

Contemporary PE reform in China: Teachers' talk

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Abstract

Among the many changes occurring across Chinese society in the early phase of Y2K is the construction and implementation of a new physical education (PE) curriculum. Not unlike recent changes in Australia, New Zealand and the UK, this process has seen a heightening of the profile of Health. Presented within a wider framework for making the school curriculum more relevant, PE is more closely aligned with China's emerging health concerns around young people. Foremost here are burgeoning social anxieties about decreased levels of physical activity, dietary practices, risk-taking tendencies, and a general decline of social cohesion/connection across the profile of contemporary youth.

This paper reports on a study undertaken to explore the perceptions of Chinese PE teachers as they engage with the new curriculum. The data reveals a number of structural, personal and cultural factors that work against PE teachers taking up the opportunities presented in the new curriculum. Prominent here are; low professional status, an expanding generation gap, lack of training and the grip of deeply rooted cultural values.

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Introduction

China has attracted a huge amount of interest from around the world over the last two decades on the back of its rapid and vigorous development. Rapid economic growth has brought with it substantial structural and ideological reform to almost all trades and professions across China. Accompanying this rapid economic development has been an unsettling of traditional Chinese culture. As with any period of rapid social change there are an element of instability as the known and familiar are challenged and over-written (Mebrahtu et al., 2000). Among the array of institutional markers of change has been the re-organization of the school curriculum. Prominent here has been the introduction of a new National Curriculum designed to better accommodate the needs of contemporary, and future, China.

It is wrong to think of globalisation as just concerning big systems, like the world financial order. Globalisation isn't only about what is 'out there', remote and far away from the individual. It is an 'in here' phenomenon too, influencing intimate and personal aspects of our lives. (Giddens, 1999)

Not unlike recent changes in Australia and the UK, the new National Curriculum in China has seen an increased coupling between the previously discrete disciplines of physical education (PE) and health (H) (Penney, 2004). In accordance with its traditional accent on the four core pillars of educational development, namely moral, intellectual, physical and aesthetic, physical education continues to be seen as a basic element of a comprehensive school curriculum. Though the dominant educational discourses in China continue to be geared toward the production and distillation of intellectual knowledge (cognitive processes), the new PE&H curriculum recognises principles of maintaining good health as a basic condition for human happiness and productivity. The new curriculum positions PE as a medium through which young people can learn to appreciate the value of regular exercise. With an increased focus on health prevention PE is seen to play an important role in promoting healthy lifestyle and exercise practices that will contribute to a stronger, healthier and happier Chinese society.

While there has been considerable research into the new National Curriculum published in academic journals in China, the overwhelming majority of this has pursued quantitative forms of analysis. Indeed, there are very few qualitatively-driven attempts to look below the surface of what is happening and consider 'why' questions. In accordance with the dominant research paradigm teacher's perspectives and experiences have been overwhelmingly collected within questionnaire formats. This pattern is consistent with the wider cultural privileging of 'scientific' knowledge and 'scientific' research where statistical analysis is all-powerful. The wide spread marginalisation of qualitative research is exacerbated in fields like PE where the discipline knowledge is heavily rooted in the biological and sports sciences. Within this knowledge regime only a small amount of qualitative data has been gathered with regard to how teachers are interpreting and engaging the new PE&H curriculum.

Even though we know quite a lot about how PE teachers deal with curriculum change in Western cultures, very little is known about the lived experiences of PE teachers in China during like times of change (Amour & Jones, 1998; Penney, 1998; Sparkes, Templin & Schemmp, 1990; Worrall, 1999). This research was designed to explore the perceptions and experiences of Chinese PE teachers during a time of substantial curriculum change. Recognising 'real' change to be a complex and fraught process (Hickey, 2001; Sparkes, 1990), this research focused on how well the new PE&H curriculum connects with the existing knowledge, practices and beliefs of PE teachers in schools. In the tradition of case study research we sought to capture a particularistic, holistic and descriptive account of how Chinese PE teachers understand and interpret their practice during a time of rapid social and educational change (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Yin 2003). Within a theoretical framework that recognises meaning to be fluid and revisable, this paper reports on insights gleaned through semi-structured interviews with 18 practicing PE teachers in a coast city in Northeast China.

Physical Education curriculum reform in China

The new Chinese National Curriculum Standard comprises 18 subjects which includes PE & H. PE has maintained a fairly stable place in the Chinese curriculum since its alignment within the reforms associated with the establishment of 'New China', in 1949. Based on its close connections with the Soviet Union, PE programs have, since 1949, been heavily focused on the development and demonstration of physical skill and discipline. During this time the main content areas of the PE curriculum have been gymnastics, track and field, basketball, football, and volleyball. The evaluation system set up around PE was weighted very heavily toward the attainment and recognition of physical excellence. Within this orientation, student achievement was observed in those who could run fastest, jump highest, balance longest and throw further. During this time pre-service and in-service teacher training programs were heavily orientated toward the provision of pedagogic content knowledge, expressed as teacher expertise (Schulman 1986). Within this context teachers were encouraged to specialise in one or two sports. Areas of specialism were usually determined by a teacher's own history of performance in their chosen sport.

The rapid development of Chinese society, especially in the recent two decades, has provoked a rethink of the place and purpose of PE in the school curriculum. In 2002 the Chinese National Education Ministry put forward a series of statements outlining the basis of educational reform for the new millennium. Foremost here was a recognition that, "a healthy body is the basic requirement for young people to serve the country... healthy bodies are the foundation of the vigorous vitality of the Chinese nation. School education should be built on a conception of 'health first', therefore strengthening the place of physical education in schools" (p. 1). Similar to Australia, Britain and New Zealand, this shift in emphasis ushered was accompanied by a corresponding change in the name of the discipline area, from PE to PE & H.

Comparisons between the old PE curriculum to the new PE&H curriculum reveal a number of important changes to the fundamental goals and practices of the discipline. The new curriculum articulates the contemporary focus of school PE as being the enhancement of student health and well-being. In the preface part of the new PE&H curriculum the following explanation is provided:

With the rapid development of science and technology, especially the globalisation of economy, the quality of human beings' material and cultural life has improved a great deal. But a modern style of production and life-style has meant a decrease in manual work and a corresponding increase in psychological pressure, which can seriously threaten and menace human beings' health. Modern people must realise that focussing on health is not about illness, but also about how to maintain good physical, mental and social condition. By recognising peoples' health as essential to national development, social improvement and individual happiness, physical education becomes a very important channel to improve health. (Chinese National Education Ministry, 2001, p. 1)

Inherent in this focus is an increasing recognition of the lifestyle changes that are now part of a rapidly changing China. Whereas the old curriculum placed heavy emphasis on personal discipline and control the new curriculum recognises the place of PE in providing health messages to a generation. Underpinning this is an increasing awareness that China's rising affluence is being accompanied by reduced exercise, increased popularity of fast food, decreased levels of fitness and the marked increased incidence of obesity among young people (Ji, et al. 2004). Embedded in this is a major pedagogic shift from a transmissive orientation towards a more constructivist one, on the spectrum of teaching styles. Prioritising participation over perfection, the new PE&H curriculum encourages PE teachers to provide students with opportunities to explore, and experiment with, a wide range of movement possibilities. Among the more enduring aspects of the old and new curriculum is a continued emphasis on PE providing a conduit to fostering a sense of collective purpose and national pride.

The conception of 'health first' in the new PE&H curriculum challenges many aspects of the traditional PE theory and practice. Moving away from its roots in the biological sciences, the new curriculum represents a fusion of psychology, physiology, environmental science, sociology, nutrition and health promotion. One of the important reform steps in the new curriculum involves considerable modifications to the core focus of existing PE programs. Here the emphasis is shifted from the function of distinguishing students who are highly capable in specific sport skills to a focus on participation and its contribution to physical, mental and social health. As one of its core educational goals, contemporary PE teachers are expected to stimulate students' desire, or approach tendencies, to participate in sporting and recreational activities and nurture life-long habits of involvement. This represents a fundamental change in the way PE has been understood and practiced in Chinese schools.

The research method

It was within a qualitative research framework that we interviewed 18 practicing PE teachers in a coastal city in the Northeast of China. Underpinning this was the fact that qualitative research is oriented toward developing 'thick' descriptions of particular phenomena (events, experiences and the meanings that are attached to them) within an epistemology of the *particular*. From this stand-point, the principles and practices of narrative enquiry are underpinned by a research orientation that leans toward the making of meaning that is simultaneously contingent and contextual (Stake, 1995). All participants were full-time PE teachers with at least ten years teaching experience. Beyond this, participants were chosen with a view to

establishing a degree of gender balance and providing a diversity of school contexts spanning the different socio-economic stratum that exist across the city. Among the 18 teachers, ten were male and eight female; 12 were from secondary schools and six from primary schools; five from relatively prestigious schools, four were from average schools, while the remaining four were from low decile schools. It is from this data set that we set out to 'analyse, interpret and theorise' the impact of PE curriculum reform PE in contemporary China (Merriam, 1998).

The research participants were recruited to the project via the regional Education Bureau. Potential participants were identified and contacted via a letter of invitation to participate in the research. During this initial contact the purpose of the study, the research process and what would be required of them if they chose to consent was outlined. It was also clarified at this time that any participant who chose to consent had the option to withdraw from the study at any time and that any data gathered up to that point of withdrawal would not be utilised. The letter also emphasised that participants would be encouraged to speak openly, without fear of recrimination. Once participants indicated that they were interesting in partaking in the research project a statement of informed consent was mailed to them. The informed consent statement clearly outlined how anonymity would be protected throughout the project. Given the cultural tendency among the Chinese not to be seen to criticise their seniors/superiors (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005) the potential risk associated with them being identified were conveyed to each participant in the process of securing their consent. Protecting their anonymity was operationalised through the allocation of pseudonyms in all aspects of the transcription and reporting processes.

In order to encourage frank and open dialogue we opted for a semi-structured interview format. Research methodologists describe this research approach as narrative, which they claim "offers exciting alternatives for connecting the lives and stories of individuals to the understanding of larger human and social phenomena" (Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995, p. 113). Polkinghorne (cited in Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995) describes a model of "narrative analysis" which involves the gathering of descriptions of events and happenings and generates a narrative as a research product (p. 126). Previous research that has focussed on the extrapolation of teacher's personal experiences through interviews, and then presented them as narrative, includes the works of Ayers (1989), Casey (1993) and Sparkes (1994). In each of the above studies, teachers were asked to comment on various aspects of their professional life and this was translated as a narrative for their final research product. The information gathered from the six participants acted to provide a narrative about the experience of being a PE teacher in contemporary China.

During the interviews, participants were encouraged to express their thoughts and feelings towards being a PE teacher in contemporary China. Inherent in this was our interest in exploring their perceptions of the social changes occurring in China and their effects on education and PE. Within this we invited them to describe how contemporary social and educational change was impacting their day-to-day existence as a PE teacher. Towards the end of the interview participants were asked to describe the way they saw new PE&H curriculum in the future and what interventions might be needed to facilitate its passage. In the interest of projecting the authenticity of the data we include the undistorted voices of participants in the presentation of the findings.

Data collection took place at times and locations convenient to the research participant, outside of school working hours. All interviews were conducted in Chinese (Mandarin) and initially transcribed into Chinese. It is well known that words, meanings and concepts do not always easily translate across cultures and languages. Therefore, translators need to be skilled in finding ways to convey concepts from one language into another (Tsai, et al, 2004), particularly with regard to making decisions about the 'cultural meanings' which language carries (Temple & Edwards, 2002). Tsai, et al (2004) suggests that the more knowledgeable researchers are about the cultural beliefs and value orientations of the interviewees, the better able they will be in their interpretations and translations of meaning. From this point of view, the translator is pivotal to cross language research because communication across many languages involves more than just a literal transfer of words.

We began the process of analysing the data by reading the transcriptions through several times with a view to identifying key (poignant or recurring) ideas, opinions, and issues. To facilitate the initial sorting process, we employed colour-code to delineate different issues that emerged from the transcripts. These colour codings were then collated and used as a way of integrating the entire data set. The determination of themes was facilitated through the identification of recurring views, experiences and perceptions emerging from the transcripts. The processes involved in sorting the individual transcripts into concepts and categories, and then compiling, naming and arranging the emergent themes, were highly recursive.

The Findings

The findings presented here focus some of the key barriers that the teachers identified to them implementing the new PE&H curriculum. In other words, the findings are a representation of the impediments to change. Central to our analysis is the fact that all 18 teachers expressed their support for the fundamental goal to put more emphasis on *health* in the new curriculum. While many of the participants tempered their support for the new curriculum over the course of their interview it is fair to say that, as a collective, the teachers overwhelmingly endorsed its broad direction. In this section we outline of the key factors that constrained the translation of this support, into practice.

To present the research findings we have organised the barriers to change into three broad categories, namely *personal*, *structural*, and *cultural* factors. We recognise that these distinctions are artificial and that many of the issues we describe within them could be extended across several categories. However, leaning on the scholarship of social theorists such as Fay (1987) and Giddens (1991 & 1984) we use them as heuristic devices for understanding and interpreting rationality and its limits. In exploring the processes of change both Fay and Giddens help us to make sense of some of the inconsistencies, ambiguities and resistances that the teachers revealed during their interviews. Here we are particularly attuned to the ways history, tradition and habit inscribe the perceptions and attitudes that teachers have towards change. To this end, the issues we present here are not a comprehensive representation of the rather as projections of some of the recurring themes that emerged from the data.

Personal Factors

During the interviews all teachers talked about their dissatisfaction with their professional life as a PE teacher in schools. Prominent here were feelings of exhaustion, frustration, powerlessness and a general lack of support around implementing the new curriculum. The interview transcripts revealed that the teachers were too busy keeping up with the day to day demands of being a PE teacher to engage meaningfully with the new curriculum. A typical working day timetable started between 7:00 to 7:30 am, and for some it was as early as 6:30 and finished around 4:30 pm. On average they teach about 13 classes per week with 40 to 45 minutes for each class. Typical class sizes are around 60 to 70 students, and rarely go below 50. As PE teachers, their responsibility extends beyond PE classes to include the organization and delivery of daily exercise programs, conducted in the morning and the afternoon.

Compounding this is a PE teacher's involvement in a range of after school activities, such as training school teams and organizing interschool competitions. They also spend a lot of time on non-teaching activities such as meetings, writing reports on practice and performance, writing a teaching diary, assessing each other's teaching, and other administrative duties. Zhang lamented, *'I think only half of my energy has been used on teaching, and the other half is just for so many odd jobs and things, including meetings, term summary reports, teaching quality analysis, ranking teachers and students'*. Some teachers do think about how to fulfil their duty better in the course of curriculum reform and creative new ideas came to them occasionally, but they were often too tired to actually do anything about what they thought and merely work on what they have to do. Xue explained, *'after a whole morning of PE teaching I am very tired and don't think I can do as well as the first class for the rest of teaching - let alone to consider the new demands of the curriculum reform'*. A recent investigation revealed that PE teachers have a normal work-load that is 15% to 20% heavier than other subject teachers (Dong, 2002). The same research also indicated that prolonged overwork created heavy psychological pressure that was a major source of burnout among PE teachers.

The interview data also revealed that the Chinese system of ranking teachers is a major source of frustration and stress for PE teachers. Here, a teacher's rank is seen to be highly correlated with the examinations scores achieved by his/her students. Quite simply, the higher the student scores the higher the rank given to the teacher. Given that PE is not a subject required for higher education entrance examination, PE teachers often got low rankings and felt very undervalued in schools. Xue complained *'no matter how hard we work, PE teachers are very seldom rated as excellent or even good. We are always ranked in the latter half or even at the end...'* As a main vector for promotion and dismissal the teachers generally felt they were more vulnerable than for teachers in other disciplines.

The interview process also revealed that the PE teachers feel a strong sense of inadequacy in terms of implementing the new curriculum. They were in broad agreement that the discipline knowledge and teaching skills they had developed through their training, was out of step with the demands of the new curriculum reform. All of them mentioned, to lesser and greater extents, that their lack of appropriate training was a major obstacle to them implementing of the new

curriculum. Yu commented *'my knowledge structure lacks a lot for today's PE teaching and today's community health... I need to learn new knowledge and skills that I didn't learn in the university in order to achieve what I am going to be expected to do in the New PE and Health curriculum'*. She added, *'the capacities of teachers do not match the demands of the new curriculum, so I see an urgent need for reform to PE teacher education programs'*.

Systematic and Structural Factors

In the Chinese education system today, the two important educational events are the entrance examination from junior high to senior high school and the entrance examination from senior high school to university. These events are very powerful in forming and maintaining the direction of school development because the promotion or success rates in these two examinations are used as the key standards for school evaluations. Under this arrangement the promotion rate has become the key focus of school leaders, teachers, students and parents. The intensely competitive logic built into this process is widely accepted as 'normal' across mainstream Chinese society. In a densely populated society where access to resources is limited, success in the entrance exams is seen as a direct pathway to securing a good job and earn a high salary. In practical terms, students who do well in their entrance exams gain admission a key or top senior high schools and universities.

Currently, PE is not a component of the higher education entrance examination process. In lieu of the heavy focus given to the promotion rates achieved through this process, what happens in PE gains only very marginal attention in schools. Yu lamented that, *'PE classes are sometimes replaced by other classes in order to guarantee high examination results and high promotion rates'*. This situation appeared to be a deep source of frustration to the PE teachers. Qu, a father and also a teacher worried that, *'students now are developing quite an imbalance between the mental and physical levels. They work too much on their brain and too little on their body'*. Unfortunately, the new PE&H curriculum appears to offer very little in terms of addressing this situation. Rather than showing any signs of abating Chen felt that, *'the tendency towards examination-oriented education is getting stronger and stronger - students have no choice, parents have no choice, teachers have no choice and schools have no choice, and so the only thing we can do is go further along this direction'*.

During the interviews all teachers raised concerns about pre- and in-service teacher training programs for PE teachers. The general consensus here was that the training that was offered through these programs was not well aligned to the needs of today's teachers. Further to this, they generally felt that they had not been effectively prepared to deal with change. Yu conveyed the very limited and specialised nature of her teacher training, stating that, *'my major was volleyball when I was studying in the university so I become very good at teaching volleyball and not so good at other activities'*. *The situation is really embarrassing now for me faced with the new curriculum reform.* Yu's described her experience during her undergraduate studies as follows:

'... the huge social change and basic education reform demand urgent reform to higher education and PE teacher training programs... Too much emphasis

was put on track and field, basketball, volleyball, football and gymnastics when I was a student in the university. But we didn't learn tennis, bowling, golf, preparation exercises and other fun activities that are in high demand today. So our knowledge structure is insufficient for today's PE teaching'.

Three decades after the implementation of the national policy of family planning (one couple one child) China's first-generation of 'only children' have grown up and have become young adults. In today's schools almost all students are the only child in their family. This unique situation brings with it a number of challenges to today's Chinese education. During the interviews all teachers raised concerns around the negative aspects the 'only child' brings to their daily teaching and the process of educational reform. Their overwhelmingly negative opinions towards the 'one child' generation were very enlightening. Pejorative descriptors, such as 'selfish', 'spoilt', 'lazy', and 'disrespectful' were littered across the transcripts. Teachers generally felt that today's parents pay far too much attention to their only child's academic performance and do little to develop their personal and social development. Wang expressed her concern about the only child generation saying:

The only child in the family has been loved blindly and spoilt and is called the 'sun' or the 'little emperor' of the family. They become very selfish, don't care about others. They are too self-centred....

Xue rendered this issue more problematic when trying to reconcile her competing interests as a teacher and also a mother:

Parents hope their only child will be a 'dragon' or a 'phoenix'. My daughter, who is only 9 years old, has to attend some classes outside normal school education. These are English, dancing, fine art, piano and things....I hope she would have a better life in the future not like me..... All parents are willing to give all they have to their only child including all their money no matter how poor they are. They invest too much on the child's education.

Cultural Factors

Traditional Chinese culture enshrined the teacher as a person of wisdom and honour, to be respected and trusted. Though teachers were never rewarded well materially their nourishment was said to be in nurturing the growth of others. In traditional Chinese culture students were expected to be obedient and tractable (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). The cultural passing on of the ability/discipline to self-regulate meant that teachers were rarely challenged. Today, under the influence of huge impact the market and an abundant access to goods or products a competing set of cultural values have emerging within Chinese culture. Emanating from this is pressure to establish a new/different relational order between teacher and their students. While *generations* are difficult constructs to apply, it is fair to say that decidedly different discourses pervaded Chinese culture each side of the 1970s. The emergence of China in market economics and the one child policy produced a sort of cultural transformation that penetrated all aspects of Chinese existence. It was therefore not surprising that cultural values emerged as an analytic theme.

All 18 teachers employed the notion of generational change to describe attitudes and behaviours that they felt were typical of young people in China. While there was some reference to attributes such as ‘resourceful, imaginative, creative and open-minded’, their critique of contemporary youth was overwhelmingly negative. ‘Selfish, disrespectful, lazy and spoilt’ were words or sentiments more frequently employed to describe them. The teachers were unanimous in the view that today’s students are much harder to manage than those that have gone before them. Indeed, a number of the teachers identified the attitudes and behaviours of today’s youth as the biggest challenge to teachers. Liu explained, “...*it is much more difficult to manage and organize today’s students because they don’t obey their teachers like before, they don’t respect their teachers - not like they did before*”. At the heart of their disenchantment with young people was a seeming inability to manage or control their behaviours. In describing his current discontent with teaching Cong highlighted the difficulties in dealing with today’s youth. “*Today’s students are much more difficult to control and manage. They do not respect what the teacher says. In my day the teacher was always right but now they think they are. Being a teacher now is much harder and much less satisfying*”.

The discord between the generations had its most tangible impact on the teachers in the implementation of pedagogy. Forefront to this was an increasing realisation that the pedagogical practices they defaulted to were not proving effective in dealing with today’s students. Ma explained, “*today’s students are not of a tractable generation, therefore, it is really necessary for teachers to learn new strategies to handle them*”. However, unlike Ma, most teachers reflected on the past to reconcile the pedagogic dilemmas that had emerged for them. Rather than teachers having to adapt to meet the demands of a changing youth, they tended to hope that today’s students might adopt the practices of the past. Chen expressed his ideas for improving the current situation saying, “...*I would much prefer to teach the students of 10 years ago. It would be much better if students now were expected to behave like they used to*”. Qu revealed a very similar sentiment in commenting, “*at the beginning of my teacher journey it was not hard to organise a class because most of the students were tractable. We need to teach today’s students how to behave properly and respect their teachers more.*” For most of the teachers the attitudes and practices of today’s youth were interpreted as a violation of culture, rather than an evolution of culture.

Further complicating the implementation of the new curriculum is the demand for teachers to employ more inclusive and creative forms of pedagogy. The shift in curriculum emphasis toward participation is progressed around a demand to get young people involved and active. While at a surface level this change appeared to have the support of the PE teachers, its implementation requires a fundamental pedagogic shift that they felt very uncertain about. Wang believed that the current uncertainty about how PE teachers should implement the new curriculum was at least in part due to the lack of direction that they had received. ‘*We hoped the experts of curriculum reform could offer us the framework or plan on how to teach the new PE curriculum ... but we have had no direction and we do not know how to teach now*’ (Wang). Zhang was another who expressed this concern:

The new curriculum reform calls for the creative work of teachers. But the fact is that most teachers are not capable of doing creative work, they need a lot of help.

One of the tensions that emerged in our discussions about the teaching demands associated with the new curriculum was a perceived lack of connection between the curriculum aspirations and teacher training. Prominent here were concerns among the teachers that they don't have the cultural dispositions required to implement the new curriculum. Having grown up and been schooled in traditional Chinese context has meant that most practicing PE teachers are poorly prepared for some of the demands that are brought forth in the new curriculum. Lui captured this sentiment in the following:

My teacher training never taught me how to explore new ways of doing things and I have never been taught that in the past 10 years. Students don't have to master sports skills and listen to teacher's descriptions of how to perform them correctly and cleanly. Curriculum reform asks PE teachers to offer a relaxed and joyful environment for students in PE class. I really have no idea how this should be done.

At the heart of this, and many similar comments, was a recognition that the pedagogic demands of the new curriculum were in direct conflict with many of the conventions and sensibilities that frame their commonsense ideas about *effective teaching*. It was around areas of practice that the teachers expressed their strongest opposition to the new curriculum.

To tell you the truth I feel that I would be leading young people astray. I would feel ashamed to be failing my duty as a PE teacher if I didn't teach my students any sport skills, and I just gave them freedom! (Chen)

Discussion

Major curriculum changes are understood to be complex undertakings no matter where they are embarked on around the world (Fullan, 1999; 2001). The data presented in this paper confirms many aspects of what we have learned about the complex nature of this process. Foremost here is the need for some level of personal commitment to the espoused changes. While systems and structures can be put in place to encourage, even force, teachers to engage with new curriculum offerings, the absence of a personal commitment to the change will inevitably dilute or undermine its carriage. In the case of PE in China it seems that despite their apparent recognition of the need for change, teachers lack a personal commitment to its delivery. For most of the teachers that we spoke to during this research, the lack of personal commitment to implementing the new curriculum stemmed from their inability to transport new rhetoric into new practice. General feelings of being over-worked and under-valued have been shown to clearly undermine a teacher's willingness to take up the challenges associated with widespread curriculum change (ref ?). While such attitudes prevail it is difficult to see Chinese PE teachers devoting the necessary time and effort to facilitate the change process.

Further complicating the curriculum change process in China is a lack of support and recognition given to PE in schools. As a subject that sits outside of the Entrance Examination process, the status of PE in the school curriculum is very marginal. Prominent here is a general lack of a shared commitment to the implementation of the

new goals and practices espoused within the new PE curriculum. School leaders were widely condemned within the data set for failing to provide the necessary conditions that would support and encourage PE teachers in the processes of change. Provoked by a system that greatly privileges academic results over personal development, the contribution that PE makes to educative process is destined for marginality. Of course the lack of commitment to PE on behalf of school leaders is symptomatic of the highly competitive situation that distinguishes winners and losers in the Chinese education system. While schools and individuals continue to be recognised solely for their academic achievements, of which PE is seen to make no contribution, the impetus for nurturing change will seemingly only ever be partial.

It is around issues of culture that the pursuit of curriculum change in PE becomes more nuanced to the Chinese context. Prominent here is the depth of the generational divide that was shown to exist between the expectations of teachers and their students. The transcripts revealed a shift in the fundamental values and attitudes from those who grew up and were educated under the old (egalitarian) regime and those who have grown up within the new (market) regime. While most teachers revealed a surface level of support for the need for curriculum change they were far less accepting of the generational characteristics of the young people it was designed to enhance. It was here that their commitment to the new PE&H curriculum was most strained. In the absence of any pedagogic direction on how to implement it, the practical translation of the new curriculum was overwhelmingly seen as a further diminution of the status of PE teachers. At a time when PE teachers are calling out for respect and recognition for the work they do, the decentering of their discipline expertise is intensely problematic.

In seeking to understand the struggle for curriculum change in PE in China it is important to situate it within the wider context of socio-political discourse. Inherent in this is a broad recognition that many aspects of traditional Chinese culture are in a process of transition. In the reflexive process of cultural identity aspects of the old and new appear to exist simultaneously, albeit in tension. Unparalleled levels of social and economic change, coupled with a unique family planning policy (one couple, one child) make China a unique context for curriculum reform.

China is both capitalist and communist, ravenously inquisitive and strictly censored, and the world is beginning to wonder if this strange equilibrium can be sustained. Can it be that China has found a new third way, neither the Soviet-style, totalitarian planned economy, nor western-style democracy and a free market? Can the world's most populous country really go on indefinitely combining censorship, a rigidly controlled media, and an authoritarian, secretive, one-party state with a dynamic, entrepreneurial culture and technological progress, and not suffer some economic or political crisis? (Meek, 2004)

Though the teachers we spoke to had intentions of honouring their professional obligations to the new curriculum, there were many aspects of this process that seemed to run counter to their fundamental beliefs about the educative process and their roles as teachers. Prominent here was their personal commitment to traditional cultural values such as; respect for elders, deference to authority, collectivism over individualism, uniformity over pluralism and the Confucian ideals of self-restraint and self-discipline. The teachers we spoke to revealed little inclination that they were

ready to compromise or depart from these cultural values to progress the new PE&H curriculum.

Though the teachers we spoke to identified their general lack of training and lack of support and equipment as impediments to the carriage of new PE&H curriculum, its perceived malalignment with their long held cultural values also forged a considerable block. One of the obvious places to initiate momentum for change is at the pre-service teacher education level. Foremost here is the need to shift the prevailing theory and practice of physical education from instruction for physical excellence to facilitating healthy participation. While many aspects of the curriculum change process in China appear comparable to like experiences elsewhere in the world, the struggle for cultural values between the generations appears magnified in contemporary China. The new physical education and health curriculum is calling for greater versatility in physical education teachers who are required to develop new teaching practices that engage with new learning philosophies of the new cultural context. To accommodate this, there is an urgent need for physical education teacher education programs to provide undergraduate students with the basic pedagogic building blocks around which they can take up the demands of the new curriculum. Better alignment between the school physical education curriculum and undergraduate physical education teacher education programs would serve to better prepare student teachers for contemporary and future demands of the profession

In conclusion, the extant literature built up and curriculum change in PE indicates that is reasonable to expect a degree of teacher resistance. To this end, the expressions of teacher resistance to the introduction of the new PE&H curriculum in China are in no way exceptional. Rather than being viewed as roadblocks, the expressions of teacher resistance uncovered in this research provide valuable insights into the sorts of interventions needed to support its carriage. If the passage of the new curriculum is going to progress from rhetoric to reality there is clearly a need for targeted support for teachers. Central to this is the need for strategic in-service training. In the absence of a clear and coherent framework to guide the practical translation of the goals of the new curriculum it is very difficult to see the reform being successful. In providing PE teachers with the pedagogic resources to implement the participatory agenda of new PE&H curriculum, specific attention should be directed to providing them with the socio-cultural lenses necessary to reconcile the grip of tradition.

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