete.

## RESULTS

### VALUE CONFIGURATIONS

The structure of relationships between the values of the PE trainees was assumed to be congruent with the cross-cultural theoretical prototype derived by Schwartz (1992). The reliability of the individual value constructs themselves was tested with the use of Cronbach Alpha coefficients. The Cronbach Alpha scores for the total sample were: Power (.73), Achievement (.69), Hedonism (.56), Stimulation (.79), Self-Direction (.49), Universalism (.75), Benevolence (.59), Tradition (.21), Conformity (.50), and Security (.58). Data at the level of value types were tested successfully for normality by means of skewness and kurtosis statistics.

### HYPOTHESIS TESTING

Table 1 illustrates the mean scores for the two samples. By comparing the ranking it is possible to demonstrate that, first, the value systems show a high degree of homogeneity. The Pearson Rank correlation coefficient was .884 ( $p=.001$ ) indicating that the two groups share similar values and the basic prioritisation of these values was very similar. Second, it was apparent that differences between the groups in specific value types were noticeable, although no statistical test could be undertaken in the absence of the practising teachers' raw data.

**Table 1:** Means and Standard Deviations of the Value Types for PE Trainees and Humanities Trainees

	Value Type	Mean PE Trainees	Mean Practising Teachers	Difference in mean score	Difference in rank order
	Benevolence	4.88	4.74	± 0.14	± 1

	Security	4.38	4.78	± 0.40	± 1	
	Conformity	4.33	4.63	± 0.30	=	
	Self-Direction	4.18	4.04	± 0.14	± 1	
	Achievement	4.07	3.67	± 0.40	± 1	
	Universalism	3.98	4.32	± 0.34	± 2	
	Hedonism	3.53	2.96	± 0.57	± 1	
	Stimulation	3.50	2.85	± 0.65	± 1	
	Tradition	3.33	3.65	± 0.32	± 2	
	Power	2.59	2.54	± 0.05	=	

Figure 1 demonstrates graphically the integrated relationships between the respective value systems of the two groups.

**Figure 1:** Value profiles of PE trainee teachers and teachers from Singapore. (Based on data from Singapore study of teachers by Chang in collaboration with Schwartz, 1994).

The scores of the PE trainees show that they place particular emphasis on three value types: Stimulation, Hedonism, and Achievement. These are recognised as characteristics closely associated with physical movement and the challenge of physical competition. By comparison, the practising teachers demonstrated a slight preference for conformity and tradition. As professional teachers, they are concerned with establishing a controlled environment for classroom learning. Needless-to-say, the inability to control for variables such as age, gender, and teaching experience, means that the results should be considered with caution.

In order to evaluate whether the results were convergent with other samples, a visual comparison was undertaken with Australian data. Descriptive statistics were derived from two studies. The value scores of Australian swimmers (Aplin, 1999) and the value scores of Australian teachers (Schwartz, 1994) were compared.

**Figure 2:** Value profiles of swimmers (Aplin, 1999) and teachers (Schwartz, 1994) from Australia.

Figure 2 shows that a similar configuration (but an even more pronounced pattern) was revealed. The characteristic shift of swimmers towards the sector including stimulation, hedonism, and achievement, and away from the sector including benevolence, tradition, and conformity gives a clear indication of the differences in value priorities between representatives of specific sub-culture and representatives of the national culture. Note that security and self-direction are anchoring points or shared values in the model. High-level competitive swimmers, who pursue excellence are characterised by the relative importance of all the value types within the system not just the absolute importance of individual values.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The primary purpose of this exploratory study was to discover if the possession of distinctive values is associated with the identity of groups engaged in different teaching orientations. Accepting the limitations of the design, it appears that PE trainees place greater emphasis on the importance of principles such as stimulation, hedonism, and achievement than practising teachers with a classroom emphasis. The homogeneity of the respective value systems is reassuring in its identification of the basic ideational structures of Singaporeans, whilst at the same time it was possible to suggest that the differences between the groups were attributable to characteristics commonly associated with involvement in physical activity.

The values of the national culture should be identifiable within representatives who are involved in the culture of sport, and yet there should also be specific differences in certain elements of the system which serve to define the identity of the sporting culture.

The communitarian ideology, which in Singapore, has been shaped by its various Asian cultures - primarily the Chinese, Indian, and Malay cultures, has placed considerable emphasis on a harmonious and self-transcending approach to life at a community level, on the one hand, and to the pursuit of meritocracy at an individual level, on the other hand. A utilitarian approach to physical activity has therefore evolved, whereby the individual is responsible for his or her own physical wellbeing and the potential contribution that can be made to the broader concerns of a well-ordered and competitive society.

This leads one to suggest that culture, and the maintenance of culture, may be confronted with the problem of dominance, that is permitting, with constraints, the expression of values potentially conflicting with the wider system. To achieve harmony the values of a sub-culture must not express beliefs that deviate too far from established norms.

What then are the values that define the culture of physical education and sport in schools? It would be misleading to suggest that trainee teachers represent fully the values of the established PE culture, however their reported scores do reinforce the theory that successful learning is based, in part, on the creation of a varied, exciting, and pleasurable environment. The emotions that are generated amongst enthusiastic participants in PE and sport are

undoubtedly fuelled and reinforced by the presence of challenge, imagination, and enjoyment.

### Stimulation, Hedonism, and Achievement

The need for stimulation and pleasure are important motivating forces for human behaviour. Likewise a sense of competency is an important component of intrinsic interest. Each is concerned with the way individuals react to their environment and particularly with the arousal-producing properties of varying degrees of environmental stimulation (Donnelly and Birrell, 1978). Based on the results in this study, the need for 'Stimulation' and 'Hedonism' are revealed as important criteria for participation in physical education and competitive sport in Singapore. Possibly even as motivation to commit to high-level performance levels.

The stimulation offered by sports participation is represented in affective experiences, which are presumably distinguishable from other experiences in the school environment. Decisions to participate or not are regulated by two factors: first, the compatibility of competitive involvement with the need for a certain type of stimulation, and second, by the strength of contending priorities, such as academic study and social engagement. Achievement of goals and standards represent an overt means of demonstrating the successful acquisition of skills and abilities.

A number of characteristics make sports participation stimulating. For example, the presence of challenge and the excitement generated in anticipation of challenge are often important objectives of participation. If challenges are not present in a sport programme then the intensity of involvement drops, boredom creeps in, and withdrawal may be the result (Clews and Gross, 1995). At another level, the feelings of competence and intrinsic pleasure, which result from successful attempts at exploration, mastery, curiosity, challenge have been identified as important elements in encouraging a positive motivational orientation towards sport (e.g. Biddle and Brooke, 1992).

In conclusion, it appears that the problems associated with examining the values or ideational structure of PE and sport in Singapore are confounded by the distinctions that exist between the implicit values and the explicit values. It was not possible within this study to evaluate these conceptual differences by empirical means. The values used as guiding principles by the PE trainees could with some justification be assumed to be an amalgam of deeply held personal values - some specific to the culture of sport and PE - and also collectively espoused values that are accepted more as norms than as beliefs.

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