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Curriculum Change in China: A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Chinese PE Teachers’ Experiences

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Amid the massive regime of change that is occurring across Chinese society in the early phase of Y2K, is the introduction of a new national curriculum. Not unlike recent changes in Australia and the UK, this process is underpinned by a perceived need for education, to better articulate the changing needs of society. Presented within a wider framework for making the curriculum more relevant and attuned to the contemporary practices of young people, PE has been more closely aligned to the rising social concerns around physical and mental health. A major feature of the new PE and Health Curriculum is a shift in focus from ‘the pursuit of excellence’ to ‘participation’. Inherent in this is a considerable shift in pedagogic theory and practice. While initial research shows that PE teachers are overwhelmingly in favour of the broad thrust of the new PE and Health Curriculum, it seems that in the absence of appropriate in-service support they are unsure about its implementation. While there has been some research already done around the implementation of the New PE and Health Curriculum, almost all of this has been quantitative - therefore orientated towards explaining ‘what’ is happening, rather than ‘why’ it is happening. Using a case study methodology, this presentation reports on research undertaken to explore deep insights into the ways in which PE teachers understand and interpret the new curriculum. Semi-structured interviews (60-90 minutes) were conducted with 18 Chinese PE teachers and two Chinese PE professors. All interviews were conducted in Mandarin and later translated to English. Among the core themes to be discussed in this presentation will be the structural, personal and cultural factors that work against teachers taking up the change opportunities that are provoked through the new curriculum. Prominent here are; low professional status, generational division and deep cultural values.