Physical Education and Sports Science in Thailand

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Physical education was first initiated into Thai curriculum in 1904. At that time, physical training was the only subject to be taught in the school. Physical education was taught only in the elementary school and was not the popular subject due to lack of trained physical education teacher. Until 1932, Thai curriculum was reformed and physical education was more focused and was one of the compulsory subject in both elementary and secondary schools. Thai curriculum has been through many reform processes such as in 1995, 2001, and the latest was in 2011. The main causes of the problem calling for reform could be identified as over centralization, lack of unity in educational administration, lack of efficiency in quality assurance and desirable standards and lack of public participation, for examples. The reform process has been stepped up as compelled by both internal and external factors. Education reform is imperative for sustainable development of the country because in a knowledge-based economy, competitiveness is attained through knowledge and ability of the people. An emphasis on decentralization, strategic planning and information technology as well as the inclusion of national quality assurance system in the strategies to translate the reform into actual plans. The new curriculum of the basic education curriculum require that the school must follow eight core subjects each semester: Thai language, mathematics, science, social science, health and physical education, arts and music, technology, and foreign languages. The latest education reform has introduced the standard based curriculum to replace the previous content based program in which the ministry of education has decentralized its authority to all schools in the country to enable them to design their own curriculum according to the indicators designated in each class level. However, mathematics, sciences, computers, and language have been given particular attention while the perception of physical education is still at a low priority subject because to many people it does not contribute directly or substantially to a country’s economy. This has given rise to policy makers and top administrative officials such as heads of schools to sideline physical education and sports under growing pressures to include other more important subjects. Additionally, lack of experience in designing the physical education curriculum by many schools cause some confusion in teaching physical education. As a result, the assessment of learner’s achievement and curriculum has been relatively affected. With insufficient number of qualified physical education teachers especially in the elementary school and limited playgrounds, physical education can then be viewed as the low priority subject. According to the Bangkok Agenda for Actions on Physical Education adopted at the UN International Conference on Sport and Education held in Bangkok during October 30- November 2, 2005, stating that it should be mandatory for every school to provide all students with at least 120 minutes of physical education each week. In lower secondary school, the requirement of the curriculum stating that there must be two hours of physical education class and one hour of health education class. However, in the upper secondary schools require physical education to be taught only twice a month with only one hour period while the alternate week allow health education to be taught. Even there is increasing demands of physical education teacher, ironically, Faculties of physical education in many universities has turned to be Faculties of Sports Science to react to the growth of sport, exercise and fitness industry. The academic discipline of sports science now encompasses the professional and allied fields of sports physiology, sports psychology, sports coaching, sports management, sports technology, health science, health promotion, recreation and leisure management. Many universities illustrate the growth and development of programs in sports science. It is hoped to see the future alignment of sports science with physical education to provide the bringing together of these two academic areas to more fully address emerging professional opportunities in Thailand.