

# A Case Study on Preschool Physical Education Curriculum in Zhuhai, China : Implications for Preschool Physical Education Reform in Macau and Hong Kong

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The purpose of this study was to examine the existing preschool physical education curriculum as implemented in a government nursery in Zhuhai, China through an ethnographic case study involving the use of participant observation, unstructured interviews, questionnaires and study of documents and records.

The results revealed that strictly based on the National Education Guidelines (Nursery), one structured physical education lesson of about 30 minutes per week was organized by two certified preschool teachers in the nursery. Also, a nation-wide preschool physical education syllabus was provided to all teachers for reference. Everyday, a 15 minute morning physical exercise session and a 60 minute physical activity session were arranged for children in the nursery. The spacious indoor games room and outdoor playground with water pool and sand pool and the well-equipped large physical apparatus all contributed to a successful preschool physical education curriculum.

The study's findings have provided systematic and illuminative information as well as elements useful for the preschool physical education curriculum form in Hong Kong and Macau. These vital elements consist of: full government subsidy for early childhood education; the compilation of preschool education guidelines and syllabus; the provision of adequate facilities and equipment; and the offer of well-trained preschool teachers. Finally constructive recommendations on these aspects for Hong Kong and Macau are suggested.

## 幼兒體育課程的中國珠海個案研究： 對澳門和香港幼兒體育課程改革之啓示

本文旨在透過個案研究去探究一所中國珠海市政府幼兒園現行的幼兒體育課程，研究工具包括：參與者觀察、非系統式訪問、問卷及資料和記錄的查閱。

研究結果顯示，該所幼兒園依從國家教育指引（幼兒園）編定每星期一課由兩位合格教師任教達三十分鐘的系統式體育課，而且全國統一的幼兒體育課程指引亦有提供給教師作參考。每天學生均享有十五分鐘的早操和六十分鐘的體育活動。此外，寬敞的遊戲室、戶外活動場地、水池和沙池區；設備完善之大型體育器械亦能帶給該園成功的幼兒體育課程。

跟據研究結果，該研究對香港和澳門之幼兒體育課程改革提供系統性和啓發性的重要參考資料。其實，基要的課程改革原素包括：政府對幼兒教育的全力資助；編寫幼兒教育之課程指引和綱要；足夠的設施和器材；及提供良好受訓的教師。最後本文亦在幼兒體育課程改革方面提供建設性的建議。

## Introduction

The early childhood period can be defined from as " birth through age eight" (NAECY, 1982).The preschool years (3 to 6 years old) are crucial for learning development (Skinner, 1979; Kelly & Kelly, 1985; Oppen, 1992) since this is the time when young children acquire many of the basic skills and abilities which serve as the foundation for subsequent development (Bloom, 1965; White & Watts, 1973; Oppen, 1992). In early childhood education (ECE), movement has been viewed as the course of all learning and it is the essence of life through which young children learn (Vannier & Gallahue, 1978). Therefore, motor learning and development through spontaneous physical play and time-tabled physical education (P.E.) are essential parts of the ECE curriculum. Therefore, structured P.E. is highly recommended in preschool programs by the Council of Physical Education for Children (COPEC, 1994), National Association for the Education of Young Children (Bredekamp, 1987) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Service (1992).

The contents of physical education in preschool programs consists of both fundamental motor skills and movement concepts. Children are ready to begin learning these skills and concepts by age 3 or 4 (Gallahue, 1989; Sanders, 1992). Evidence shows that learning fundamental motor skills may have a positive effect on self concept and social skill development (Gallahue; 1989; Williams, 1983). According to Lever (1976, 1978), children develop many social skills through their play experience. Consequently, participation in sports and games promotes the development of leadership skills, independence, assertiveness, and confidence (Lever, 1978). Participation in sports may also contribute substantially to cognitive development (Emmot, 1985).More convincing is the evidence that preschool P.E. programs can have a significant, positive effect on children's

fundamental motor skill performance (Ignico, 1992, a; 1992, b) and health-related fitness (Ignico, 1990). In a word, the physical, social, mental, moral and intellectual values of early childhood P.E. have been scientifically and socially proven.

Zhuhai, Macau and Hong Kong are situated in the Pearl River Delta region and are modern cities forming a geographical triangle. Preprimary education (from age 3 to 6) is an accepted part of all the cities' culture. In Zhuhai, young children receive preschool education in nurseries which are regulated by the Zhuhai Education Committee (ECE section). In Macau, about 99% of young children between the ages of 3 to 6 years go to a kindergarten which is registered with the Macau Education and Youth Department. However, in Hong Kong, preschool consists of kindergartens regulated by the Education Department for 82% of the children, or of day nurseries regulated by the Social Welfare Department for 17%.

Preschool P.E. including both structured P.E. and free physical play is a compulsory unit in Zhuhai's ECE program. However, structured P.E. has been considered as a supplementary unit in the kindergarten curriculum of Hong Kong and Macau. In Hong Kong's nurseries, according to the Child Care Centers Ordinance, Chapter 243, (1990), free play activities consisting of indoor and outdoor play should be arranged daily.

Evidence shows that it is a difficult task to conduct preschool P.E. programs in Hong Kong due to the major obstacles in non-unified preschool staff training systems (Oppen, 1992, a); inadequate content and contact hours in P.E. (Wong, 1993, b); insufficient P.E. facilities and equipment (Wong, 1992); and an over-emphasis on academic performance from parents (Oppen, 1994). In Macau, the extreme non-interventionist philosophy of the Macau government (Bray & Tang, 1994); insufficient P.E. facilities and equipment (Low, 1994; Wong, 1994, 1995, b); and inadequate teaching resources (Wong, 1993, a; 1995, a; 1995, b) are the major difficulties. Consequently, preschool P.E. has been viewed as a dessert on the menu of early childhood curriculum in Hong Kong and Macau.

In Macau, usually time-tabled free play and P.E. lessons are scheduled twice a week and for 20-30 minutes a period in private kindergartens. Morning exercises are not compulsory. In Hong Kong, time-tabled 30 minutes free play and P.E. lessons are conducted in kindergartens five times and two times a week respectively; while compulsory 30-50 minutes free play and P.E. are usually conducted twice every day and twice a week respectively in nurseries. However, due to the shortage of outdoor playgrounds, insufficient play equipment and large P.E. apparatus, simple fundamental movement skills and manipulative skills dominate the P.E. curriculum in Macau and Hong Kong. As well as this, the lack of centralized kindergarten guidelines and syllabus and inadequate teaching resources have hindered the development of preschool P.E. in Macau. More than 46% of kindergarten teachers in Hong Kong (Education Department, 1994) and 36% of kindergarten teachers in Macau (Macau Education Department, 1994) have not received any training.

With an understanding of the major deficiencies in the P.E. curriculum in Macau and Hong Kong, the present study seeks to investigate the features and examine the characteristics of the existing preschool physical education curriculum of a typical government nursery in Zhuhai, the People's Republic of China. Afterwards, recommendations on preschool P.E. curriculum reform in Macau and Hong Kong are discussed.

## **Method**

An ethnographic case study research was adopted for the study. Techniques used included participant observation, unstructured interviews, study of documents and records and questionnaire. A typical government nursery was selected in Zhuhai, China, in order to investigate and understand the program context from a holistic perspective. The underlying reasons for selecting the nursery included: it was a newly established government nursery (November, 1993); was typically well-equipped and spacious; was famous for effective administration and management; the principal and staff were friendly cooperative; and the geographical site was convenient.

To obtain sufficient illuminative information a self-devised questionnaire was employed, (Appendix I). There were six sections in the questionnaire: the background, P.E. curriculum, P.E. facilities and equipment, teaching resource, safety precaution and teachers of the nursery.

Unstructured interviews were conducted with the principal of in order to obtain a thorough understanding of the implementation of the adopted P.E. curriculum in the nursery. The main focus of the interview was on the actual situation of implementation of the P.E. curriculum. It increased the reliance and relevance of questions.

Interviews were built on and emerged from observations. The interviews could be matched to individuals and circumstances.

Participant observation was employed in the study by observing directly program implementation and other activities. By doing so, the researcher was better able to understand the context within which the program operated and to understand and interpret the program being evaluated through his personal knowledge and direct experience.

In the study of documents and records, the researcher had developed an in-depth knowledge of the nationally centralized P.E. guidelines and curriculum as well as school-based curriculum and syllabus in P.E. so as to grasp more direct and relevant program context. The information gathered could be used to increase knowledge and understanding about the implications being studied.

The study was conducted from January to May, 1995. Five steps were involved : approaching the nursery principal, conducting participant observation, conducting interviews, sending out and collecting the questionnaire and follow-up.

Two alternative approaches were employed in the study for data analysis : by 'instinct', and by 'qualitative analysis'. Analysis by instinct was adopted for the rich data collected by participant observation. Information collected from interviews was recorded and analyzed under the six sections as categorize in the questionnaire. Also, the data gathered from the questionnaire were analyzed directly by description.

## **Results**

The integrated results of the study from the questionnaire, unstructured interviews and participant observation are noted below according to the five categories.

### ***I. Background***

The nursery was established on 15th November 1993, and was the 4th government nursery in Zhuhai, China. The nursery was situated in the Xiangzhou district of Zhuhai. The number of teaching staff and non-teaching staff were 25 and 17 respectively. Coming from other provinces of China, teachers were well-qualified, preschool diploma holders of an average age of 23.6. Figures showed that the teacher to pupils ratio was very low: K1-1:12; K2-1:13; K3-1:13. In practice, there were 2 teachers and 1 health helper for each class. There were 4 K1 (Aged 3-4) classes, 3 K2 (Aged 4-5) classes and 3 K3 (Aged 5-6) classes and with a total number of pupils 152, 135 and 120 respectively.

In teaching, the activity approach was adopted. Teachers prepared work sheets and learning materials for pupils. No writing was allowed for pupils. Every day after the morning physical exercise, lessons started at 8:30 a.m. and ended at 4:30 p.m. intersected with breakfast, tea and lunch, afternoon nap and outdoor activities.

### ***II. Physical Education Curriculum***

Preschool physical education programs are strongly emphasized in China. In accordance with the ECE guidelines set by the National Education Committee, the nursery had arranged at least two hours' outdoor activity which including at least one hour's P.E. exercise for pupils. One structured P.E. class was conducted weekly for pupils. The duration of one P.E. lesson for each level was: 10-15 min. (K1), 20-25 min. (K2) and 30-35 min. (K3) accordingly. Both the Yearly Plan and Scheme of Work for each class were prepared well before the commencement of the semester. Teachers always followed the suggested ECE P.E. guideline and syllabus in teaching. However, they sometimes modified the activities with regard to the needs, abilities and interest of pupils. In structured P.E. lessons, the teaching units included: gymnastics, rhythmic exercises, games with/without small apparatus, outdoor activities, water activities, sand activities, basic sports and health knowledge lesson. Apart from time-tabled P.E. lessons, games day, children sports day and children gymnastic performance shows were launched yearly. Furthermore, every morning children gathered at the spacious playground and performed the 'Children Morning Exercise' for at least 15 minutes.

As far as teaching method was concerned, the 'direct method' with emphasis on games was employed. Teachers carried out systematic and specified formative evaluation in P.E. After school, they filled in the daily teaching log book and evaluated their own teaching.

### ***III. Physical Education Facilities and Equipment***

The nursery comprised of the following P.E. facilities: 3 outdoor playgrounds (2620 m<sup>2</sup>), 1 indoor games room (120 m<sup>2</sup>), 1 dance studio (120 m<sup>2</sup>), 1 outdoor sand pool (50 m<sup>2</sup>) and 1 outdoor water pool (100 m<sup>2</sup>). P.E. equipment consisted of large amount of small apparatus (Table 1) and large apparatus (Table 2).

**Table 1: Outdoor Large P.E. Apparatus**

Items	Number(s)
Plastic Combined Box	2
Plastic Climber	2
Iron Climber	1
Rope Climber	1
Swing	1
Plastic Slide	5
Iron Slide	1
See-saws	2
Swinging Boat	2
Basketball Post	2
Large Box	7
Boxing Stand	1

**Table 2: Small P.E. Apparatus**

Items	Number(s)
Plastic Ball (small)	200
Rice Bag (Small)	100
Hoop	100
Rope (small)	100
Mini Stilts	100
Sand Play Materials	100
Bouncing Net	80
Bean-Bag	70
Touching Bag	50
Colored Band	50
Water Play Materials	50
Chest Stretcher	60
Wooden Dumbbell	50 pairs
Throwing Block	20
Rubber Quoit	10
Mattress	10
Tricycles	10
Rolling Ball (large)	6
Balance Beam	5
Used Tire	5
Parachute	1

#### ***IV. Physical Education Teaching Resources***

Five ECE journals and magazines had been subscribed periodically in the nursery. There were 40 cassettes (Music), and 60 cassettes (Song) ECE P.E. teaching materials were stored in the teaching resource room of the nursery for reference and use.

#### ***V. Safety Precautions***

There was a well-equipped medical room in the nursery. During school hours, a registered medical doctor and nurse were on duty. Daily medical check-ups were conducted for pupils during the morning and afternoon sessions. In the beginning of academic year, parents were asked to fill in a 'Form on Pupil's Health Condition'. Moreover, teachers were assigned to check the P.E. facilities and equipment twice a week.

In sum, the government of China supported the preschool education sector fully in terms of teacher training cost; teachers salaries and fringe benefits; provision of facilities and equipment; provision of teaching resources and guidelines as well as running expenses for the nursery.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings, sufficient and illuminative information has been collected from this case study. It provides important implications for the preschool P.E. curriculum reform in Macau and Hong Kong. Listed below are the six major recommendations: government's role and support, P.E. curriculum reform, P.E. facilities and equipment, P.E. teaching resource, P.E. promotion and Teachers.

### ***1. Government's Role & Support***

The degree of the government's willingness of the acceptance of early childhood education as a fully-aided sector has greatly influenced the quality of education. The recommendations consist of:

- playing a more active and initiative role in ECE in Hong Kong and Macau;
- strengthening the existing in-service training for early childhood educators in Hong Kong and Macau;
- supplying extra professional staff in the Education Department (ECE Section) in Hong Kong and Macau;
- accepting early childhood education as the fully-aided sector in Hong Kong;
- unifying and articulating the training structure for both kindergarten and child care sectors in Hong Kong;
- offering extra funds to private kindergartens for the purchase of teaching materials in Macau;
- providing professional support and advice to private kindergartens in Macau.

### ***2. Preschool Physical Education Curriculum Reform***

Structured P.E. lessons are crucial to all-round education for children. There is an urgent need for preschool P.E. curriculum reform in Hong Kong and Macau. Listed below are the recommendations:

- establishing a P.E. Curriculum Reform Committee to be responsible for reform work;
- setting education ordinance on the implementation of Structured P.E. lessons and Free Physical Play in kindergartens; such as the frequency, intensity, time and type of exercises (FITT) of P.E. lessons; and
- compiling the ECE P.E. teaching guide and syllabus for teachers;

### ***3. Physical Education Facilities & Equipment***

Adequate P.E. facilities and equipment are vital components of a successful ECE P.E. program. Therefore, the recommendations are as follows:

- constructing multi-purpose playgrounds in different districts;
- renovating the out-dated recreational playgrounds and parks;
- exploring the indoor playgrounds and games rooms in kindergartens;
- recommending a standardized P.E. equipment list to kindergartens;
- providing extra funds to kindergartens to purchase P.E. equipment; and
- strengthening the practice in the examination and maintenance of P.E. facilities and equipment.

### ***4. Physical Education Teaching Resources***

Sufficient teaching resources may facilitate teaching processes and up-date teachers' knowledge. Therefore, the availability of adequate teaching resources is crucial to teachers. The recommendations are as follows:

- setting up a particular ECE Unit in the existing Teaching Resources Center;
- recommending a ECE P.E. teaching resources list including audio-visual materials, periodicals and references etc. to kindergartens;
- producing localized P.E. teaching kits, teacher aids and materials;
- circulating up-dated teaching materials to kindergartens; and
- increasing education funds for teaching resources centers.

### ***5. Preschool Physical Education Promotion***

The Education Department of Hong Kong and Macau should raise the profile of ECE Physical Education through collaborative and cooperative effort among departments concerned and kindergartens. The recommendations include:

- organizing ongoing preschool physical education campaigns, e.g. sports carnival, sports festival, and games day etc.;
- launching ongoing parent education programs, e.g. parent day, parent education seminars and parent-children sports day etc.;
- launching preschool physical fitness award schemes and the outstanding healthy children award campaign; and

- publicizing sports and health newsletters periodically.

## 6. Teachers

The status of preschool teachers in Hong Kong and Macau has always been low. However, preschool teachers' roles are important in children's education. Listed below are the recommendations:

- standardizing the pay scale of all kindergarten teachers according to their qualifications, teaching experience and special duties assigned;
- confining the basic minimum preschool teacher qualification to diploma/certificate in ECE;
- offering adequate INSET (In-service Education for Teacher) programs for kindergarten teachers during long holidays, and a weekend;
- providing post-graduate ECE programs for teachers who are B.Ed. holders;
- encouraging kindergarten exchange program on a short term basis; and
- limiting the class size to not more than 20 in Hong Kong; and not more than 35 in Macau private kindergartens.

To summarize, information acquired from the study makes practical and constructive recommendations for ECE P.E., particularly in Hong Kong and Macau, namely: government's role & support, curriculum reform, facilities & equipment, teaching resources, promotion and teachers.

## Conclusion

Numerous research studies have shown the educational value of preschool physical education to young children's all-rounded development in the preschool years from 3 to 6 are important. These formative years are important ones in the life of a person because young children acquire the basic knowledge, skills, dispositions and attitudes that will determine their future learning and establish the foundations for their subsequent development. In ECE programs, through the participation of structured P.E. lessons and free physical play, young children's fundamental movements, and physical fitness will be developed and enhanced. Simultaneously, physical education and play provides opportunities for children in the acquisition of social and ethical manners, sportsmanship and friendship. Therefore, the carry-over value of preschool P.E. is life-long. In kindergartens, frequent and meaningful age appropriate instruction and practice opportunities should be provided by preschool teachers (COPEC, 1994). They should also recognize the importance of purposeful movement for young children. According to Bredekamp (1987):

"Children have daily opportunities to use large muscles by running, jumping, and balancing. Outdoor activity is planned daily so children can develop large muscle skills, learn about outdoor environments, and express themselves freely and loudly." (P.56)

This study has generated for the first time illuminative data on the early childhood P.E. curriculum in Zhuhai, China, based on an ethnographic case study approach. The findings have provided crucial guidelines useful for the preschool P.E. curriculum reform in Hong Kong and Macau. Despite the social and cultural differences, Zhuhai's experience in the successful implementation of preschool P.E. curriculum may already set a good example for Hong Kong and Macau. As a matter of fact, during the post-transition period, Hong Kong and Macau should consider the improve the quality of early childhood education particularly in physical education which has been neglected by preschool educators and parents. The strategic actions for recommendation on early childhood P.E. consist of government's role and support, P.E. curriculum reform, P.E. facilities and equipment, P.E. teaching resources, P.E. promotion and the teachers.

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Physical education in Hong Kong has gone through considerable changes over the past 50 years. Still, the pace and the status were relatively slower and lower compared with other subjects. The 1990s saw a gradual shift from sport-oriented to health-focused sports culture. This shift was chiefly highlighted when physical education became one of the eight key learning areas in the millennium year education reform. This article summarizes the major changes over the past 50 years of school physical education in Hong Kong, and anticipates the positioning of the future physical education. Discover th Educational Reform and Curriculum Change in China: A Comparative Case Study. by Zhou Nanzhao.Â Therefore a comparative study of schools curriculum reform in China is most meaningful, on the one hand, to facilitate better understanding of the largest education system in the world and its system wide reform in context of drastic and profound socio-economic, political and cultural changes, and on the other, to develop broadened vision and research-based conceptual frameworks of school curriculum change. as an effective strategy in achieving the goal of worldwide campaign for Education for All (EFA) in â€œover-all improvement of quality in education at all levelsâ€. Open a company in Hong Kong. Resources.Â Teaching physical education in China. In what type of school do you teach? How old are your students?Â My fellow physical education teachers always invite me to teachersâ€™ soccer and basketball games while my colleagues never fail to leave me a treat or fruit on my desk. Of course I canâ€™t deny that itâ€™s hard to have a deep relationship because of the language and cultural barriers (a different sense of humor and a different entertainment culture), but thereâ€™s a desire to do so. Any advice for those looking to work as a teacher in China? Since I started my blog many people have written asking me for advice on how to move to and work in China, especially basketball teachers and physical education