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Lived Experiences of a Hong Kong Physical Education Teacher: Ethnographical and Phenomenological Approaches

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Abstract

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Keywords

Lived Experiences, Physical Education Teacher, Hong Kong, Ethnography, Phenomenology

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Lived Experiences of a Hong Kong Physical Education Teacher: Ethnographical and Phenomenological Approaches

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This study employed ethnographical and phenomenological methods to explore the lived experiences and career of a Hong Kong secondary school physical education (PE) teacher (Wharton) in order to embody his versatile roles through phenomenological description of a lived body itself and the lived world. The central research question is “How does a male secondary school PE teacher manage his work life and the embodiment of his professional roles?” Data collection techniques were in-depth interviewing, participant observation and field notes, participant’s reflection documentation and visual elicitation. Concepts of “play to learn,” “professional development” and “political empowerment” were used to examine Wharton’s lived experiences and career. Themes such as Static Gestalt, Dynamic Gestalt, Style Gestalt and Reversibility Gestalt were identified. This study may inform literature on sociological perspectives and the life histories of PE teachers and applicable to other teachers as they adapt to environmental changes in other settings. Keywords: Lived Experiences, Physical Education Teacher, Hong Kong, Ethnography, Phenomenology

The central research question of the present study is “How does a male Hong Kong secondary school physical education (PE) teacher manage his work life and the embodiment of his professional roles?” This study therefore aims to examine the lived experiences and career of a PE teacher in order to embody the versatile roles through phenomenological description of a lived body itself and the lived world.

Contextualizing the Problem

Physical education has long been considered an essential part of school education (Berryman, 2010; Kirk, 2006). In Hong Kong, PE became one of the eight Key Learning Areas in 2002, among Chinese and English languages, and Mathematics. PE teachers play an important role not only in teaching, but also in other daily duties to fulfil their professional obligations in schools. Such duties can include planning of lessons and facilities, management of groups of students, collaboration with other teachers and school administrators, and representation of their schools in inter-school competitions (Castelli & Beighle, 2007; Sum & Dimmock, 2012). However, PE teachers also faced increasing pressure and the danger of teacher burnout because of the unique nature of PE teaching, such as social isolation, role conflict, lack of status, and lack of opportunity for self-development (Richards & Templin, 2012; Thorburn, 2011).

Despite the fact that numerous research studies relating to the lives and careers of teachers (Day, 1999, 2004; Day, Sammons, Stobart, Kington, & Gu, 2007; Goodson, 2003; Hargreaves & Goodson, 1996) and PE teachers (Armour & Jones, 1998; Cohen, 2009; Macdonald & Kirk, 1996; Stroot et al., 1993; Templin, 1989) have been carried out in Western

countries, there is a need for such studies to be conducted in the Asian context. Indeed, it would be beneficial for those engaged in the teaching of PE in Hong Kong to take an in-depth look at their careers and lives as a whole.

Literature Review

Lives of PE Teachers

While reforms for schools and teachers continue to be proposed (Curriculum Development Council, 2002, 2004), particularly to secondary school PE teachers, there is a need to understand more about the lives of Hong Kong secondary school PE teachers since their increasingly diversified workload of PE teachers in primary schools at local levels was evidenced (Sum & Dimmock, 2014).

Furthermore, regarding the career trajectory of PE teachers, the assimilation and adaptability of PE teachers to their career paths are influenced by the characteristics of their organization, their self-orientation towards their careers, the prioritization of other obligations and their career aspirations (Sum & Dimmock, 2012). All of these factors are related to and hence affect the different identities a PE teacher may perceive across a range of ages (diachronic career trajectory of PE teachers) and in specific circumstances (synchronic role conflict and socialization).

In this study, the researcher has defined the relationship between teachers' personal and professional lives in terms of role conflict (Richards & Templin, 2012; Sum & Dimmock, 2014). According to Blankenship and Coleman (2009), many novice PE teachers may experience different degrees of wash-out under such career frustrations. Comparatively, for veteran PE teachers, the understanding of children, awareness and understanding of the school and teaching environment, the nature and types of concerns felt, family support, and their perceptions of themselves, their work, and their profession all affect the sophistication of their life experiences and drive a further resilience in their PE career (Woods & Lynn, 2001).

It is common for Hong Kong PE teachers to take up duties not only of PE teaching, but also of coaching, teaching other academic subjects, and administration and discipline in the school, while also striving for the professional advancement of sports and officiating at sports events (Sum, 2011). However, evidence has shown that some PE teachers suffer from role conflict (Ng, 2002; Sum & Dimmock, 2014). Role conflict exists where there are incompatible expectations from the different roles. When one role is receiving more attention, the expectations are higher and the immediate rewards are also greater. Coaching and professional officiating is relatively more openly viewed by public than teaching in a primary/secondary school classroom. In terms of professional identity, O'Connor and Macdonald (2002) indicate that identification as a PE teacher is "reflective of the type of relationship between PE and sports in different school contexts, teachers' personal philosophies, and the risks and rewards derived from dual commitments to teaching and coaching" (p. 49). Despite all this, some teachers manage their duties well and enjoy having dual (or more) responsibilities (O'Connor & Macdonald, 2002). Hence, studying the daily work lives and experiences of PE teachers allowed the researcher to study their work situations and perceived problems in relation to the institutions they worked for and the people they worked with.

Method

The researcher used ethnographical and phenomenological methods as a process to understand the lived experiences and career of a Hong Kong secondary school physical education (PE) teacher (Wharton). Ethnography focuses on the individual views and the shared

values of a specific culture, whereas phenomenology attempts to disclose concealed meaning embedded in the words of participant narrative (Sorrell & Redmond, 1995).

Ethnographic Approach

Since ethnographic approach is a process to understand the culture of a group from the perspective of a group member (Wolcott, 1995) and it also allows the researcher to become highly involved and immersed in the social world of the participant, the researcher of this study tries to concentrate on the description of Wharton's daily lives in which enables the researcher to explore different views at the same time. In addition, ethnography has been used to explore differences in cultures and is both administered to human communities as well as applied to other social settings in which humans interact (Whitehead, 2004). According to Sparkes (2002), quoting Dension and Rinehart (2000), the motivations behind were "to create a space for sport sociologists who have turned to more evocative ways of writing and to help legitimize the use of fiction and stories as nuanced ways to write up experimental ethnography" (Dension & Rinehart, 2000, p. 7). Sparkes (2009) stressed the production of multi-sensory ethnographies should be increasingly studied in sport and exercise science in order "to translate the multidimensional experiences of sport and exercise science to the reader..." (p. 32).

Phenomenological Approach

Phenomenology is a scientific and objective study of the nature of human beings and their existence (Husserl, 1931). Presently, there are different strands of phenomenology. In particular, Merleau-Ponty's existentialist phenomenology offers opportunities for exploring the human consciousness as embodied consciousness in PE and sports settings (Kerry & Armour, 2000). Research in PE and sports using phenomenological approach was advocated by Armour (1999) while Kelan (2011) also suggested exploring the embodiment of teaching and learning in her studies on the teaching of physical activity.

The conceptualization of phenomenology of movement in PE could renew the meaning and meaning-making for pedagogical theory development and practices (Brown & Payne, 2009). Shilling (2003) explained that the lived experience is inevitably mediated through bodies and was dependent on the management of bodies through time and space. Furthermore, sport is a good example of the social construction of bodies. Mastering physical skills and highly effective controlling of bodies can hence allow players to perform in prescribed ways. This echoes what Stolz's (2013) expressed as "what it is like to be embodied and recognizes the role of corporeal movement and embodiment plays in learning, in, by and through physical education (p. 949)."

From a phenomenological perspective, Merleau-Ponty (1962) argued that people conceptualize through their bodies. People can understand more of the relationship between the lived body and lived world from four perspectives: the existential dialogue between the intersensory body and intersensible things; the existential dialogue and the perceived media; the intercorporeal dialogue as existential dialogue; and the existential dialogue in the utensil world (Liu, 2012, pp. 13-19). To further understand the relationships of our consciousness and the existence of nature, Liu (2012) elaborated Merleau-Ponty's gestalt philosophy into four gestalts (static, dynamic, style and reversibility) to explain how multi-textured behaviours are embodied through athletic skill reconstruction since such experiences are socially constructed, and culturally and contextually-bound (Kirk, 2002).

The embodiment of the qualities of a good teacher is essential in order to shape and maintain the professional identity of PE teachers through contributing their expertise and constructing their status (Sum & Dimmock, 2014). At the same time, PE teachers also need to

see that other people view them as embodying exemplary qualities (Korthagen, 2004), such as the image of fairness and affirmation in the role of officiating, and the determination for excellence and victory in the role of coaching. The embodiments of these characteristics work as an expression of professional identity which affects the long-term development of a career trajectory and work life of a PE teacher (Sum & Dimmock, 2012).

Standal and Engelsrud (2013) emphasized that the notion of embodiment as a form, content and substance in movement contexts should be informed by empirical work such as intercorporeal learning and experiencing one's own training. To explore aspects of experience of self in sport, Whitson (1976) advocated that the phenomenological approach would make the greatest contribution. Moreover, Thorburn (2008) ascertained that Merleau-Ponty phenomenology of PE could link lived body experiences "within its inner life" (Hannah & Thompson, 2003, p. 24). The researcher of this study therefore intended to describe and interpret the experiences of Wharton in order to understand the essence of the experience as perceived by Wharton.

The above literature provides a concrete conceptual foundation for the use of phenomenology as one of the approaches in this study. In particular, the researcher used Liu's (2012) four gestalts (static, dynamic, style and reversibility) to explain how Wharton's multi-textured behaviours are embodied and internalised since the process of establishing the identity(ies) of a PE teacher combine one's embodied view of the self (self-image) and one's perception of how others see one's (public image; Jenkins, 2008).

Through combining ethnographical and phenomenological approaches in this study, the researcher believes that both researcher and participant can be empowered to play their essential roles on data collection. The combined approaches also offer a broader narrative and in-depth interpretation in data analysis. This study therefore also used ethnographic exploration and phenomenological description to inquire how a male secondary school PE teacher manages his work life and embodies his versatile roles.

Sampling

Wharton (pseudonym) had been identified by the researcher as a professional who specialized in teaching PE at a Hong Kong secondary school. The researcher employed theoretical sampling in order that data collection was purposively directed towards the informant and towards situations thought likely to provide data (Patton, 2002). Wharton had taught for nearly two decades in the same school, and was identified as a suitable participant for this study after initial interviews and observing him at one-half-day teaching period.

The researcher approached the participant directly in order to help establish a relationship of trust, which facilitated the process of data collection. To establish an equitable relationship between the participant and the researcher, it was important to be explicit about the nature of the study. The researcher explained to the participant how information was to be collected, processed and used. A written consent was obtained before the data was collected. This study was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and received approval by the Survey and Behaviour Research Ethics Committee of the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Data Collection

The data collection techniques were in-depth interviewing, participant observation and field notes, participant's reflection documentation and visual elicitation.

Interviewing is a conventional method of data collection for qualitative studies. The researcher used semi-structured interviews to provide plenty of room to respond to

conversations between researcher and participant. Complementary to the semi-structured interviews, participant observation and field notes is a central method of ethnography and a useful way of collecting data. Field notes are useful in helping the ethnographic researcher to identify specific phenomena as interesting and deserving of annotation. Observation was drawn upon at subsequent times to explore issues in different ways. Observation also offered the benefit of a physical presence and would have enabled the researcher to map the participant as he went about his daily work. The researcher reflected on what he observed and recorded as much as possible of what the researcher saw and heard by recording what he observed in the form of field notes. In addition, the participant's reflection notes served as secondary data to verify the participant's thoughts on a range of social or personal issues.

Through semi-structured interviews, the researcher elicited photos and videos which were taken during observation periods in his own school and working environment. These were aimed as visual aids to evoke thoughts, reactions and feelings from the participant about aspects of social life and to guide discussion between the participant and the researcher (Snyder & Kane, 1990).

The researcher in total used four semi-structured interviews, together with participant observation and field notes, participant's reflection documentation and visual elicitation for collecting data in this study. This wide range of data collection and analysis added an in-depth description and analysis to this phenomenological study. Data collection was conducted over a 6-month period. The data was collected at the Wharton's school with his consent.

Data Analysis

The interviews conducted in Chinese were audio-taped and transcribed into English by the researcher. The researcher was responsible for data collection, transcription, translation and analysis to ensure quality, consistency and accuracy of data processing and interpretation. Analysis included the identification of essential features, patterned regularities and systematic description of interrelationships among data. The researcher also examined the interview transcripts, field notes and participant's reflection documentation thoroughly and coded one by one using descriptive coding and the codes were then clustered into themes.

The concepts of "play to learn," "professional development" and "political empowerment" were identified to examine Wharton's lived experiences and career. By employing phenomenological description of a lived body and the lived world (Merleau-Ponty, 1963) as a starting point to understand the relationships between the lived experiences (Allen-Collinson, 2009), themes such as Static Gestalt, Dynamic Gestalt, Style Gestalt and Reversibility Gestalt (Liu, 2012) were used.

Trustworthiness

To ensure that the study was credible, member checks were conducted by emailing the analysed data to the participant, who was asked to correct errors or inaccuracies in the analysed data. As triangulation was also implemented in this study, the field notes and participant's reflection notes were used for validating the incoming data from the interviews. Through systematic record-keeping and on-going evaluation of findings, confirmability of the research findings was of uppermost consideration. Criteria of confirmability were the keeping of an audit trail, triangulation (stated above), reflexivity and researcher subjectivity. To reinforce reflexivity, the researcher addressed their subjectivities in addition to setting aside prior knowledge of the phenomena. The member check used in this study diminishes researcher bias because it allows participants to react to inaccuracies, if any, in the transcripts and analyse data

derived from the data collection process. This was a key process in combating any insider research bias.

All the interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. During the process of data collection and analysis, field notes were written, thus helping the formation of sturdier inductive results.

Results

Through an in-depth understanding of the meaning of the lives and embodiment of qualities of a secondary school PE teacher and constant comparison of the inductive approach from the data collected, Wharton was able to intentionally influence the nature of the culture within which he participated, through striving to change and/or preserve certain characteristics or practices. Three interrelated concepts were identified. They are “play to learn,” “professional development” and “political empowerment.”

Play to Learn

Wharton repeatedly mentions his life motto – “Play to Learn” - throughout the data collection period. His former PE teacher, who still teaches at the same school, has known Wharton for over 30 years. He described Wharton as having average academic results, was naughty and fond of challenging teachers. The only thing that held Wharton’s attention was playing basketball. This practice finally became essential in his professional development throughout his career.

In the interviews, Wharton told the researcher that he grew up in a low income family living in a public estate, not unlike many youngsters of the 1970s and 1980s in Hong Kong. He had two years clerical assistance experience before embarking on his PE teacher education studies in university from 1989 to 1993. Wharton has been teaching at his alma mater since 1994 after a year of teaching at another school. During the data collection period (December 2012 – May 2013), Wharton served as PE panel chair, subject teacher of Mathematics, as well as coach of the school’s boys’ basketball team. He has been responsible for these roles since starting his career at the school. He is also a keen licensed international basketball referee outside school hours. He has been serving these posts (roles) for almost two decades. Generally, Wharton has enjoyed having such versatile roles although he ranked teaching Mathematics a priority over PE. He remarked that there have been conflicts with other subject teachers as he holds dual roles teaching PE and Mathematics. He has juggled to balance the focus on academic success with upholding a strong sporting culture in the school. In terms of his expertise in basketball, he also commented that there have been concerns about the overlapping of his dual roles as a coach and an authoritative referee when he was executing his coaching role whilst refereeing at inter-school competitions. In relation to teaching PE, he stressed:

This is what the school required, [they were] very realistic ... Though I love basketball, I would not teach a lot of things related to it. I tend to let students explore many kinds of sports for them to discover which one ignites their interest. They have to be willing to exercise first, play to learn. Learn things through playing it.

Coaching basketball has been his source of satisfaction. He stressed that he does not know what his life will be like once he relinquishes his role as an international referee as he is reaching the retiring age imposed by the FIBA (Federal International Basketball Association).

Professional Development

With regards to Wharton's professional development, he considered a PE teacher to be an omnipotent professional. He chose to further develop his expertise by officiating at competitions and expressed:

The life working as a referee is even more interesting. People may think becoming an international referee is very successful, but I became a referee representing Hong Kong as I could not represent Hong Kong as an athlete. It has taken a lot for me to become an international referee and after doing so for many years, I realized that opportunities go to those who are well prepared.

Regardless, Wharton chose to further develop officiating in basketball although this was not a requirement of his full time work. He did not think that further development on the subject knowledge of PE was necessary.

Political Empowerment

In contrast with his preference of professional development, Wharton had clearly stated from the outset that being a Mathematics teacher was his top priority in terms of institutional requirement, political sensitivity and empowerment. He emphasized:

This is the school's requirement, very realistic; although this school does not require me to acquire a lot of subject (mathematics) knowledge...the school's system suits me.

Wharton was also the panel chair for the PE department. He has set up many working routines for the PE department in order to harmonize with the systems of other Academic departments. He claimed:

...that is why I said I set up working routines, not to make people feel that I am overbearing. The school also gives me the authority.... People can see the purpose of such routines.

Based on the above phenomenon, it is worth noting that Wharton's behaviour remains an open question as to how he manages his work life and the embodiment of his professional roles. In particular, observations of Wharton's teaching of both PE and Mathematics lessons, and coaching and officiating basketball were conducted during the period of the first data collection. In this, the researcher questioned how Wharton's lived body itself related with his lived world (Merleau-Ponty, 1963).

Phenomenological Description of a Lived Body and the Lived World – Gestalts

The researcher realized that Wharton's behaviours were blended with his beliefs, intention and actions (Pratt et al., 2001) through his life motto "Play to Learn." His actions were reflective of his professional development and political empowerment. In order to begin the process of reflexive critique, the researcher decided to concentrate on the reasons behind Wharton's behaviour and what it means to be a PE professional in Wharton's specific context.

In this connection, the researcher began reviewing related literature and tried using appropriate framework to delve into more detailed investigation on Wharton's view of his work

life and the embodiment of his professional roles. After critically studying literature about phenomenology and PE and sport, the researcher found that behaviour structured through the phenomenology description by Merleau-Ponty's (1963) was best suited as a framework for on-going data analysis in this study since Armour (1999) suggested that a new rationale in PE should be body-focused. Allen-Collinson (2009) believes that "phenomenology provides us with a way of combining the personal, idiographic and the general, ethnographic...and creating rich descriptions that produce a feeling of understanding in the reader, of bodily knowing and sense-making as well as cognitive knowledge" (p. 293).

Phenomenological description by using static gestalt, dynamic gestalt, style gestalt and reversibility gestalt (Liu, 2012; Merleau-Ponty, 1963) to explain how the multi-textured behaviours of Wharton had interacted with the social world since such experiences were socially constructed, culturally- and contextually-bound. The researcher believed that sociological examination in the context of PE could make wider use of the phenomenological approach since an in-depth analysis of meaning constructed by Wharton may serve as tools for both Wharton's and the researcher's reflections. In addition to this, the concept of norm was also highlighted to apprehend how Wharton's behaviour was structured where norm is the style of behaviour that is caught through perception and based on the certainty of the cognitive act (Merleau-Ponty, 1963). With Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception that is closely tied to the concept of the body concerning the experience of self and others, it is important to ascertain how Wharton's behaviour was structured through these gestalts.

Static Gestalt

Static gestalt is a "fixed focus" of how Wharton's versatile roles were formed equivalent to a figure with a background. While Wharton was reflecting his behaviours in a more structural way during the semi-structured interview, observation and visual elicitation, he accentuated how a pre-eminence of public image (Jenkins, 2008) and the society affected his modelling of an ideal teaching professional. As a non-subject specialist in Mathematics, he found that being "autocratic" was a "self-protective mechanism" to conceal his insufficiency of subject knowledge and teaching pedagogy of this untrained subject. Similarly, in his PE teaching, Wharton reflected that he was also autocratic when teaching aspects of PE that were non-ball games related. Such mechanism being incepted was an intention to ensure effective classroom management and prohibit students undermining his professional authority.

As for his basketball coaching, his answer was concise and precise – "autocratic." Whether at a training session or a competition, student-athletes must adhere to his instructions.

Dynamic Gestalt

In contrast with static gestalt, dynamic gestalt is the description of how Wharton operated his intentionality with the employment of schema of multi-aspects background and made sense of a wide range of phenomenon. Through a "self-protective mechanism" in the beginning stages of his professional life, Wharton's adaptation was rooted on the interaction with students. Since "self-protective mechanism" is the use of anger as a self-protective response against the feeling of shame and have a self-regulating effect on emotions (Kaplan, 2007, p. 244), he reflected that students implicitly taught him many things. He remembered:

Once, a student achieved full marks in a maths test but I only awarded him 99/100 and told him that there is no perfection in this world. He was so mad and threw the test paper into the garbage can...After this incident, I changed my methods.

Continuous professional development was also a positive way of deepening the acceptance of diversity in student learning. This has helped Wharton over the years to develop his philosophy in teaching, that is, “play to learn.” Despite being “autocratic” in both Mathematics and PE teaching, Wharton found he was more able to cultivate students’ interest in his Mathematics teaching than PE. Owing to the peculiarity of his conventional teacher education training, Wharton had a rather routine style of teaching PE at the beginning of his career. The turning point was when he was invited by scholars at a teachers education institute to work with an action research focused at teaching games for understanding (TGfU) (Bunker & Thorpe, 1982) as continuous professional development. TGfU is a problem-based approach to games teaching where the play of a game is taught before dealing with the performance of sport skills in PE lesson. Through observing Wharton’s PE lessons, the research realised that his PE lessons have been a more interactive and games focused learning experience for his students. He also acknowledged that changes to his teaching style were gradual and affected by sharing experiences with his wife, who was also a PE teacher, and by being a father of two.

Wharton’s basketball coaching approach appears to show little change from his “autocratic” ways which are deeply embedded in his beliefs. The only change was that by observing and imitating other coaching behaviours, he became more tolerant to mistakes and immaturity exhibited by student-athletes. As a licensed international referee, being “*neutral and apathetic*” in each game was unquestionable. He recalled being arrogant and uncooperative in the early stages of his refereeing career. He did not compromise on the so-called norms of the practices of what ordinary referees did. He had strongly believed that being a referee was a form of mechanical and unidimensional way of executing the task. Over the years, his earlier convictions have transformed to more multi-dimensional methods, serving players with a more humane and aesthetic approach.

Style Gestalt

Style Gestalt emphasizes on the intention of an individual and composition of his/her intention to effect. Intentionality forms a fundamental characteristic of an individual’s conscious activities (Merleau-Ponty, 1963). Merleau-Ponty’s interpretation of style was contextually “within the larger discussion of perception and expression” (Singer, 1996, p. 234). In other words, when Wharton interacted with the social world using his senses and different parts of his body, he had already been part of the gestalt of stylization. With regards to his teaching of Mathematics and PE, Wharton possessed a caring character. He described:

I think I am quite interesting. I’m a friend to them (students) instead of a teacher, I care about them and I rarely get mad at them. You feel joyful when playing and you can truly learn things. I hope my students can feel the same.

He also has his own teaching methods. In this, he added:

I will share my own experiences with my students. I have more opportunities to speak during a maths class, and therefore I prefer it (to PE). I might use my own actions to evoke change in students as there is less room to talk during a PE class... I have my own rules and I know how to deal with different situations.

In terms of his coaching style, he portrayed himself as a coach with brains and tactics but acknowledged that he can be annoying. As aforementioned, he believed that by being “autocratic,” he would have better control of the team. He claimed:

When I am a coach, I think many of my students don't like me but as I have a lot of coaching experience, my students benefit from it.

Wharton was satisfied with his refereeing style. He contended that his every judgment whilst refereeing was accurate and fair despite the fact that he did not pay much attention to his personal appearance which was fat and clumsy.

Reversibility Gestalt

Reversibility is both the principle of reflexivity of the senses and self-reference of the individual sensing body. It also emphasizes on the individual's rethink and embodiment of his/her self-awareness (Welton, 1999) and "leads to a reduction of the inter-subjective experience of the body manifest in an encounter with another embodied person, to a form of reflexivity operative within the body proper" (Stawarska, 2002, p. 155). Wharton valued his being "autocratic" to students where he reflected "*self-protective mechanism*" would not be necessary in his teaching and coaching roles. He expressed:

I will still be the same (autocratic). There are some rules which must be clarified. I have built my system and students should obey and uphold it. My students are quite used to my system of teaching even though it seems contradicts of being a friend.

Wharton was also proud to claim he was the first teacher to bring students out of the classroom for academic teaching. Students valued the initiative and other subject teachers thereafter followed his initiative. Wharton believed that such diversified pedagogical skills took root from his teaching philosophy. In spite of Wharton's inter-subjective experience, he had developed a set of norms in relation to his style. Particularly in PE teaching, he claimed:

The teaching environment, particularly for PE, must be clearly delineated. Students must be disciplined and adhere to my instructions at all times. For example, in gymnastics teaching, safety is my highest concern and skills taught must be well organized...others might see these as my "self-protective mechanism." As long as both parties accept these well-established norms, we should continue in these practices... However, I have also become more able to accept changing situations.

Through PE and Mathematics lesson observations by the researchers, Wharton's personal re-evaluation and embodiment of his self-awareness and continuing reflection of his interaction with students, he has become more tolerant and flexible in order to avoid confrontation with students. Wharton's teaching practices were highly received by students although students viewed his style as vicious. Nevertheless, his practice as a licensed international referee has remained the same. Wharton affirmed:

Even now, I would not appear too sociable, especially on court. Being "neutral and apathetic" in each game is unquestionable.

However, Wharton found there was more space to show solicitude for students' ability in coaching basketball. He implicitly and modestly acknowledges that he is still learning how to be a good coach:

Being older and more mature, I don't scold students as often as before, as long as they attend practice and train hard. In my earlier years, I did not hold back my reproach to students who were late for training and would even scold them in front of other students. I do not do that now.

With Wharton's continual reflection on his lived body and lived world, he reaffirmed that human relationships is one of his concerns. He further added that his physical appearance could be better as he considered himself clumsy and fat, and that may bring considerable adverse impressions to the public.

Discussion

The emergence of "Play to Learn" is based on the ideas, values and habits possessed by Wharton, which result from the interaction of his personal dispositions and the external environment. This life motto is thus one of the concepts in the interpretation of results of this study. In addition, Wharton's actions in his day to day living reflect his professional development and political empowerment. Despite the fact that Wharton's "play to learn" motto goes against the grain of traditional Confucianism in Hong Kong society which focuses on academic success and mental work (Hsieh & Woo, 2005), he carried out his motto through different roles as PE teacher, Mathematics teacher, coach and referee of basketball.

Wharton repeatedly mentions "Play to Learn" as his life motto. However, this is contradictory to his day to day actions where his authoritarian style appears predominant once his self-protective mechanism is triggered. In brief, "autocratic," "self-protective mechanism" and "neutral and apathetic" were characteristics of how Wharton's versatile roles were performed when he manages and embodies his professional life (Sum & Dimmock, 2014).

With regard to Wharton's continuous professional development, scholars have accentuated that career-long continuing professional development of PE teachers is the central component to improving education and to meeting the challenges of an ever-changing environment (Amour, 2006; Guskey, 2002; Ha et al., 2010). This was echoed by Sum and Dimmock (2012) who viewed PE teachers as having a wider range of expertise in practicing their profession by actively participating in sporting activities outside their formal working hours, which they can find satisfying.

Wharton's political empowerment experience is a process of establishing autonomy and influence on decision-making "whereby school participants develop the competence to take charge of their own growth and resolve their own problems" (Short, 1994, p. 488). Wharton's experience may also be viewed as "solace" (Thorburn, 2011, p. 337) in a PE teacher's career, being empowered through playing other more diverse roles outside school PE (Sum & Dimmock, 2014).

With regard to Wharton's static gestalt, this is consistent with the findings of Kwon et al (2010) which stated that PE teachers possess more autocratic decision-making styles when coaching. While trying to avoid arousing suspicion as coach and referee in the small basketball scene in Hong Kong, he tries to be "neutral and apathetic" when officiating at basketball competitions. Since Wharton experienced role conflict as highlighted by previous studies (O'Connor & Macdonald, 2002; Richards & Templin, 2012; Schempp et al., 1993), he performed his social positions in accordance with his experiences which was culturally and contextually-bound, and modelled by society.

Although Wharton's body is continuously communicating with the social world (Kirk, 2002), his style is consistently adapted, reformed, reinforced and refreshed with his versatile roles and to the ever-changing environment. This echoes Kirk (2002), who highlighted that the body image of PE teachers is socially constructed and shaped by everyday practices.

It appears that Wharton's lived experience of teaching had shifted from a behaviourist teacher (Barakatas, 2005) to a more constructivist teacher (Morrone et al., 2004) where he mechanically viewed his roles from a teacher-centred approach to a comparatively more student-centred approach by gradually using active learning strategies to stack activities and tasks to students in order to let them explore their environment and learn from experience. The "self-protective mechanism" being a hindering factor in the early stages of his career appears to be diminishing as time goes by.

The retrospective narrative of Wharton stemmed firmly from his beliefs and intentions. He took action with the schema of multi-aspects background and made adaptive sense to a wide range of phenomenon. The patterns of behaviour formed his habits and ritual which finally affected the culture and atmosphere of his working institution (Sum, 2012).

The researcher is able to delve further into how Wharton manages his work life and the embodiment of his professional roles using static gestalt, dynamic gestalt, style gestalt and reversibility gestalt (Liu, 2012; Merleau-Ponty, 1963) to analyse Wharton's multi-textured behaviours.

Conclusion

This study sought to explore the work life and embodiment of qualities of a Hong Kong secondary school PE teacher by employing Wharton's story of how he manages his professional roles. Lived experience is the way Wharton views the world through his experiences. This refers to the way Wharton views and describes his experiences as a secondary school PE teacher. The lived body concerned with Wharton's past experiences have become embodied in which Wharton believed (lived body itself) his "Play to Learn" life motto constituted his further professional development and that of being politically empowered. However, the data collection findings, based on phenomenological examination on Wharton's blended behaviours, contradicted the "play to learn" theme. "Autocratic," "self-protective mechanism" and "neutral and apathetic" (lived world) were the key factors of Wharton's multi-textured experiences of his lived sporting body when he embodied the work life and the qualities of a PE teacher in the Hong Kong context. Wharton's living body was also a site where lived experience was being perpetual.

It was found that using ethnographical and phenomenological approaches were appropriate for exploring the life and embodiment of a PE teacher. With these approaches linked to the results of this study, it allowed the researcher to look for cluster of meaning, textual and structural descriptions and horizontalisation of collected data that happen as a result of intervening and assisting on how Wharton reflected on his blended behaviours. It also allowed Wharton to study his work situations and perceived problems in relation to the institutions he worked for and the people he worked with.

This study used phenomenological framework to examine a PE teacher's work life and embodiment of qualities which are socially located, socially related and an interacting body (Allen-Collinson, 2009). The concept "play to learn" was identified during the course of the study, and professional development and political empowerment were employed to outline the findings in the data analysis. Merleau-Ponty's gestalts were used to analyse the findings in the data analysis. With Merleau-Ponty's wide scope of work, the unified central question was how we should understand consciousness, the world and their relationships. This study illustrated that Wharton's behaviour is shaped by his environment; his environment is also shaped by Wharton through his Coaching, Officiating, Administrating and Teaching (COAT) roles.

Since this study was not to generalize its findings to a population, it allows readers to understand a Hong Kong secondary school PE teacher's past and/or future experiences in a new way. In addition, this study may inform literature on sociological perspectives (Green,

2000; 2002) and the life histories (Sparkes et al., 1993) of PE teachers and be applicable to other teachers as they adapt to environmental changes in other settings. This study also expands the notions of lived experiences of PE teachers in which may provide insights for policy makers attending to the need to plan the professional training of PE teachers and retain young professionals who have just entered the field. In addition, methodologically, the data collection techniques used to study teachers generally and PE teachers particularly, have been predominantly questionnaires and structured interviews. Often these formats draw the participants' attention to specific questions designed by the researchers on the basis of their own personal experiences, including biases and predispositions about the topic. Such inquiry tends to indicate statistical relationships between phenomena, but do not necessarily indicate the reasons underlying complex relationships. The present study allows participants to describe and construct the meanings they made of their work, rather than respond to predetermined questions or address topics that were important only to the researcher.

As a qualitative researcher who is also a PE teacher educator, the researcher has personally benefitted from the findings of this study in various ways which will affect his research practices, as well as his relationships with both in-service and pre-service PE teachers. It has been an enriching experience and a fruitful journey for the researcher to reflect his role as an educator in a teacher education institute. It is hoped that this study will lead to improving one's understanding of the lived experience of PE teachers in Hong Kong. Further research might foreground how PE teacher's beliefs, intention and actions can affect the culture of the school. The researcher believes the lived experience and career of PE teachers is illuminated through the contributions to this study.

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