Leisure education in schools from students' perspectives: the case of Hong Kong

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Leisure education in schools from students' perspectives: the case of Hong Kong

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This paper examines the views of Hong Kong secondary school students regarding leisure education and its practices in their schools. Data were collected through questionnaires ($N = 401$) and semi-structured interviews ($N = 35$). Results of the study indicated gaps in students' perceptions related to six areas of learning of leisure education in general and those applied in schools in particular, suggesting that what students experienced in school did not meet their expectations. Schools implemented leisure education through three strategies: "constraining," "enabling and facilitating," and "advocating and fostering," and in various forms ranging from academic classroom teaching to out-of-class recreational activities. Students' accounts illustrated how leisure education in their schools enhanced their knowledge, developed their skills, changed their attitudes, and consequently affected the way they went about their leisure. They regarded school leisure education practices as useful and expressed an interest in obtaining more guidelines while maintaining their freedom of choice among different activities. Findings of the study are discussed with reference to the different approaches to leisure education, the recommended ways for its implementation in schools and in the context of educational reform in Hong Kong.

Keywords: leisure education; school students; Hong Kong; education reform

Introduction

This paper examines the views of Hong Kong secondary school students regarding leisure education in their schools. It attempts to shed some light on the way in which schools are perceived as sources of leisure education, how they undertake this role, and the effects they have on the way students spend their leisure time.

A review of the literature indicates that there is no one universal definition of leisure education. According to Ruskin (1995), "leisure education is a conscious and systematic education for and in leisure which aims to bring about certain desirable changes in the use of leisure" (p. 147). Leisure education has different approaches and is multifaceted. Mundy (1998) distinguished between extrinsic and intrinsic approaches to leisure education. While the former is society orientated, focusing on developing pre-determined leisure values, attitudes and behaviours, the latter is person based, emphasising the fostering of participants' ability to understand their leisure and develop their own leisure values and behaviours.

Sivan and Cohen (2009) identified six areas of learning in leisure education: "Active Engagement," "Education", "Ends and Means," "Motivation,"

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"Self-development," and "Attitudes and Values." Active Engagement emphasises the importance of participation in active forms of leisure for promoting personal wellbeing and serving as a preventive measure against misuse or abuse of leisure in society. Education focuses on participation in activities through which participants can increase their knowledge and widen their horizons. Ends and Means is concerned with the provision of relevant resources (e.g. venues, programmes) for leisure participation. Motivation refers to aspects of education that help participants to set their leisure preferences and ensure their enjoyment of leisure. Self-development aims at encouraging people to participate in activities that meet their needs and promote skills and abilities for their leisure activities. Values and Attitudes centres on helping people to discover the meaning of leisure, understand the importance of leisure, and think positively about it. Of these six areas, Active Engagement seems to resonate mostly with the extrinsic approach to leisure education. The present paper focuses specifically on these six areas of learning as well as the two approaches to leisure education.

Schools and leisure education

Schools have long been recognised as having a major responsibility to educate for leisure. Calls were made for schools to assume this role (Brightbill & Mobley, 1977; Mundy & Odum, 1979; Ruskin, 1984; Ruskin & Sivan, 2002) and numerous strategies were suggested to best perform this role. These strategies include the infusion of leisure content into different subjects, provision of out-of-class expressive and instrumental experiences in the form of extracurricular activities and incorporation of aspects of enjoyment and intrinsic reward (Ruskin & Sivan, 2002). Recent years have seen a growing advocacy for leisure education in schools through position statements (Pesavento, 2003; Pesavento & Ashton, 2011; World Leisure Commission on Education, 2000) and operational goals (Albrechtsen, 2011). The importance of leisure education in schools was also illustrated through the development of several models and curricula (e.g. Bullock, Morris, Mahon, & Jones, 1992; Cherry & Woodburn, 1978; Mundy, 1998; Ruskin & Sivan, 2002; Zeyen et al., 1977). However, there have been few reports on actual implementation of these models and curricula (e.g. Caldwell, Baldwin, Walls, & Smith, 2004).

Specific to the US context, the lack of leisure education in schools was attributed to, among other developments, the "back-to-basics" movement, which emphasises core and examinable subjects (Pesavento & Ashton, 2011). Unlike this American movement, there have been numerous educational reforms outside the US, emphasising "whole person development," recognising the importance of life-wide and life-long learning, and thus potentially providing a solid base for incorporating leisure education in schools (Sivan, 2008; Sivan & Stebbins, 2011). A good example of these changes can be seen in the Asia-Pacific region, where new visions and educational aims have been established across different countries, and where learning, teaching, and assessment are rapidly changing to include a wider perspective of education for life (Cheng, 2003). Hong Kong is one of these places. In view of these reforms and the recent calls made in the region for schools to include leisure education in their curriculum (Su, 2006), Sivan and Stebbins (2011) suggested that leisure education practices be examined in educational settings that have undergone changes. In response to this suggestion, the present paper examines the

extent to which leisure education is practised in Hong Kong schools from students' perspectives and the ways it is practised.

Overall views regarding leisure education in schools

Few studies have been conducted to identify existing leisure education practices in schools and to solicit stakeholders' attitudes towards these practices. Among these studies, two were conducted among policy makers and those involved in educational implementation (Bollaert, Corjin, & Theeboom, 1990; Ruskin & Sivan, 2002). Their findings pointed to the need for including leisure education in schools, highlighted its existing forms, and suggested changes to best facilitate its adoption/incorporation by schools.

To our knowledge, only three studies have solicited students' views regarding leisure education in schools. The first was undertaken in Scotland, employing a case study of primary school students and graduates (Hendry & Marr, 1985). Results indicated that schools had little influence on the leisure patterns of students since they placed more emphasis on providing short-term recreational skills than on equipping students with the attitudes and skills appropriate to their leisure participation.

The second study was conducted among pupils, teachers, graduating students, and teacher educators across four countries: Canada, Ireland, the UK and the USA (Standeven, Duffy, Grobe, Thompson, & Wilcox, 1989). Despite revealing common views among participants about the significant role of leisure education in schools, the study found that the delivery of leisure education was ineffective and students' expectations of the educational systems with regard to their leisure were not fully met. Standeven et al. (1989) recognised the need for better understanding of students' views and asserted that "until these are taken into account, mismatches will prevail and education for leisure may continue to be ineffective" (p. 336). The authors argued that in-depth research is required to understand students' views and the meanings of leisure education in relation to their leisure experiences, and called for using both quantitative and qualitative approaches to gauge students' attitudes. In response to their arguments, the present study examines Hong Kong students' views regarding leisure education using both quantitative and qualitative research strategies.

The third study was undertaken by Sivan (1991) to solicit students' and teachers' views about the aims of secondary schools in Hong Kong, in general, and in relation to leisure education, in particular. Data were collected through a questionnaire from Form Four (Grade 10) students and their teachers in seven secondary schools. It was found that, while both students and teachers acknowledged the important role of schools in educating for leisure, they had different perceptions concerning the most appropriate strategies for leisure education. Students preferred learning experiences and special social activities, whereas teachers, who regarded enhancing students' academic development as the main role of schools, favoured the more formal strategy of classroom teaching. Sivan's 1991 study was undertaken prior to the educational reform that took place in Hong Kong. The present study builds on this initial examination by soliciting students' views via interviews.

The Hong Kong educational context

In response to globalisation, rapid technological development and social change, the Education Bureau of Hong Kong has revised the overall aims of education to facilitate the all-round development of students and develop their life-long learning capacity (Education Commission, 2000). The revised aims make special reference to students' leisure. For example, the specific aims of school education include: the adoption of healthy life practices; the mastering of skills useful for further study, work, and life; the maintenance of physical fitness; the development of interest in sport and of creativity and aesthetic awareness; and the overall ability to optimise students' leisure and enrich their cultural lives (Education Commission, 1999). It is also interesting to note that the aims of higher education, which have been formulated on the assumption that the aims for school education are largely fulfilled, include the additional aim of producing healthy leisure lives (Education Commission, 1999).

Based on the revised educational aims, a new educational reform was launched in 2001 (Curriculum Development Council, 2001) that signifies a move to a more progressive system. This reform brings about pedagogical changes to better suit student needs and to adapt to changes in society. It includes a shift from a separate subject-based curriculum to the establishment of several key learning areas such as physical education; arts; technology science; personal, social, and humanities; mathematics; and languages. Student learning also consists of five essential learning experiences, including moral and civic education, intellectual development, community service, physical and aesthetic development, and career-related experiences.

To best facilitate whole-person development, the notion of life-wide learning has been introduced, with the aim of providing experiential learning in real contexts that are not confined to the classroom (Curriculum Development Council, 2002). In addition to the above changes, in 2009 a new senior secondary school structure was launched in which Other Learning Experiences (OLE) have been further incorporated within the curriculum (Education Bureau, 2009).

With reference to the above-mentioned literature review and the changing context in which leisure education takes place, the current paper will report on students' views regarding: (1) leisure education in general and leisure education as practised in schools in particular; and (2) schools' strategies and forms of leisure education and their effect on students' leisure.

Method

Sample

A convenience sample consisting of 401 Form One (Grade 7) to Form Seven (Grade 13) students (aged 12–18) in eight secondary schools in Hong Kong participated voluntarily in the study by completing a self-administered questionnaire. Of these students, 192 (48%) were boys and 201 (50.1%) were girls. Follow-up semi-structured interviews were held with 35 students from the same sample. Students participated on a voluntary basis and they came from different forms.

Data collection

Both quantitative and qualitative approaches were used in this study. In the quantitative part of the study, students were requested to respond to a questionnaire containing a list of 18 statements on leisure education in general and 18 statements on leisure education as implemented in their schools. The questionnaire was originally developed to examine the different facets of, and approaches to, leisure education (Sivan, 1991) and was further refined by Sivan and Cohen (2009) in line with the six identified areas of learning referred to above. The average internal consistency of the questionnaire in this study was 0.91, showing very good reliability. Students were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each statement in general and the extent to which it exists in their schools on a four-point scale ($4 =$ to great extent, $3 =$ to some extent, $2 =$ to less extent, and $1 =$ not at all). A high score meant a greater degree of agreement with the statement concerned. A comparison between the level of agreement with each statement in general and the level of agreement with its existence in school, indicated whether there were differences between students' expectations of what they wanted to be offered and their attitudes towards what was offered in their schools. All quantitative data were analysed using the Statistical Packages for Social Sciences for Windows Version 15 (SPSS, 2006).

In the qualitative part of the study, students were asked about their school practices with regard to leisure education and whether, to what extent, and in what ways their schools influenced their leisure participation. All interview data were tape-recorded, transcribed, and analysed using the NVivo 7 qualitative analysis package (Richards, 2005).

Results

Quantitative approach

Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations of students' views regarding (1) the aims of leisure education, in general, and (2) leisure education aims as they existed in their own schools. For the former, the mean scores on the six areas of learning range from 3.05 (Active Engagement) to 3.27 (Ends and Means), and for the latter, the mean scores range from 2.47 (Motivation) to 2.66 (Education). Concerning the six areas of learning, the results of paired-samples t tests indicated that there were significant differences in students' views regarding the aims of leisure education, with consistently higher mean scores for the former as compared to those for the latter: (1) Active Engagement: $t = 14.28$, $p < 0.001$; (2) Education: $t = 9.91$, $p < 0.001$; (3) Ends and Means: $t = 15.37$, $p < 0.001$; (4) Motivation: $t = 15.21$, $p < 0.001$; (5) Self-development: $t = 15.45$, $p < 0.001$; and (6) Values and Attitudes: $t = 14.33$, $p < 0.001$. These significant differences suggest that students' experiences in schools concerning the aims of leisure education did not meet their expectations.

Among the individual items concerning leisure education in general, the highest ($M = 3.42$) and lowest ($M = 2.90$) mean scores were associated with Item 13 ("helping people choose leisure activities that meet their own needs and interests") and Item 2 ("telling people what society expects them to do during their leisure time"), respectively. Among the individual items concerning leisure education in school, while Item 18 ("helping people to develop favourable attitudes toward their leisure time and to think positively about it") scored the highest ($M = 2.68$), Items 1 and 2

Table 1. Comparison of students' views regarding the aims of leisure education in general and of leisure education in their schools in particular ($N = 401$).

Area and Item	In general		In school		
	M	SD	M	SD	t
Active Engagement	3.05	0.63	2.48	0.67	14.28*
1. To tell people what to do during their leisure time.	2.91	0.99	2.41	0.90	
2. To tell people what society expects them to do during their leisure time.	2.90	0.97	2.41	0.95	
3. To encourage people to participate in more recreation activities than they participate in today.	3.32	0.92	2.70	0.90	
4. To encourage people to take part in leisure activities that meet the needs of their society.	3.07	0.97	2.42	0.91	
Education	3.25	0.95	2.66	0.90	9.91*
5. To encourage people to participate in leisure activities through which they can increase their knowledge.					
Ends and Means	3.27	0.77	2.51	0.78	15.37*
6. To supply information about places such as parks, swimming pools, and sports areas that are available for recreational activities.	3.25	0.92	2.42	0.94	
7. To provide recreation programmes.	3.29	0.96	2.60	0.91	
Motivation	3.26	0.76	2.47	0.82	15.21*
8. To teach people how to enjoy their leisure time by doing things just for fun.	3.33	0.91	2.44	0.95	
9. To help people find out why they prefer certain leisure activities to others.	3.19	0.95	2.48	0.97	
Self-development	3.25	0.65	2.60	0.70	15.45*
10. To help people identify their own skills and abilities that they can use in leisure activities.	3.23	0.95	2.54	0.93	
11. To teach people the skills for getting involved in more recreation programmes.	3.20	0.93	2.62	0.89	
12. To help people learn basic physical, social, and creative skills through which they can increase their options and directions for leisure involvement.	3.25	1.00	2.66	0.95	
13. To help people choose leisure activities that meet their own needs and interests.	3.42	0.92	2.65	0.98	
14. To provide people with the opportunity to identify what their leisure time needs are.	3.26	1.00	2.55	0.95	
15. To encourage people to take part in creative activities that contribute to their own lives.	3.16	0.97	2.64	0.90	
Values and Attitudes	3.23	0.73	2.56	0.77	14.33*
16. To help people understand the importance of leisure in their society.	3.11	1.01	2.52	0.95	
17. To enable people to discover what leisure means to them.	3.26	0.98	2.47	0.96	
18. To help people to develop favourable attitudes towards their leisure time and to think positively about it.	3.35	0.91	2.68	0.93	

*$p < 0.001$.

("telling people what to do during their leisure time" and "telling people what society expects them to do during their leisure time") scored the lowest ($M = 2.41$).

Qualitative approach

The follow-up interviews with students revealed their overall views regarding leisure education in their schools. Students' accounts highlighted the strategies their schools were using and their effect on their leisure, as well as the forms through which leisure education was implemented.

Three strategies of school practice were identified in students' responses, representing the different ways through which schools affected students' leisure. These strategies can be located on a continuum ranging from "constraining" at one extreme to "advocating and fostering" at the other, with "enabling and facilitating" inbetween. The following sections describe these strategies, identify the various forms of leisure education taking place in schools, and examine students' overall views regarding leisure education in their schools.

The first perceived strategy of school practice was described as "constraining." Using this strategy, school affected students' leisure mainly through overloading them with schoolwork and telling them what to do and what not to do in their leisure time. Students stated that, since they had been busy with homework and examinations, they hardly had spare time for leisure. Typical student comments are as follows:

> If the school assigns too much homework or requires us to read out-of-class books, my leisure time will be greatly reduced. If I want to maintain my leisure, I will have to shorten or speed up the time spent on my schoolwork. (Student 1)

> Much of my time is spent on getting prepared for the exam. Since I need to spend my leisure time on studying and doing homework, I will have less leisure time left to do other things. (Student 29)

Some students mentioned that their schools had told them what to do or what not to do in their leisure time. A typical comment follows:

> Yes, the school influences my leisure. I always find much pressure in my studies and therefore I spend less time for leisure. Our school always tells us that we shouldn't spend too much time on web surfing or playing computer games. As a result, we study in our leisure time instead of playing games. (Student 25)

The second perceived strategy of school practice was portrayed as "enabling and facilitating." Employing this strategy, school affected students' leisure mainly by offering a variety of activities (e.g. extra-curricular activities) to them and making special arrangements to best enlist their participation. Some students provided examples of how participation in these activities developed their interest, increased their knowledge, and affected their feelings about leisure education. The following quotations are illustrative of this strategy and its impact on students:

> The school organises activities for us so we do not need to stay at home after school. These activities cost very little and there are quite a number of choices for us. (Student 15)

> There is some leisure education in the school in the form of extra-curricular activities. For example, there are activities organised by the Cookery Club and Crafts Club.

As a result, we can learn how to do cooking or handicrafts at home. These activities help to reduce some of our studies-related tension and stress. (Student 13)

I learned how to ski when the school requires each student to pick up one sport activity. I have been sticking to this activity ever since then. It is leisure education and I regard it as useful. (Student 33)

I have joined the school choir. I regard this as important because I am motivated to sing better. Leisure education is important because I won't be bored; I know better how to mix with others. Consequently I have become more confident. (Student 16)

The third perceived strategy of school practice was described as "advocating and fostering." Using this strategy, schools influenced students' leisure by providing different activities and by taking the initiative to encourage, promote, and advocate student participation in these activities. One student, for example, described how his participation in these activities nurtured his interest in his leisure involvement:

The school affected my leisure. When I was in Form One, the school advocated the picking up of at least one activity by each student. Students were also encouraged to participate in the different academic and non-academic activities organised by the school. We only attended school for five days per week and returned to school on Saturdays mainly for joining extra-curricular activities. For example, we would go back to school early on Saturdays to have various ball games, to join uniformed groups or to play musical instruments. We could as well mix with other students. My interests were actually developed at that time. What I am doing now in my leisure actually originated from those activities I had picked up when I was younger. (Student 4)

One student described how she was motivated by her school's initiative in advocating and fostering leisure education:

There are leisure education activities in my school. They are organised in the form of sharing sessions and led by the participants who share with us their successful past experiences in taking part in these activities. These sharing sessions are included in the morning assemblies or organised as seminars. I regard these activities as very important to us. We are motivated to take up certain activities by their touching stories. (Student 26)

Students' accounts highlighted the various forms through which leisure education was implemented in their schools. These forms ranged from ones with academic emphasis to those with social and recreational orientations that included teaching as part of subject content in the classroom (e.g. "life education" and "physical education"), providing information on the school website, holding special talks and seminars as part of school assemblies, organising extra-curricular activities, and, to a lesser extent, holding special functions outside the school, such as day camps.

In their overall comments on leisure education in their schools, students stressed the importance and usefulness of leisure education and expressed an interest in obtaining more guidelines for participation while maintaining their freedom of choice:

Leisure education is important. The school has provided us a lot of activities like Sports Day and school picnic. These activities help us to relax and release us from the stress of our study. (Student 14)

Leisure education is important because it provides a channel for us to participate in activities which are relatively inexpensive. It is good to have choices among alternatives. (Student 15)

> Leisure education is important to us because usually we spend most of our time on our studies. If I can obtain more knowledge and guidelines about leisure education from my school on how to make good use of my leisure, I will learn more and widen my horizon. Leisure education will enrich our lives. (Student 10)

> Leisure is our own time and should be arranged by ourselves. The school can provide some reference but not a rule for us to follow. Guidelines will be better. (Student 8)

Discussion

The present paper sheds light on leisure education in schools as perceived by secondary school students in Hong Kong. Apart from adding to the literature on leisure education in the local context, the paper has contributed to the specific area of leisure education in schools, which has been much advocated but scarcely researched. The use of both quantitative and qualitative approaches has helped to better understand students' views regarding leisure education and highlight the effects of different school practices on students' leisure.

Results of the quantitative analysis suggest that what students experienced in school concerning the aims of leisure education did not meet their expectations. The implications of these findings are that schools could do more to promote leisure education in the six areas of learning. These results are consistent with Sivan's (1991) study, in which students wanted to have more leisure education in their schools.

Results of the qualitative analysis revealed the ways in which leisure education was practised in schools and their effects on students' leisure. Unlike previous studies in which schools were found to provide mostly recreational skills (e.g. Hendry & Marr, 1985), results of the present study reveal positive changes in students' behaviour, knowledge, attitudes, and feelings. This is consistent with Ruskin's (1995) assertion that changes made as a result of leisure education "may be stated in terms of beliefs, feelings, attitudes, knowledge, skills and behaviour." (p. 147). Students' accounts in this study illustrated how leisure education in their schools enhanced their knowledge, developed their skills, changed their attitudes and behaviour, and consequently affected the way they went about their leisure.

Despite the lack of a structured curriculum in schools in Hong Kong, leisure education was delivered through different channels such as seminars, talks, specific topics taught within certain subjects, and extra-curricular activities. In that respect, leisure education was, to some extent, infused into the curriculum, a strategy which has been strongly advocated for schools (Ruskin & Sivan, 2002). Ruskin and Sivan (2002) and Sivan (2008) noted that leisure education does not necessarily need to be undertaken in a formal way. It could be even more successful if implemented in different informal settings involving recreational activities, experimentation, and extra-curricular activities.

Students' accounts of practices in their schools showed the latter had a tendency to adopt the intrinsic approach to leisure education. It is interesting to note that, in the results of the quantitative part of the research, the statements "telling people what to do during their leisure time" and "telling people what society expects them to do during their leisure time," which represent the extrinsic approach to leisure education, scored the lowest among the items in the six areas of learning. These findings suggest that students were not in favour of the extrinsic approach (Mundy, 1998). Their preference for more guidelines from schools whilst at the same time for maintaining their own freedom and personal choice, further reflected adoption of the

intrinsic approach to leisure education. Students' responses might be triggered by their perception that the compulsory nature of participation in various activities is antithetical to the "nature" of leisure.

Specific to the educational context of Hong Kong, results of the study highlighted the strategies adopted by schools in order to move towards students' all-round development, which is the focus of the education reform. The strategies of enabling and facilitating, and advocating and fostering, were found to have a positive effect on students' perceptions of their leisure. Although these school practices could lead to changes in the school system, making it less "exam-orientated," students' perceptions of the use of the constraining strategy by schools was also evident.

Regarding forms of leisure education, results of the qualitative analysis indicated that leisure education was implemented in the form of subject matter through seminars, talks, specific subject teaching, and as part of extra-curricular activities mostly held on school premises. With the recent launch of the new structure of the secondary school curriculum, which includes other learning experiences (OLE), it will be interesting to see if the existing practices will be expanded to incorporate learning about leisure through experiences in leisure settings that are *not* confined to school environments. This perspective, which regards leisure education as a context rather than content and emphasises the use of leisure settings for education, has been recommended as a future direction for leisure education (Henderson, 2007).

One of the recommended ways of implementing leisure education in schools has been to focus on teachers as role models (Sivan, 2008). Although students' accounts in this study may implicitly point to the roles played by their teachers, no explicit reference was made in these accounts to the direct effects of teachers on students' leisure. As noted earlier, previous research undertaken prior to the reform (Sivan, 1991) indicated differences between Hong Kong students' and teachers' preferred strategies for implementing leisure education, with the former favouring more informal experiences and the latter preferring formal classroom learning. Future research could further investigate whether these differences still exist and to what extent they affect students' perceptions of their teachers' influence. Despite the changes brought about by recent educational reform, studies examining curriculum implementation in Hong Kong have indicated that the acceptance of these changes may be hindered by teachers' traditional views (Yeung & Lam, 2007). Since the success of curriculum change in schools depends on what teachers think and how they act (Fullan, 2001), future research could also re-examine teachers' views on and practices of leisure education in the context of educational reform.

The different strategies for implementing leisure education identified in this study – enabling and facilitation, and advocacy and fostering – which were found to have positive effects on students' behaviour and attitudes toward leisure, could lay the foundation for further study in Hong Kong schools. Leisure education in schools involves different role players and could potentially be shaped by additional factors such as school climate, school ethos, and the hidden curriculum (Jackson, 1968). It would be beneficial to extend the examination of leisure education practices in schools by using observation methods, which have been found to be effective in identifying informal methods of values education in Hong Kong schools (Sivan & Chan, 2008).

The present study examined Hong Kong students' views regarding leisure education and its practice in schools within the context of educational reform.

Hong Kong is only one of the places in the Asia-Pacific region that has been undergoing educational changes. It would be useful to broaden the scope of the investigation by examining how schools educate for leisure in other countries and contexts within the region.

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