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Gendered pedagogy in senior secondary physical education curriculum enactment

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ABSTRACT

Arnold's dimensions of movement (1979) and Wilcox's embodied ways of knowing (2009) informed case study research which explored the influence of gender(ed) movement-based pedagogy and associated equity issues in Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) Physical Education (PE). VCE PE teachers from three schools provided documentation (course, unit, lesson plans, resources, assessment materials) and semi-structured interviews to investigate how teachers used movement and the role gender plays in influencing decisions and approaches relating to movement-based pedagogy. Gender discourses were evident in teachers' decisions regarding the types of movement experiences included in VCE PE, pedagogical approaches and assessment contexts. Issues of safety were linked to gendered assumptions about learners. Movement is a central tenet of senior secondary PE, yet movement-based pedagogy needs to be more responsive to the needs of all students to ensure equity in students' movement and learning experiences and to positively reflect gender diversity of student cohorts.

KEYWORDS

Physical education;
Curriculum; Gender;
Pedagogy; Physical activity;
Equity

Introduction

Senior Secondary Physical Education (SSPE) courses comprising an examination component were first introduced in Australia in the 1970s (López-Pastor, Kirk, Lorente-Catalán, MacPhail, & Macdonald, 2013). SSPE courses are delivered in the final two years of secondary education and typically contain an examination component (Whittle et al., 2017). In 2018 the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) introduced the revised SSPE examination course within the VCE. VCE Physical Education (PE) consists of four units of study and includes a high stakes externally assessed examination. Units 1 and 2 are generally completed in Year 11 and the externally assessed Units 3 and 4 in Year 12 (the exit year of Victorian secondary schooling). Students following the VCE PE course are generally 15–18 years old. In their aims for the

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VCE PE course, the VCAA state that this subject enables students to ‘use practical activities to underpin contemporary theoretical understanding of the influences on participation, performance in physical activity, sport and exercise’ (VCAA, 2017, p. 5). Foundational work conducted for this research affirmed that a comparable emphasis on connecting physical activity with theoretical understanding was evidenced across SSPE courses nationally (New South Wales, Queensland, Tasmania and Western Australia) and Internationally (Ireland, New Zealand and Scotland). Specifically, a word frequency analysis of each jurisdiction’s rationale statement identified movement, physical activity and learning as three of the most commonly used terms across each jurisdiction’s rationale. Yet, alongside this orientation articulated in course rationales, course developments and research have drawn attention to challenges associated with how physical activity (through selected practical activities) is positioned in examinable SSPE courses (Brown & Penney, 2018). Pertinent to this study is the scope that the VCE PE curriculum affords teachers for localised decision-making in relation to *how* movement-based pedagogies will be used in their enactment of the course and what practical activities they can draw upon and. This research therefore acknowledged that *what* activities and the movement-based pedagogy used to implement these to students in VCE PE may vary. In establishing these foci for inquiry we also recognised the potential for SSPE to be a site for the expression of gendered discourses and pedagogy amidst stated commitments to ensuring educational equity and inclusion (Brown & Penney, 2018; Hay & Macdonald, 2010; Penney & Hay, 2008). As Penney et al. (2018) highlighted, decisions relating to PE curriculum, pedagogy and assessment may all variously advance or inhibit progress towards greater equity in the subject. We therefore acknowledged a need to bring a ‘gender agenda’ (Penney & Evans, 2002) to the exploration of movement-based pedagogies in teachers’ enactment of the VCE PE curriculum, and to reflect this in the research questions guiding the broader study:

- What are Physical Education teachers’ perspectives of using physical activity in VCE Physical Education?
- What gender discourse, if any, is evident in relation to VCE PE teachers’ use of physical activity in VCE Physical Education.

In so doing, the research sought to extend knowledge of enactment of VCE PE and generate insights relevant to curriculum agencies, teachers, teacher educators and researchers working in other SSPE contexts.

Gender discourse and movement discourse in SSPE: theoretical frameworks for inquiry

The focus of this research study broadly explored *how* teacher’s used practical activities to support development of students’ theoretical understanding in VCE PE. Embedded within this focus and the basis for this paper, was the intent of exploring the presence of gender discourse and issues of equity prominent through the responses provided by teachers participating in this study. This section provides an overview of the theoretical perspectives that informed and were blended in the inquiry: Arnold’s dimensions of movement (1979) and Wilcox’s embodied ways of knowing (2009).

Arnold's dimensions of movement (1979) provided a conceptualisation of learning *in*, *through* and *about* movement. The framework has been directly and indirectly used as a theoretical basis for the construction of SSPE curricula both in Australia and internationally over many years (Brown & Penney, 2013; Garrett & Wrench, 2015; Jones & Penney, 2019; Penney & Hay, 2008). In this study, Arnold's dimensions provided a framework to explore intrinsic, embodied *in* movement experiences that privileged or inhibited respective genders. Education *in* movement directs attention to the ingrained value of movement for the individual, and therefore the intrinsic worth of the movement experience and the embodied learning that cannot be disassociated from the experience (Jones & Penney, 2019). Secondly, the study allowed for identification of gender discourses in the objectives teachers had for learning *through* movement, encompassing extrinsic learning objectives, such as physical, emotional, intellectual, and social understandings of an individual (Jones & Penney, 2019). Finally, the role that gender played in determining the movement experiences that were selected to learn *about* the theoretical knowledge specified in VCE PE was examined. Education *about* movement is concerned with the theoretical or propositional learning that can be derived from participation in the activity, including biomechanical, physiological, psychological, and sociocultural understandings (Brown & Penney, 2018). This dimension has previously been identified as overrepresented in the planning and enactment of SSPE curricula in preference to the *in* and *through* dimensions (Stolz & Thorburn, 2017).

Despite Arnold never intending for the dimensions to be viewed exclusively (Arnold, 1979), it is important to acknowledge the prevailing view of scholars (Brown & Penney, 2013; Jones & Penney, 2019) who have questioned the application of the dimensions in formal curriculum development and its enactment. Stolz and Thorburn (2017) highlighted the over representation of the *about* dimension of movement in senior school examination courses, in preference to the *in* and *through* dimensions which has commonly resulted in the perpetuation of the mind/body dualism (Grosz, 1993; Wilcox, 2009), where theoretical and practical ways of knowing were seen as unrelated properties; or as 'demarcated silos' (Stolz & Thorburn, 2017, p. 385). The interpretive link made between the *about* dimension of movement and propositional knowledge in SSPE (Brown & Penney, 2013) can be further used to explain Thorburn (2007) and Casey and O'Donovan's (2015) viewpoint that students were spending more time studying than experiencing SSPE.

Figure 1 illustrates the previously accepted overemphasis on Arnold's learning *about* movement in SSPE whilst introducing our blended theoretical framework that brings Wilcox's embodied ways of knowing (2009) into play to extend the interrogation of how Arnold's dimensions are being expressed in SSPE practice.

This framework promotes the body being used to experience PE and produce knowledge. To articulate the value and uniqueness of blending in Wilcox's ways of knowing (2009) we point specifically to *Tom's Story*; practitioner physical activity research conducted by Garrett and Wrench (2015) with teachers in South Australia, Australia. The context of *Tom's Story* provided an example of how Wilcox's ways of knowing (2009) could be used as a mechanism for the application of Arnold's dimensions of movement (1979) and particularly the *in* movement dimension. In our research the blending of Arnold's (1979) dimensions of movement and Wilcox's (2009) embodied ways of knowing supported the added intent of the study to investigate the presence and

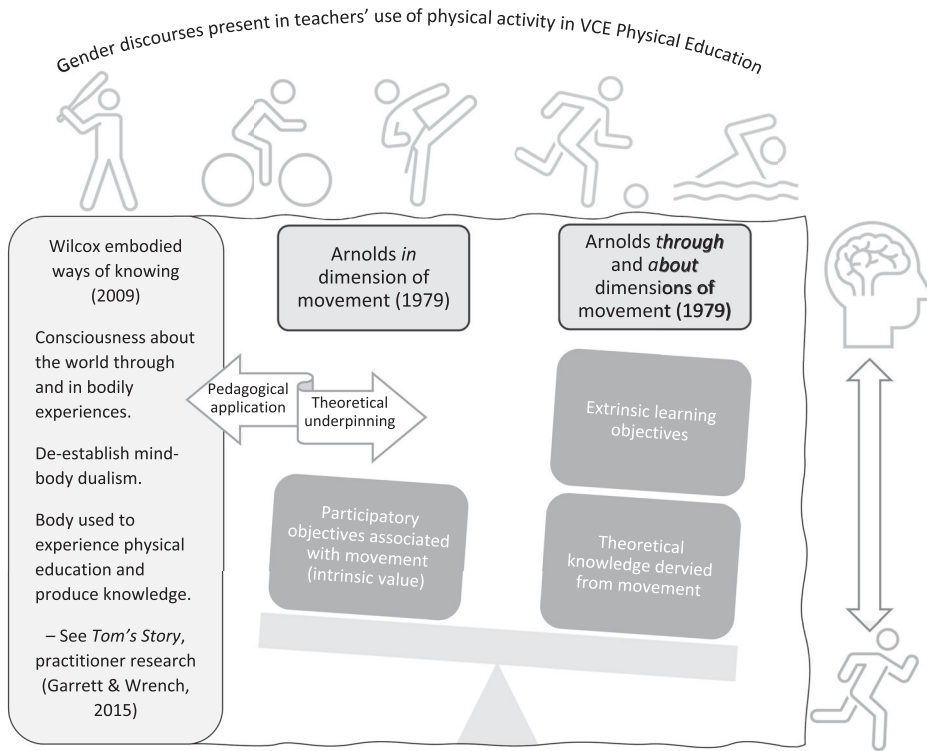


Figure 1. Blended theoretical framework (Arnold’s dimensions of movement & Wilcox embodied ways of knowing) used to explore gendered discourses in teachers’ use of physical activity in VCE Physical Education.

influence of gender discourse, through both how physical activity was purposively used to enact the course specifications (to achieve intrinsic/extrinsic benefits and link theoretical concepts) and (gendered) decision-making relating to the types of physical activity and how they would be implemented.

The sections that follow provide further important background to the study, relating to the positioning of physical activity within VCE PE and the notion of gender discourse and equity within PE.

Physical activity within the VCE physical education curriculum

The rationale for the VCE PE course includes the following statements:

The study of VCE Physical Education enables students to integrate a contemporary understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of performance and participation in physical activity with practical application. Through engagement in physical activities, VCE Physical Education enables students to develop the knowledge and skills required to critically evaluate influences that affect their own and others’ performance and participation in physical activity. (VCAA, 2017, p. 5)

For over two decades, academics in this field have highlighted the challenges associated with integrating theory and practical activities (Brown & Penney, 2017; Jones & Penney,

2019; Macdonald & Brooker, 1997; Thorburn, 2007; Thorburn & Collins, 2006). The concept of integration was defined by Jones and Penney (2019) as ‘the development of an understanding about theoretical knowledge and principles, developed and utilised in and through authentic practical activities, contexts and situations’ (p. 7). While research has found that teachers acknowledge the importance of experiential learning through practical experiences (Thorburn, 2008), the academic discourse inherent in many current SSPE curricula has commonly resulted in the privileging of propositional knowledge over the use of physical activity through movement-based pedagogy (Brown & Penney, 2017). At the same time, previous studies engaging with the VCE PE have affirmed the importance of physical activity from both teachers’ and students’ perspectives (Whittle et al., 2017, 2018). This aligns with Thorburn’s (2008) contention that to achieve student engagement, movement must be the backbone of many learning experiences in PE; if it is not, that would be akin to ‘music education without sound!’ (p. 263).

As noted, localised decision-making is embedded in the VCE PE course design and can be regarded as a feature that to some extent, empowers schools and teachers to ensure that students will be given access to authentic learning experiences that link to lived experiences (Thorburn, 2008) and have personalised meaning. At the same time, we suggest this flexibility in curriculum enactment opens the door for gender equity to be either advanced or inhibited in enactment.

Gender discourse and equity in physical education

We share the views of Penney (2002) and Shilling (1993) in stating that notions of *sex* referring to biological difference and *gender* as socially defined, non-biological differences, are too simplistic. Use of the term ‘gender’ in this research seeks to acknowledge the same diversity of ‘characteristics and experiences’ (Shilling, 1993, p. 15) that supersede individuals as merely women and men and recognises their multiple identities as people (Penney, 2002). Gender equity as explored in relation to VCE PE therefore extends beyond access to opportunities (and specifically physical activities), to also include equity in relation to one’s physical culture. Kirk (1993) defined physical culture as: ‘a range of practices concerned with the maintenance, representation and regulation of the body centred on three highly codified, institutionalised forms of physical activity: sport, physical recreation and exercise’ (p. 340). In this context, physical culture provides a link between the term *movement* used centrally in this research and the identification of gender discourses in teachers’ enactment of VCE PE.

Gendered curriculum and practices in pre senior physical education

PE curriculum and pedagogies have been extensively analysed as sites for the (re)production of gender dominant norms (Joy et al., 2021) and practices that have marginalised young people who do not conform to established gendered (binary) lines (Drury et al., 2022). Put somewhat bluntly, ‘the structure of PE is gendered and so is the way PE is often taught’ (Joy et al., 2021, p. 2), with studies noting that pre senior PE is commonly experienced by students through a gendered sport-based curriculum delivery underpinned by competitive, performance-driven pedagogies (Block, 2014). Many programs

have historically featured a gendered curriculum where team and ball sports have been taught to boys while other activities, including dance and gymnastics, have been taught to girls (Joy et al., 2021, see also, Larsson et al., 2009). Underpinning curriculum structures such as these are notions of gendered (and binary) bodies that influence the activities deemed appropriate for which gender (Gard, 2006) and how they are taught.

The historical embodiment of gender discourse within PE is also reflected in sustained commentaries that have revealed the obstructiveness of masculinity in shaping the learning experiences of boys and girls in PE (see, for example, Evans et al., 1996; Hay & Macdonald, 2010; Mooney & Hickey, 2017; Penney, 2002). Van Daalen (2005) notes, for example, the use of pedagogies that employ competition as a motivation technique. While competition can be used to teach the qualities of fairness and integrity in sport, it can also be negatively used to create a performance gap between students who are stronger and more skilled and can also privilege hegemonic constructs of masculinity such as physical and emotional strength (Connell, 1995). Competitive bodies position boys not only to be interested in PE but also to excel and be dominant within PE, while simultaneously positioning girls to be less interested or capable (Joy et al., 2021). As Mooney and Gerdin (2018) point out, it is important to acknowledge that many boys are also affected by simplistic, gendered assumptions, where they are expected to develop their masculinities through competitive athleticism in PE, resulting in the victimisation of those who fail to embody dominant masculine norms.

In considering how most girls view PE classes and what they want from PE lessons, Azzarito et al.'s (2006) research further subverts the notion that 'girls' subjectivity is fixed and singular and provides an alternative view to dominant patriarchal discourses that depict girls as 'passive, subordinated, and with emotional needs' (p. 237). On the contrary, girls indicated that 'they would be willing to actively participate in activities in an equitable setting' (Azzarito et al., 2006, p. 237). Elsewhere, Larsson et al. (2009) reported developments in Sweden where girls were taught activities that were previously only taught to boys, but also noted that often the reverse did not happen and activities such as dance and gymnastics were effectively removed from the curriculum. Kim and Hodge (2021) recently shared the responses of three female Korean middle school students who described how the pedagogies forced upon them by their teachers, denied them the chance of playing sports offered to boys. Findings such as these point to the continued need for teachers, teacher educators, and researchers to look for ways to disturb established gender discourses and create more inclusive and encouraging physical education contexts for all students (Azzarito et al., 2006).

Gender discourse and senior secondary physical education

The work of Hay and Macdonald (2010), centring on the Queensland, Australia SSPE examination course and the gendered construction of ability, is one of few studies examining gender discourse in SSPE. Hay and Macdonald (2010) founded their work on the anticipation that the syllabus encouraged 'sensitivity to gender' (p. 274). At the same time, they believed adjustments to the curriculum such as 'the inclusion of more gender-neutral physical activities in Senior PE present an obvious and official avenue for change' (Hay & Macdonald, 2010, p. 283). To contextualise this view and link to the present study, we note that VCE PE (as other comparable SSPE examination

courses in Australia) is an 'opt in' course, where students elect to study the course based on a reasonable assumption of an interest in physical activity, which could include, but is not limited to traditional forms of (competitive) sport. For teachers to help students to engage with and reflect on their performance and participation in physical activity, as is required in VCE PE (VCAA, 2017), it is important to recognise their prior experiences and motivations with physical activity, which includes their pre senior (potentially gendered) experiences of PE.

Brown and Penney (2018) referenced UNESCO's (2015) guidelines for quality PE as an orientation point for SSPE teachers, policy creators and physical education teacher educators (PETE) in developing and adopting pedagogy to promote authenticity and inclusion, that is characterised by choice, flexibility and is student centred. This is relevant for PE across all years of schooling, through a recognition that gender discourse is changing and PE student demographics are becoming more diverse. Since 'self-described' (previously referred to as Gender 'X')¹ student enrolment data was first collected in Victoria in 2017, students completing VCE Physical Education nominating 'self-described' as their gender identity has increased from one in 2017 to ten in 2023, representing a 9% increase. Whilst it is beyond the scope of this paper to explore issues of gender identity and the experiences of individuals identifying as gender-neutral, transgender or LGBTIQ+², it is important to note the significance of research that has such a focus. Furthermore, we suggest that it is extremely timely for research to explore the ways in which SSPE programs, pedagogy and assessment contribute to either challenging or reproducing gender dominant norms. This is a clear reminder of the need to ensure curriculum structures and the way they are enacted by teachers are as equally progressive and inclusive in their approach as the students they are educating (Drury et al., 2022). In the VCE PE context, our research explored how teachers' enactment of curriculum used movement and the role gender played in decisions and approaches relating to movement-based pedagogy.

Methodology

Ethical approval for the research was gained from Edith Cowan University. As a requirement of the ethics approval process participants were provided with an information letter that explained the focus of the study and considerations for participation, including the voluntary nature of participation and recognition of the potential sensitivity of data. To protect anonymity, participants' and institution names were not used during the transcription, analysis, and reporting processes. Coded abbreviations for schools and pseudonyms for all teachers are used in the presentation of data and discussion that follows.

The research used a qualitative framework and case study approach. The focus was on collecting detailed information from a small, defined sample of cases; a single sex boys (SSB) school, a co-educational (CE) school, and a single sex girls (SSG) school. To facilitate comparison between each case, all three schools were: (a) independent (non-government) schools, (b) situated in the south-eastern suburbs, and (c) similar in terms of socioeconomic profiles. The three participant schools (referred to as SSG, SSB and CE hereon) were situated in the south-eastern suburbs of Melbourne, Australia, and within 10 km of the CBD. At the time of the research all three schools were ranked at or above 97+ percentile for socio-educational advantage based on the Australian

Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority's (ACARA) Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA); ACARA (2022) and could be considered 'high achieving' based on their VCE study score results, with each school ranking in the top 15% of schools in Victoria in 2020 (Better Education, 2022).

Two VCE PE teachers from each school participated in the study. Table 1 provides a summary of the schools' demographic profile and teacher information.

Data collection utilised firstly, documentary methods, where documents specifically related to purposeful decision-making around formal (pre-determined) and informal (incidental) practical activities that employed movement-based pedagogy, were collected from participating teachers at each of the three case study schools. This included time-tabling information, unit outlines and worksheets and/or other materials relating to physical activities completed. Secondly, semi-structured interviews were conducted

Table 1. SSG School's demographic and teacher information.

	SSG	SSB	CE
Year levels	Early years (3 year and 4-year-old Kindergarten) – Year 12	Preparatory (5-year-old commencement of primary school)–Year 12	Kindergarten (3-year-old)–Year 12
Student population	~1,000	~1,900	~1,300 (Approx. 55% boys; 45% girls)
VCE PE classes	1 x Units 1 & 2 2 x Units 3 & 4	2 x Units 1 & 2 2 x Units 3 & 4	2 x Units 1 & 2 1 x Units 3 & 4
Average number of students per VCE PE class	18	15	13
Timetabled lessons	5x55-minute lessons and 1x110-minute lesson per 10-day cycle	4x45-minute periods and 1x90-minute period per 6 d cycle	4x80-minute periods and 2x40-minute periods per 10-day cycle
Facilities accessible for Physical Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A 25 m indoor swimming pool • 1 indoor netball/basketball court • Gymnastics room featuring a foam pit and sprung floor • Designated gymnasium (resistance equipment and cardio equipment such as rowing machines and spin bikes) • 6 outdoor netball courts • Yoga studio • Small athletics track 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25 m heated swimming pool (with diving pool) • Indoor sports hall for basketball, volleyball, badminton and table tennis • Gymnasium (strength and conditioning centre) • Synthetic hockey/soccer pitch in winter and 12 tennis courts in summer • Over six ovals and sports fields • Rowing pavilion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25m indoor swimming pool • Indoor basketball court • Weights room • Synthetic hockey pitch • 2 small outdoor netball courts • 2 small outdoor basketball courts • Oval • Small indoor multipurpose room
Teacher information			
Teachers (pseudonym, classes being taught at the time of research)	Mary (Units 3 & 4) Ruby (Units 1 & 2 and Units 3 & 4)	Mark (Units 1 & 2 and Units 3 & 4) James (Units 1 & 2)	Lisa (Units 3 & 4) Eden (Units 1 & 2)
Teachers' years of experience	Mary 11 years Ruby 3 years	Mark 15+ years James 7 years	Lisa 9 years Eden 4 years
Teacher experience in specific gender settings	Mary (SSG and SSB) Ruby (SSG)	Mark (SSB, SSG, and CE) James (SSB and CE)	Lisa (CE) Eden (CE)

online (COVID restrictions meant in-person interviews were not possible). The relatively unstructured nature of the interviews allowed for the exchanging of ideas and organic exploration of viewpoints raised by the teachers. Interviews sought information related to; introductory information about the school (i.e. numbers of boys and girls in your class and access to learning spaces), curriculum (i.e. what do you believe your students most and least enjoy about VCE PE?), enacting curriculum (i.e. what, why and how is physical activity included in your enactment of the study?) and impact of movement (i.e. have you any anecdotal evidence that you can link physical activity involvement to improved understanding of concepts?). It is important to note that the semi-structured interview themes and sample questions above, reinforce that this paper formed part of a broader study that had the primary focus of exploring teachers' perspectives on their use of physical activity within the VCE PE curriculum. Interview questions were deliberately structured to allow the exploration of gender discourse in teachers' use of physical activity to occur indirectly. As Laker et al. (2003) noted when gender issues were not a primary focus of the research, a greater level of honesty tended to be achieved within a research environment. Where gender discourses were evident in teachers' responses in exploring content associated with their movement-based pedagogies, participants were then prompted to expand on their responses to further understand the role gender played in teachers' movement-based pedagogical decision-making.

Data analysis involved a staged process that was theoretically informed, whereby a provisional set of codes was developed from the two theoretical frameworks underpinning the research: Arnold's dimensions of movement (1979) and Wilcox's embodied ways of knowing (2009). These codes were refined in an iterative manner through multiple rounds of reading, classifying, reviewing and refining the meanings associated with data extracts. Data from the documentary research artefacts was first annotated with reference to the research questions. The next step brought together the documentary and interview data for each case. This step identified points of consistency and contrast in documentary and semi-structured interview data for each case and developed depth in analysis at a single case level. Data analysis then further examined the full dataset for all three cases. This iterative process and the application and refinement of codes led to the identification of common themes across the cases.

Themes that were identified through this analysis across the three case study schools were:

- the pedagogical purpose of using physical activity to integrate theoretical concepts (themes related to the 'why' and 'when?')
- the logistical influences (e.g policies and facilities) within the school that influenced the use of physical activity (themes related to the 'where?')
- the decision-making of the type of physical activities and how they would be implemented (themes related to the 'what' and how?'), including gendered perspectives evident.

The focus of this paper is on findings pertaining to the third theme and specifically, the gendered perspectives identified in the data.

Limitations

This study employed case study methodology and the findings arising are acknowledged as context specific. Further research involving a broad cross-section of Victorian schools, including different geographical locations (metropolitan and regional) and all sectors (Government and Catholic – in addition to independent) is desirable. The absence of observation methods and student voice in this research also meant that teachers' perspectives could not be verified or extended upon. The impact of COVID -19 and associated lockdowns in Victoria, was reflected in these research constraints and the use of on-line rather than in-person interviews. It is beyond the scope of this study to ascertain the impact of COVID -19 on the level of physical activity in VCE PE compared to other years.

Findings: gendered movement experiences and gendered pedagogy

The next section shares findings related to the two components of the gendered perspectives identified in the data:

- i. The *type* of movement experiences (such as physical activities, individual movement prompts and sports) selected as the learning contexts via which to integrate theoretical concepts in the teaching of VCE PE.
- ii. Gendered pedagogies that influenced *how* teaching in, through and about movement occurred in particular school and lesson settings.

Gendered perspectives influencing the type of movement experiences selected

The influence of gender on the selection of movement experiences used in VCE PE was not directly referenced by teachers. However, references to self-identified issues such as assessment requirements and perceived student interests, featured links to gender. In referring to assessment requirements, Mary and Mark both pointed to activities that the girls and boys they taught were less accustomed and less associated with traditional gender labels. When working with boys at her previous school, Mary 'leant towards things that they would not have had experience with' (Interview, Oct. 2020), such as netball and yoga. Mark also explained that he used activities the boys were unlikely to be familiar with, to improve their ability at applying their theoretical understanding to potential examination contexts (Interview, Nov. 2020). He gave the examples of tchoukball or golf (Interview, Nov. 2020). These examples could be classified as more 'gender neutral' sports than Mary's examples of netball and yoga. In contrast, Ruby precluded her class from their choice of Australian Rules Football (Interview, Oct. 2020), an activity that has historically been labelled one of the pre-eminent masculine sports in Australia. Her reasoning was also aligned to assessment in that she did not believe the girls in her class had the requisite skill level to collect 'correct data' and that soccer or netball would be more suited to data collection needed for the assessment (Interview, Oct. 2020).

Lisa and Mary both suggested that the confidence or interest a teacher has in a sport is influential in what activities were chosen; 'I probably wouldn't choose netball as I don't like it and haven't played it, whereas (colleague) Eden is a netball person, therefore she

might choose a netball prac and I would choose a basketball prac.’ (Interview, Nov. 2020). Mary also leant towards sports she felt more comfortable with when teaching boys, such as netball, and away from sports she was less comfortable with, such as cricket. Her reasoning was multi-factorial, given these activities also afforded the opportunity for boys to experience activities with which they were less familiar and enhance their motivation. Examples provided that referenced either high or low levels of experience, confidence, or interest in a sport influencing PE teacher pedagogy aligns with Locke (1979) who attributed the presence of gender discourse shaping PE teacher pedagogy to socialisation throughout childhood, teacher education and the occupational setting. Other than one example provided by Ruby of student agency in the selection of movement experiences which we highlight later, the findings indicated that teachers were authoritative figures in the selection of activities in VCE PE.

Gendered pedagogy influencing the way teaching in, through and about movement occurred

Interviews with teachers revealed that varied and inherently gendered understandings (and assumptions) about learners in VCE PE, were shaping approaches to teaching in, through and about movement. Established gendered stereotypes, including the historical idea of girls being resistant to participate in physical activity, also emerged within this research. Mary, for example, ‘thought the level of participation in physical activity at the boys’ school would be a lot higher than the girls’ school’ (Interview, Oct. 2020). However, Mary found ‘that definitely was not the case’ and that participation levels were not ‘too different for the girls (compared to the boys)’ (Interview, Oct. 2020).

Teachers expressed gendered views about students’ motivations to participate and learn *in* a movement experience. At the CE school Eden said; ‘the girls in my class are really motivated and want to do the pracs and they study really hard’ (Interview, Nov. 2020). This statement appeared to align the girls Eden taught with an increased interest to learn the theoretical knowledge *about* movement, in a similar manner that Mary reported that girls wanted to know more about the ‘rules and understanding’ of an activity (Interview Oct. 2020). Teachers’ descriptions of movement-based pedagogies that were focused on preparing students for assessment items, especially the high stakes external examination, affirmed that movement experiences were privileging the theoretical knowledge that was being transmitted, rather than the intrinsic value of the movement itself.

Conversely, Mary offered gendered perspectives related to the boys she previously taught in acknowledging they wanted to be let ‘have a go’ (Interview, Oct. 2020) and tried to beat her at whatever they were doing, making the activity ‘quite competitive’ (Interview Oct. 2020). Mark affirmed Mary’s point regarding the perceived value the boys he teaches place on competitiveness, noting ‘It doesn’t really matter what the activity is, but if there’s a degree of competition generally you can make something practical and fun’ (Interview, Nov. 2020). Mary and Mark’s responses appeared to identify a gendered perspective in their decision-making that promoted the learning *in* movement dimension. While James also prioritised the learning *in* movement value of activities he used with boys, he showed how he predicated their ability to learn theoretical concepts *about* movement on the intrinsic value they had in an activity by saying, ‘If you try to do

an activity and they're not really interested in it, I think the buy-in at the start is quite low and then therefore their understanding of the concepts reflect that'. (Interview, Nov, 2020). The integration of dimensions of movement in James' pedagogy, aligned with the emphasis in previous research that Arnold never intended these dimensions to be enacted independently (Brown & Penney, 2013; Jones & Penney, 2019).

Within Garrett and Wrench's (2015) *Tom's Story*, Tom identified that his students had noted the learning benefit to have come from the emotional and physical experience of a challenging activity such as the *frog balance*. In a similar manner, at the SSB school Mark had his students complete deliberately incorrect biomechanical movements such as swinging a golf club on one foot, in what Zembylas and McGlynn (2012) referred to as 'pedagogies of discomfort' (p. 41) which had the potential to enhance learning by inducing emotions that sparked deeper thinking and enquiry. We note the potential benefit the learning outcome of deeper thinking and enquiry has for the students Mark teaches, given that it appears to challenge the hegemonic constructs of masculinity such as physical and emotional strength (Connell, 1995) that an emphasis on competitive activities can promote and legitimate.

In other instances, however, data pointed to the potential for teaching and learning activities and environments to privilege forms of gender construction that prioritise physical and emotional strength (Joy et al., 2021). For example, Lisa referenced classes in which the students undertake a fitness assessment (a required component of the course) and are required to work at maximal intensity. She noted student engagement varied (Interview, Nov. 2020). Lisa explained that elite athletes in the group (who were considered likely to possess the required physical and emotional strength required in fitness assessment) were willing to work at maximal intensity, while other 'kids, especially girls' (Interview, Nov. 2020) were not willing to run in front of their peers. Combining a competitive environment with the movement context of fitness assessment, which Rowland (1995) contended can be uncomfortable and may reinforce the notion that exercise is competitive, an explanation could be provided for why Lisa's girls were less willing to participate fully in fitness assessment.

Gender discourses were further evidenced in several teachers' comments regarding *safety* in relation to typically physical, rough, and masculine sports (including Australian Rules Football) being selected (or not) as practical opportunities in VCE PE. Female participation rates in typically masculine sports are increasing (Cricket Australia (2018) and Australian Rules Football (14.42% increase in female participation between 2018 and 2019 (Cleary, 2019))). Despite this, responses from multiple teachers indicated hesitancy when it came to allowing equitable access to historically male sports. Mark and James both specifically considered *safety* if they were working in a CE school and implementing these sports with girls and boys. Eden said she was 'conscious in not playing anything rough, because, generally speaking, the boys are quite big' (Interview, Nov. 2020). While Eden believed that the girls wanted to participate, and that the boys do try and engage them by passing the ball, she acknowledged that the girls didn't 'want to get bowled over' (Interview, Nov. 2020).

While the examples provided above identified contrasting gendered understandings of male and female learners, teachers did align in their belief that most students, regardless of gender, preferred embodied learning pedagogies.

Opportunities for gender equity and inclusive pedagogy in VCE PE

Previous sections of this paper have identified influences on movement experiences in VCE PE that seemingly (re)produce gender norms long noted as inherent in PE curriculum and pedagogy (Joy et al., 2021). This study has particularly linked gendered assumptions and pedagogy to matters such as safety, learner motivation and assessment preparation and importantly, with teachers' best intentions to provide an environment that promotes engagement and ultimately better learning (Marsh, 2000). This section considers the possibilities and challenges that exist to champion more gender inclusive movement pedagogy in VCE PE.

Safety and levelling the playing field. Should gender be an agenda?

Teachers have a key role to play in what is deemed gender legitimate knowledge in the use of physical activity with students. This includes *what* physical activities that are selected and *how* they are taught. As indicated above, teacher interest and confidence in a particular sport was influential in the movement experiences selected. At the CE school Lisa explained that 'what I want to teach and what the kids want to play' and 'access to venues,' were more influential in the activities used in class rather than any gender influence (Interview, Nov. 2020). Lisa's dismissal of gender as an agenda was contextualised by her reference to an inclusive culture and gender-neutral sports at the CE school (e.g. a big following of boys' netball and girls' football; Interview, Nov. 2020). This was supported by school policy information that made no specific reference to inclusivity of either gender and instead, emphasised the school's values as underpinned by a philosophy of students being viewed and valued equally.

While Mary and Mark worked with only girls and boys respectively, in determining *what* activities were taught, they placed an emphasis on providing movement experiences that students were less accustomed to and that from their perspective, were less associated with traditional gender labels. However, as noted, this limits opportunities for girls particularly, to participate in traditional (physical) male sports such as Australian Rules Football. Despite teachers indicating an awareness of community trends in female participation, such as increased participation in Australian Rules Football, there was notable trepidation from Mark, James, and Eden when it came to allowing girls to participate in what they still deemed the traditional *male* sports in VCE PE, due to safety concerns.

In considering the safety concerns expressed by Mark, James and Eden, we note that historically there has been a reluctance to disassociate the *what* from the *how* when it comes to highly physical activities such as Australian Rules Football. The formal way in which a sport such as Australian Rules Football is played, characterised commonly and within this research as physical, rough and masculine, appears to overshadow different methods of implementing the activity in a more inclusive way. Rather than have girls participate in sports that have been historically labelled as physical and masculine, teachers have turned to alternative activities that as Azzarito et al.'s (2006) suggested 'level the playing field' (and pose less of a safety risk). In so doing, however, there is the prospect that certain activities are portrayed as beyond the legitimate reach of girls and/or other students who do not identify with stereotypical gendered ways of engaging with

movement. While our position is to advocate for inclusive movement pedagogies when considering *how* an activity is implemented, this is not intended to diminish the safety considerations raised by James, Mark, and Eden. We advocate for future exploration of ways that traditional male sports might allow for gender inclusive participation that provides meaningful learning *in, through* and *about* movement.

Gendered learning in, through and about movement: challenging historical assumptions and promoting future opportunities

Interweaving Wilcox's (2009) embodied ways of knowing with Arnold's (1979) dimensions of movement in this research reflected growing acceptance of the link between embodied ways of knowing, lived experiences, and knowledge (Garrett & Wrench, 2015). As noted earlier, the rationale for VCE PE establishes the intent to integrate *theoretical underpinnings* (propositional knowledge) with physical activity, aligning with Arnold's (1979) emphasis that the dimensions should not be viewed exclusively. Like Brown and Penney (2018) we also believe that the different ways of knowing when applied to physical activity have great potential to provide equitable access to rich movement experiences for all students. The localised decision-making that characterises enactment of VCE PE provides scope for what Brown and Penney (2018) referred to as 'creative interpretation' (p.192) that prospectively expands pedagogical enactment of ways of knowing and doing. However, this research has affirmed that a challenge for teachers is to move beyond what may be termed both 'historical' and 'traditional' assumptions about the learner and about pedagogical approaches that can support theoretical understanding. Examples presented above depict gendered assumptions that situated learning *in* movement for boys to be primarily through the psychology of competition. Whilst for girls, learning *about* the historical, and physiological knowledge (rules and theoretical underpinnings) associated with movement, appeared to hold a higher value than the movement itself. We acknowledge that each of these ways of doing and knowing are independently important, however when they are supported by other ways of knowing and doing (e.g experiential, biomechanical, sociological) in a holistic way, the capacity for learning the required propositional knowledge is stronger (Brown & Penney, 2018). It is not lost on us that the call for a greater focus on Arnold's framework (1979) with respect to delivery of VCE PE is not new (see Brown & Penney, 2013; Brown & Penney, 2018). However, we particularly propose that movement-based pedagogy be more responsive to the needs of all students to ensure equity in students' movement and learning experiences.

Student agency in striving for gender equitable movement experiences

We lend our voice to Brown and Penney (2018) who encouraged pedagogical practices in SSPE to be characterised by choice, flexibility and be student centred. The localised decision-making afforded to teachers within VCE PE promotes teachers' autonomy and therefore should provide the opportunity to incorporate student voice as well in the pedagogical decision-making. In helping to facilitate student voice, UNESCO's (2015) guidelines for quality physical education, reference the work of the Sport for Development and Peace International Working Group (2008) in encouraging physical

educators to better understand the needs and motivations of boys and girls when it comes to physical activity to establish more personal experiences.

Student motivation was identified by teachers in this study as an influence on the selection of movement experiences, but these were typically collective decisions, whereby the presumed motivations of the majority influenced the activity chosen. One differing example was provided by Eden who referred to student agency in having the students she taught choose an activity they wished to participate in, and she then linked it back to the theoretical concepts (Interview, Oct. 2020). This example related to Unit 1 and 2 where there is no externally set written examination and seemingly provides greater autonomy on the choice of physical activities used across a cohort. However, we challenge teachers of SSPE examination courses, such as Units 3 and 4 VCE PE to consider ways of providing greater individual agency over movement experiences.

Whilst space precludes detailed discussion, it is important to return to the ever-changing demographic of SSPE cohorts and the need to ensure that curriculum structures and the way in which they are enacted remain progressive and inclusive (Drury et al., 2022). The contemporary debate surrounding transgender participation in sport and questions of ‘level playing field’, ‘performance benefits’ and ‘safety’ are currently situated in a largely sports performance context. However, we echo calls from Drury et al. (2022) and Joy et al. (2021) for PE to reduce the emphasis on traditional, gendered and competitive sports, and increase student-centred movement experiences that focus on social interactions where student gender is less relevant.

With respect to our example of Australian Rules Football, participatory programs such as Australian Football League (AFL) 9s, a non-contact, social form of Australian Rules Football designed for all ages, genders and ability levels (AFL Victoria, 2023), could provide a means of addressing safety concerns of teachers, address gender equity issues in SSPE participation, whilst still allowing for authentic exploration of learning *in, through* and *about* movement.

Conclusion

This paper has sought to extend insights into the presence and influence of gender discourse in the pedagogical decision-making associated with movement-based learning experiences in VCE PE. Gendered understandings, assumptions and decisions were evidenced in *what* type of movement experiences teachers selected as the learning context via which to integrate theoretical concepts and *how* movement experiences were designed and implemented. Teachers referred specifically to matters of safety, learner motivation and preparing students for high stakes assessment as influential in their movement-based pedagogy. Dominant gender discourse appeared to limit the experiences offered to some students, particularly girls. Given we share the view of Brown and Rich (2002) and Hay and Macdonald (2010) in identifying PE teachers as highly influential in the transmission of gender legitimate knowledge, we urge curriculum developers to continue to look for new ways to support teachers to enact SSPE courses such as VCE PE in inclusive, student-centred ways. To this end, we encourage future exploration of teaching that utilises traditional male and female sports as a context for all students to learn *in, through* and *about* movement, and ways to leverage more

contemporary forms of sport in SSPE curricula. We reiterate the need to maintain gender as an important contemporary focus for research, policy and pedagogy in SSPE and therefore acknowledge the opportunities for future study that explores students' gendered perspectives and other intersections between SSPE, gender and social class.

Notes

1. 'Self-described/Gender 'X' [The self-described gender category refers to any person who does not identify as either exclusively male or female, including people of non-binary gender] <https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/administration/vce-vcal-handbook/Pages/index.aspx>.
2. LGBTIQA+ [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, asexual and other sexually or gender diverse] LGBTIQA+ glossary of common terms <https://aifs.gov.au/resources/resource-sheets/lgbtiqa-glossary-common-terms#:~:text=Overview,organisations%20are%20inclusive%20and%20respectful>.

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