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Inclusivity and Senior Physical Education Studies courses in Australia.

Chantel and Matt move to Western Australia.

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Abstract

At AARE 2005 Penney (with Evans and Taggart) outlined a new senior Physical Education Studies (PES) course in Western Australia (WA), drawing attention to ways in which course developers endeavoured to embed commitments to inclusivity in the course structure and requirements. The course purportedly enables students to personalise studies and maximise opportunities for achievement by (1) avoiding prescription of specific physical activities and (2) emphasising the scope for achievement of outcomes to be demonstrated via 'player/performer', coaching and/or officiating roles. Also at AARE Hay presented two case studies of student experiences of Senior Physical Education Studies in Queensland. In both instances school activity contexts were seen to impact on experiences and achievement. An obvious question arose: *Would the two students have more rewarding experiences and enhanced opportunities for achievement if they were to follow the new PES course in WA and specifically, focus on their respective personal activity contexts?* This paper represents the collaborative pursuit of this question from a hypothetical perspective. Hay's knowledge of the two students is combined with Penney's knowledge of the new course in WA to produce an analytical commentary that raises issues for debate amongst physical education curriculum developers and teachers across Australia and internationally.

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Introduction

People might well have read the abstract to this paper and wondered why such a line of inquiry would be pursued and/or whether anything of substance could arise from it. It is probably important to therefore make explicit the issues and agendas that underpin the paper and that have provided the motivation for its development. As the title indicates, inclusivity is very much to the fore here. Amidst significant federal interest in achieving greater standardisation in schooling and more specifically, in senior secondary schooling across Australia (Reid, 2006a,b; Masters, 2006; see below), it is arguably timely to explore matters of inclusivity in current year 11 and 12 physical education courses. In particular, we suggest that there is a need to be taking a close look at what - and therefore *whose* - learning needs, interests and abilities in physical education are recognised, provided for and destined to be valued in senior school courses, and furthermore, *how* the recognition, provision and privileging occur.

The paper acknowledges that course design, school and teacher decisions can all have wide reaching significance for students' educational and vocational futures. It also recognises the potential merits of comparative studies in prompting educators in each of the states and territories in Australia and internationally, to critically reflect upon aspects of current provision in senior physical education from an inclusivity perspective. In so doing it links with a growing body of literature in health and physical education that has posed searching questions of established curriculum and pedagogical practices in the secondary years in relation to the seemingly limited acknowledgement of and provision for, diverse contemporary interests and abilities in physical activity (Evans, 2004; Hay & Lisahunter, 2006; Penney & Lisahunter, 2006; Wright, Macdonald, Wyn, & Kriflik, 2005). We share Keddie and Naylor's (2006) concern to question the degree of alignment between current philosophies and pedagogical practices in school, and stated policy commitments to equity, and advocate a similar analysis in relation to inclusivity. While traditionally, inclusivity has referred to the inclusion of students with disabilities in mainstream education contexts (Barry, 1995; Jorgenson, 1995), as Forlin (2004) reports the focus of inclusive education has notably broadened in recent years. It now 'aims to include all children who could be regarded as being at educational risk due to marginalisation as a result of minority group status through, for example, disability, ethnicity, religion, socio-economic and/or psychological factors' (p.187). In essence, the concern is to maximise educational opportunities for *all* students.

The lines of discussion pursued in the paper reflect an acknowledgement that while inclusivity is instantiated through the pedagogies employed by teachers in classes, the pedagogic possibilities for teachers are nested in, and therefore both explicitly and subtly constrained by official curriculum texts and associated expectations of education systems. Our contention is that as institutionalised projects, senior physical education curricula can largely disregard the learning that occurs outside of schools, as if that learning is in some way inferior to that which is exhibited or valued in schools. The interests and abilities of some students are thereby marginalised if not denied. Furthermore, the rigidity of some course and/or assessment frameworks is such that they have the potential to divest the learning context of its relevance and pleasure for those who demonstrate (the valued) learning attributes in alternative, culturally distinct and/or creative ways and contexts. In contrast, notably broad thinking about 'abilities' in physical education and the many and varied contexts in which different students may best demonstrate their individual abilities, can be seen as a basis for the development of courses and pedagogical practices with legitimate claims to inclusivity (Penney with Evans & Taggart, 2005).

Necessarily we begin with a brief overview of the current 'senior secondary scene' from a national perspective. We outline variations and commonalities across Australia in relation to

senior secondary school studies and identify key contemporary agendas for future developments in this arena. We also point to various perspectives on inclusivity that are being expressed and/or pursued in association with developments in senior secondary schooling across Australia. This commentary provides an important backdrop for our subsequent focus on senior physical education studies and in particular, the current course in Queensland and that set to be implemented in Western Australia (WA) in 2007.

A national perspective: a patchwork quilt?

In 2005, the then Minister for Education, Science and Training, Brendon Nelson, looked to the future from the perspective of an eight year old boy, 'typical of a new generation of lifelong learners looking for a system that doesn't differentiate between study pathways, but focuses on choices which enable a fulfilling and challenging working life'. He went on to stress the need for 'our' education system to become more responsive, 'to economic needs and to parents' and students' expectations...more diverse; and yet less divided between sectors...more nationally consistent, yet offer greater choice' (Nelson, 2005). Expanding upon the matter of national consistency, he left no doubt as to the policy direction to be pursued by federal government. The provision of a nationally consistent schooling system was confirmed as 'one of our key priorities'. The Minister added;

Last year, 84,000 school-aged children moved interstate – they might as well have moved to a different country. Our goal is to ensure that standards are equally high regardless of where a child resides. We have an ambitious agenda in this area. We are insisting, as a condition of funding, that school starting age will be the same across the country by 2010. We are introducing common testing standards in key subject areas; we are driving consistency in curriculum outcomes and a common information system for the transfer of student data when students move interstate. *Most importantly, we are beginning work to implement an Australian Certificate of Education as the key year 12 certificate. Of course we are proud of our state origins, but we live in an increasingly mobile and globalised world and it is time that our schooling system caught up.*

(Nelson, 2005, our emphasis)

Thus, we now have a situation whereby;

Nationally consistent approaches to school education are firmly on the Federal Government's agenda. The former Federal Education Minister Dr. Nelson, and his successor, Julie Bishop, have made it clear that they intend to use whatever means they have to pursue their version of 'national consistency'...It is assumed self-evidently to be a desirable direction, one that will result in better quality curriculum.

(Reid, 2006, p.55)

As Masters (2006) has explained, the senior secondary scene across Australia is one of notable variation in certification arrangements, course offerings and their inherent teaching, learning and assessment requirements. "Current arrangements are the result of locally negotiated 'settlements' and reflect different state/territory histories, educational philosophies, local schools of thought, and the influence of particular individuals and committees in each jurisdiction" (Masters, 2006, p.56). Furthermore, as Masters (2006) also noted, the senior secondary years have been and remain a focus for reform in several states, including the two that we focus on in this paper. In Western Australia, the development and introduction of some fifty new senior secondary school courses that may all contribute to attainment of the new Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE) is ongoing (see http://newwace.curriculum.wa.edu.au/pages/teachers_courses.asp). In Queensland, the current Senior Certificate is set to be replaced by the Queensland Certificate in Education (QCE) in 2008 (see www.qsa.qld.edu.au/learning_priorities/qce/index.html).

The developments in WA have been born out of a major review of senior secondary schooling, initiated under the mandate of the Curriculum Council Act of 1997. The Act placed a legal obligation on the Council to ensure that the *Curriculum Framework*¹ setting out the 'knowledge, understanding, skills, values and attitudes that students are expected to acquire...from kindergarten to year 12', became an integral part of reporting in the senior school years (Curriculum Council of Western Australia, 2002, p.7). The Act thus set a frame and agenda for the development of new 'courses of study' (referred to here as courses) as a curriculum organiser for the senior secondary years. As we discuss further below, development of the new courses in WA presents a direct challenge to established subject hierarchies and the 'academic-vocational divide' in senior secondary schooling.²

The purpose and constitution of the QCE heavily reflects key recommendations made in the Pitman report (Pitman, 2002) challenging the way in which learning is valued and recognised in Queensland. To receive a QCE, students must achieve a significant amount of learning, to an agreed standard. Students can 'bank' learning credits by completing QSA subjects; achieving VET competencies, acquiring recognised certificates, and participating in casual work contexts. Interestingly, while the 'bankable' contribution of some VET avenues are afforded greater value than completion of traditional 'high status subjects' the fact that these subjects and learning contexts do not contribute to the generation of a tertiary entrance score indicates that Pitman's challenge to prevailing subject hierarchies has been, in the main, rhetorical.

If we consider year 11 and 12 Physical Education specifically, a picture of diversity is captured by variations in the titles of courses being offered and their 'standing' within senior secondary systems (see Appendix 1). Behind the varied titles lie differences in prescribed content, physical activities, modes of and criteria for assessment. Yet it is also important to acknowledge notable similarities across the various jurisdictions and shared concerns being pursued in current developments. In discussing the national curriculum debate (albeit not specifically the year 11 and 12 curriculum) Graham and Martin (2006) have drawn attention to 'the use of generally comparable standards frameworks, a greater emphasis on 'essential learnings' and a refocusing on depth rather than breadth in learning' (p.63) across the states and territories. In relation to senior school Physical Education, there is broad acknowledgement of the multidisciplinary nature of knowledge relevant to and prospectively developed in and through physical education. Similarly, concerns for senior Physical Education courses to extend knowledge and understanding through practical learning experiences and to promote pedagogical practices that challenge a 'theory / prac' dichotomy can legitimately be regarded as shared by curriculum developers, teacher educators and teachers across Australia and internationally (see for example, Macdonald & Brooker, 1997a,b; Thorburn & Collins, 2003, 2006).

That said, there is no denying that the study opportunities currently available to Australian students who have interests and abilities in the health and physical education learning area that they wish to pursue in senior school years are identifiably distinct to their particular state or territory. The remainder of the paper engages with the questions of whether and in what ways, the variation matters, particularly if we recall the vision articulated by Brendon Nelson (2005) that 'every young Australian should be encouraged to find and achieve their own potential – whatever that is'. In presenting two parallel narratives, one grounded in real data, the other 'imagined but informed', the paper is designed to bring real lives and life chances firmly into view amidst debates about curriculum development in senior schooling and senior Physical Education in particular.

The paper is thus notable methodologically, in according a place to fictional narratives and in adopting a somewhat non-conventional presentational style. In shaping and presenting the

¹ Further details of the Curriculum Framework for Kindergarten to Year 12 in Western Australia can be obtained via www.curriculum.wa.edu.au

² see also Penney & Walker (forthcoming).

paper as we have, our intention has been to prompt renewed reflection about senior physical education and about research and writing in our field. As Garrett (2006) recently emphasised, 'Stories capture the richness and nuances of meaning in everyday existence and give insight to the complexity of our experiences' (p.339). The presentation of stories here is firmly directed towards such illustrative insight. By overtly foregrounding the experiences, abilities and interests of two Queensland students, Matt and Chantel, we have endeavoured to highlight the potential value of according student voices a greater presence in research, policy and curriculum debates focusing on senior secondary schooling. In using a split text presentation our intention is that two narratives may be read either independently or in tandem. One centres on senior Physical Education in Queensland. Drawing directly upon Hay's previous research with the two students³, (see Hay & Lisahunter, 2006; Hay, 2006) the intention has been to present a narrative that is as true to life as possible while nevertheless created to align with our specific lines of inquiry. The responses presented for both the Queensland and Western Australian commentary thus need to be acknowledged as constructed by us on the basis of our knowledge of the two students. From the WA perspective, the aim has been to position these students, their abilities and interests in a newly reconstructed and still emerging senior Physical Education scene, with plans for implementation currently taking shape as teachers prepare for the 2007 academic year. In developing parallel narratives we have attempted to anticipate and pursue a series of points that serve to reveal similarities and differences between the opportunities that the Queensland and Western Australian courses can be seen to present to our two students, Matt and Chantel. The points addressed were designed to reveal the significance of the course frameworks that schools and teachers are operating within, but also of the decisions that teachers are making within the frameworks. We therefore engage with what is 'fixed', what is 'flexible' and the decisions being taken within the 'what is flexible' arena, always with the focus on the implications for students, their prospective learning opportunities and learning achievements.

³ Hay, P. (in process) An analysis of the construction and distribution of ability, through assessment, in Senior Physical Education'. Doctoral thesis under the supervision of Prof Doune Macdonald and Prof Richard Tinning.

Setting the scene. Introducing senior secondary physical education.

Welcome to Queensland...

PH: Matt and Chantel, we are glad that you have elected to study Senior PE over the next two years here in Queensland. Senior PE is an 'authority' subject which means that the results you achieve in this course will affect your tertiary entrance score (Overall Position - OP). Senior PE is a very popular subject in Queensland. 10,582 students in elected to begin the course in 2005. In fact, of the 60 odd subjects that students may potentially choose from, only English, Maths and Biology had larger cohorts of students⁴. We think that the large numbers of students electing to take the subject indicate that it may be perceived as somewhat less demanding than for example, Physics and Chemistry, and perhaps more accessible to a larger number of students. Besides Senior PE and Senior Health Education (also an 'authority' subject) you can always consider 'Recreation' (an 'authority-registered' subject) as a study option if you think that you will find the written component of Senior PE and HE too difficult or if you are not particularly interested in going on to university studies. The large number of subjects offered to year 11 and 12 students demonstrates how flexible the system is to cater for your varying interests and help you to realise your vocational aspirations. How do you see yourselves fitting in, in this subject?

Matt: This sounds like a great subject. I'm a real sporty kind of guy, I just love sports. I reckon that I'd love to take Rec, however I'm concerned that it wouldn't count towards my OP score. I need an OP to get into Architecture.

Chantel: I did pretty well in HPE in junior, so I think that I could do well in this subject as well. I like the fact that it will contribute to my OP score because I want to be a VET. I'd be keen to know what physical activities we'll be doing during the course as I'm not very strong and don't like having to play in sports and games that requires aggressive involvement.

PH: As I mentioned before, if the academic nature of Senior PE or Senior HE (authority subjects) is not for you, there are other subjects that you can elect to take that might better service your prospective futures. These include a suite of Vocational Education subjects (part of the 'authority-registered options') in which you might be able to gain certificate 1, 2, 3 or 4. These would be useful if you are thinking that you might like to work in the fitness/recreation industry. Enrolment in the senior PE or senior HE courses does not enable you to achieve these certificates. But it is also important to realise that the results you achieve in the vocational subjects do not 'count' towards an OP score that is necessary for entry into university - While only 'authority' subjects can contribute to the generation of an OP score, successful completion of both authority and 'authority-registered' subjects contribute towards you attaining a Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE)⁵.

⁴ http://www.qsa.qld.edu.au/yrs11_12/statistics/2005/qs1123C2005.pdf

⁵ The attainment of a certificate 3 or 4 through certain vocational strands of subjects like Recreation is worth double the points of normal authority and authority-registered subjects

Welcome to Western Australia...

DP: Hi Matt and Chantel ... and welcome to Western Australia (WA)! You have moved here at an exciting time for Physical Education. As you may be aware, this is the first time that year 11 and 12 students in WA have been able to select Physical Education Studies as a subject that can count towards their tertiary entrance. We have a new course that has been introduced as part of the reform of all senior school studies in WA. In 2002 a report entitled 'Our Youth, Our Future' highlighted the case for an expanded range of subjects to be associated with the tertiary pathway, and stated that the new arrangements for year 11 and 12 'must provide greater flexibility for students to select courses according to likely destinations, with the option to modify and adapt their pathways as interests and aspirations evolve' (Curriculum Council of Western Australia, 2002, p.21). So, the traditional division between so called 'TEE' and 'non-TEE' subjects in WA is being broken down. Physical Education Studies was previously 'non-TEE' and has often been seen as of lower academic standing to those subjects designated as 'TEE'. Now, it will hopefully be seen as a viable and attractive choice for students of various academic abilities, including students who are looking to go on to tertiary studies. Is that where you see yourselves going?

Chantel: Yeah, I loved physical education in years 8, 9 and 10, but would be worried if it didn't count towards a tertiary entrance score as I want to be a vet and need to give myself the best opportunity to get into vet science by taking TEE subjects. I think that I will be able to do well in PE studies as I did well in junior PE and in my sport outside of school.

Matt: Yep, I'd take PE even if it wasn't a TEE subject however I'm glad it is because I want to get into Architecture at uni and need to give myself a good opportunity to do so.

DP: As I said, all of the new courses are set to count towards university entrance, so you'll be fine. Another characteristic of the new courses is that students may have the opportunity to gain units of competency from Vocational Education and Training (VET) courses or full VET certificates as an integral part of completing a course. In the so called 'VET version' of courses a VET certificate is gained in addition to (rather than instead of) the course counting towards both your 'WACE' (Western Australia Certificate of Education)⁶ and tertiary entrance if that is the pathway you are aiming to follow. In Physical Education Studies, for example, you may have the chance to gain a Certificate II Sport with a focus on General Administration, Coaching, Officiating or Sport as a career. Not all schools will offer a 'VET version' of the course, but some will. Do you have an interest in specific roles such as coaching or officiating?

Chantel: Not really, I'm more interested in participating in physical activity than coaching or officiating. I'm a bit shy and don't like talking in front of people so I don't know if I'd make a great coach.

Matt: I love every thing to do with soccer and footy. I mostly love playing but would be interested in coaching soccer in the future. It would be handy getting refereeing ticket as I know I could get work on the weekends refereeing soccer games... it would be better than working at Bi-Lo which I'm doing now!

DP: Physical Education Studies is one of four courses designed to build on students' experiences in Health and Physical Education (HPE) in years K-10 in WA. Alongside Physical Education Studies there are also new courses being developed for Health Studies, Outdoor Education and Recreation Studies, and Children and Family Studies (see http://newwace.curriculum.wa.edu.au/pages/teachers_courses.asp). So, there are plenty of opportunities in the learning area. Are you confident that Physical Education Studies is the course for you?

Chantel: As long as it helps me get into uni I think I would be interested in taking Physical Education Studies. I enjoyed PE and did pretty well in it in previous years, so I can't see why that wouldn't continue. Outdoor education sounds interesting. I enjoy bushwalking with my friends. However, I'd only be interested in this if I could still get into uni.

Matt: They all sound awesome! Are we able to take all of them? It would be sweet if I could take three sport subjects. I'm pretty sporty.

DP: The three other courses in the learning area won't be introduced into schools until 2008, but in time, provided that your school offered the courses, you should be able to do more than one course in the learning area.

⁶ For full details of the eligibility requirements for a WACE, encompassing completion of course units, average level across units, standards for English Language competence, completion of community service and inclusion of all overarching learning outcomes in overall program of study, see http://newwace.curriculum.wa.edu.au/pages/about_whenwillstudents_untilthen.asp

Finding out more about the Physical Education Studies course...*what is it about and therefore who is it really for?*

PH: Qld Senior PE is a performance-based subject in which the quality of performances in physical activities, as well as the quality of the thinking ('cognitive engagement') in, and in relation to, those physical contexts, is valued. The intention of Senior PE in Queensland is for students to develop as 'intelligent performers'. In the syllabus, intelligent performance is described as:

...rational and creative thought at a high level of cognitive functioning and engages students, not only as performers but also as analysts, planners and critics in, about and through physical activity. It is this intelligent performance that distinguishes students as being physically educated, which shapes the global aims of Physical Education.

(QSA, 2004, p.1).

Building on this definition, the QSA identify a 'physically educated person' as exhibiting the following characteristics:

- demonstrate a range of physical responses within the contextual demands of the activities
- demonstrate physical responses that reflect both an ability to implement and evaluate strategies and tactics in physical activities
- demonstrate the application and evaluation of movement concepts and principles to performance in physical activities
- demonstrate the ability to reflect critically upon physical activity in social, historical and cultural contexts
- accept responsibility for the organisation and development of their learning experiences within a framework provided by the teacher
- demonstrate the ability to select and use information in order to evaluate and enhance learning in, about and through physical activities
- communicate through a variety of modes (including physical)
- challenge social practices that disadvantage individuals and/or groups in their involvement in physical activities
- experience the enjoyment, challenge, self-expression and social interaction that is possible through engagement in physical activities.

(QSA, 2004, p.4)

This makes for a pretty special student! What do you think about that?

Chantel: I think that would be pretty hard to achieve high grades in the subject. I'd be really interested in which physical activities we will be studying.

Matt: There seems to be a lot of theory stuff there, like 'reflect critically', 'select and use information', 'challenge social practices' (what the...??!!)...Are you sure this is physical education?

DP: In developing a new physical education studies course in WA, the curriculum developers have endeavoured to produce a course relevant to students with a range of backgrounds, abilities and interests in Physical Education. It is put like this in the course document:

The Physical Education Studies course will appeal to a broad spectrum of students, with varying backgrounds, physical activity knowledge and dispositions, including students with disabilities. The emphasis is on learning through movement and personalised learning experiences. The aim is to achieve progress towards the course outcomes of Skills for Physical Activity; Self-management and Interpersonal Skills for Physical Activity; Knowledge and Understanding of Movement and Conditioning Concepts for Physical Activity and Knowledge and Understanding of Sport Psychology Concepts for Physical Activity. The course is designed to challenge students to consider issues, such as what it takes to prepare for and become good at physical activities; why so many people advocate physical activity but significant numbers find it difficult to fit it into their daily lives; and what it takes to create programs that can enhance their own and others' readiness for, interest and ability in physical activity. ... Students achieving the course outcomes will be well prepared for a range of post-school destinations, including immediate employment or tertiary studies. They will be valuable recruits to an increasingly diverse range of employment opportunities in the sport, leisure and recreation industries, education, sport development, youth work and health and medical fields linked to physical activity and sport. They will also be well positioned to take on the roles of volunteers and leaders in community activities.

(Curriculum Council of Western Australia, 2006, p.3).

How does that sound to you?

Chantel: This sounds great! I love the fact that PE Studies aims to appeal to a broad range of students, not just the boys who always seem to take over the team sports that we do in PE.

Can you tell me more about what I'll actually be doing, or be required to do in the course? What sorts of learning experiences / tasks can I expect in the course?... and what are my required or potential roles in those?...what is the nature and structure of units? (how are content, contexts and outcomes/criteria positioned and related in practice?)

PH: The curriculum and assessment of senior subjects in Queensland is school-based which means that schools are responsible for the design of their courses within guidelines established by the Queensland Studies Authority (QSA). As part of the curriculum design work, the PE teachers at your school choose the physical activities to be included in your course. Your teachers are required to select four physical activities from at least three of the four categories of activities listed in the syllabus (performance; aesthetic; direct interceptive; and indirect interceptive activities).

There are also three content focus areas which have to be addressed in the course:

Focus area A – Learning physical skills (Motor learning and control; sport and exercise psychology; biomechanics)

Focus area B – Process and effects of training and exercise

Focus area C – Sport, physical activity and exercise in the context of Australian society.

(QSA, 2004)

Your teachers will decide which focus area content they will present with each of the physical activities that you undertake. More than one focus area may be addressed in the context of an activity, however this is not required or promoted, as it is the depth of engagement with one focus area and a physical activity that is important in relation to your success in the course. Each of the four chosen physical activities is studied twice over the two years. For example, some of the common physical activities that schools choose are touch football, volleyball, and athletics.

To take up your point, Matt, regarding the amount of physical activity in the subject, it may seem as if there is a lot of written work involved. However physical activity is very much viewed as the context for learning and for demonstrating the characteristics of a physically educated person, which we talked about before. We use the principles of 'integration' and 'personalisation' to explain how this approach to physical education is achieved. The syllabus describes 'integration' like this:

...integration implies a dual role for physical activity in Physical Education. Physical activity serves both as a source of content and data and as a medium for learning. This interrelationship directly implies that learning in Physical Education cannot be separated from engagement in physical activity. Physical Education therefore involves students in closely integrated written, oral, physical and other learning experiences based on the study of selected physical activities. (QSA, 2004, p.2)

Personalisation is a really important concept as well. We are keen to ensure that the learning experiences you have in Senior PE are authentic, or relevant to your life. This is important to us because we hope that what is learnt over the course will continue to be relevant when you finish school. Personalisation means providing:

...learning experiences that relate to their [the students'] personal experiences. It enables students to make meaning of complex understandings by providing connections with their real-life contexts. From this basis of understanding students can apply these experiences to increasingly diverse and less familiar circumstances. (QSA, 2004, p.2)

Chantel: What if the school decides to do physical activities that I'm not all that good at, or have had little experience in?

Well, Chantel, you should be able to ensure a strong overall grade if you work hard in the written component of the course. Also, remember that you undertake the same

activities twice, once in year 11 and once in year 12. You should be able to demonstrate some improvement when you revisit the activities in year 12. Finally, we believe that because teachers are required to plan for activities from a variety of activity categories, there should be at least one type of physical activity that you have a stronger affinity for and can perform well in.

Matt: I don't mind what the sports are. I reckon I'd do well at all of them... except of course, if we had to dance!

Chantel: I'm really into equestrian and camp drafting...

Camp what?

Chantel: Camp drafting! It's a horse handling competition in which riders are required to guide a cow through a course of markers in the shortest possible time... Anyway, I guess there isn't much chance that I'd get to do anything like that?

PH: No, it's unlikely. It would depend on whether the school had access to the facilities and whether the teachers had the necessary expertise to facilitate the activity. Furthermore, it wouldn't be a great unit choice for a school because of the limited exposure that the majority of the students would have had to horse riding. The teachers' selection of activities are influenced by:

- relevance to the focus areas and the general objectives
- interests, cultural backgrounds, stages of development and abilities of students
- gender considerations
- traditions and practices in the school and the community
- teaching resources and special aptitudes of staff
- facilities and equipment
- climatic conditions.

(QSA, 2004, p.13)

Each unit you study in Senior PE is about 9 weeks in length (about a half a semester). So, you will study 4 units (four different physical activities) in year 11 and then the same four units (but not necessarily in the same order) in year 12.

Matt: That could get boring in Year 12.

PH: Perhaps... but we believe that it allows all students to develop the knowledge, skills and processes in the physical activities and associated focus areas to optimise achievement. It allows you to build on what you have learnt in relation to a physical activity, in the previous year. It's important to note that in year 12 a physical activity may be linked to a different focus area than it was in year 11. Changes such as this diversify the content and strengthen your ability to apply the focus area knowledges in multiple contexts. The syllabus requirement that teachers choose physical activities from three of the four categories ensures that variety of physical activities is evident in work programs.

Chantel: What are some examples of the types of activities we might study in PE? Like this could have a big impact on how well I go in PE.

PH: Touch football is a common 'direct interceptive' activity that schools include in their programs. Similarly, volleyball as an 'indirect interceptive' activity, athletics in the performance category, and dance for the aesthetic category seem to be popular choices.

Matt: That sounds 'sweet as' to me... except maybe dance...

Chantel: I've never played volleyball before and it looks hard! Touch has been a nightmare in the past because the boys never pass the ball to the girls. Athletics would be alright. I like dance, but I'm not real keen on dancing in front of people by myself. I mean, how do we get assessed in all these things?

More about the course in WA...

DP: In important respects the new course in WA has some notable similarities to the course you are familiar with in Queensland. Firstly, I should stress that the course is intended to be as practical as possible. You will learn about various aspects of participation through practically based learning activities and tasks that have a specific focus on content associated with either 'movement, skills, strategies and tactics' 'physiological dimensions'; or 'social dimensions' of participation and performance in physical activity and sport, and that are designed to progress your learning in relation to the identified course outcomes mentioned above - Skills for Physical Activity; Self-management and Interpersonal Skills for Physical Activity; Knowledge and Understanding of Movement and Conditioning Concepts for Physical Activity, and Knowledge and Understanding of Sport Psychology Concepts for Physical Activity.

Your teachers therefore face quite a challenge, to develop so called 'integrated' activities and tasks for you, to help you connect 'theory and prac' and to also make links between the various content areas. The course tries to promote a so called 'holistic' view of participation, recognising the many factors that influence participation (which is taken to include performance at all levels) and that need to be considered if we are interested in enhancing either our own or other people's participation. So, you will be encouraged to recognise for example, that mental skills are arguably as important as physical skills if you are going to achieve your potential in an activity or help other people to do so. You will have the opportunity to analyse many different aspects of your own and other people's participation, look at how to improve particular aspects and explore how to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of training strategies and programs that you use or design.

One of the things that is perhaps most notable about the new course in WA is that in every unit, you will cover material associated with each of the three areas of content. You should therefore constantly be encouraged to make connections between them, in progressively more sophisticated ways.

Chantel: So, how long is a unit in Western Australia, and how many units will we do?

DP: In the new courses units are a semester long. Ordinarily, you will study four units, two in year 11 and two in year 12. Sometimes students might choose to just complete two units from a course. The units are designed to be progressively more difficult in the demands that they present, so that they will extend and enhance the skills, knowledge and understanding that enable students to achieve the outcomes at higher levels. The diagram below shows the way in which course units are presented in progressively more advanced pairs. Not everyone will follow the same set of units. It is anticipated that while some students may commence their year 11 studies with a 1A unit, others may be in a position to enter at 1B or 2A. Students are thus acknowledged as having different potential to advance in any particular course and we would be looking for you to have the opportunity to enrol in the units that will best suit your ability.

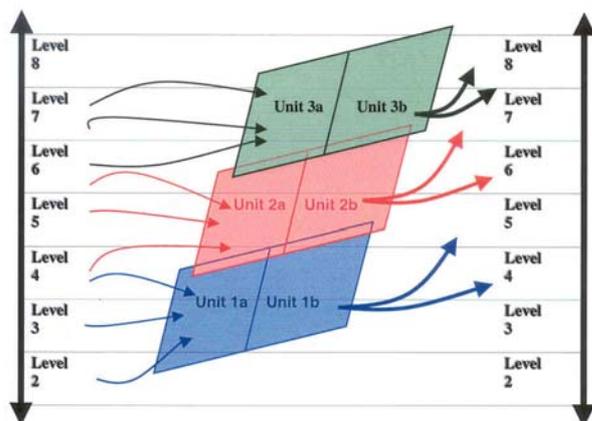


Figure 1: Organisation of Units in Courses of Study (Curriculum Council of Western Australia, 2005, p.16)

WA continued...

Chantel: So, will all schools in WA offer a variety of units for students starting the new course?

DP: Ahh now that is an interesting question Chantel. In time I think we can certainly expect a range of unit offerings in many schools. To begin with you may find that some schools only offer particular pairs of units, such as 1a and 1b in year 11. Others may endeavour to run different units simultaneously, so that for example, some year 11 students follow unit 1a in semester 1 while others follow unit 2a.

Chantel: So who will decide what unit I should or can start with?

DP: Well, the intention is that the new course builds upon student achievement in Health and Physical Education K-10 in WA. There has been a strong emphasis placed upon continuity and alignment between the level descriptions presented in the Curriculum Framework for K-10 and the level statements in the new courses. Ordinarily, teachers would look at the levels you had reached in relation to the four HPE K-10 outcomes that are assessed (Skills for Physical Activity; Interpersonal Skills; Self-management Skills; Knowledge and Understandings) and then advise you about the most suitable Physical Education Studies unit to start with. What levels did you get in relation to your HPE in Queensland?

Matt: What levels... we didn't have levels. The school gave us grades. I got 'A's in all the units in Junior HPE.

Chantel: Yeah, we didn't have levels. I know that at my other school we had to achieve 'core learning outcomes' and got levels from them. I think that in year 8 was about level 4, going on level five.

DP: OK, that's helpful. We can look into how that matches up with the levels here in WA.

Matt: But what about the activities we will do? Who chooses them?

DP: That's a good question Matt and again, the new course is interesting. There are no specific requirements for schools to include particular activities or cover specific categories of activity in the course. The course was designed with the intention that there would be the scope and opportunity for personal interests and abilities in relation to activities to come to the fore. In reality, as in Queensland, we can expect various factors to influence school and teacher decisions about which activities are included in the course. It will be important to include activities that will enable most students to achieve well. That said, you can expect to have some opportunities to demonstrate your achievement of the course outcomes in the context of your own preferred activity. You may well be able to focus on your activity when exploring various aspects of the knowledge and understandings outcomes and even submit evidence of your achievement of the outcomes from a setting outside of school. For example, you could discuss with your teacher how you could involve your coach in the assessment process and what sort of video clips you would need to demonstrate your achievement of the Skills for Physical Activity outcome in your soccer.

But...what about assessment?... What outcomes and/or criteria will students be judged in relation to? (will it suit me, my interests and abilities?)...what form / format does assessment take?...how and when are judgements made, about what, and by whom? (Given the required or possible contexts, can I play to my strengths and interests?) ...Are there exams?

PH: In relation to your question Chantel, both the physical and written performances planned by your teacher for each unit are assessed using a set of task-specific criteria and standards. These are written by your teacher and are based on a generic set in the Senior PE syllabus. Your teacher observes your physical performances or reads your work and makes a judgement about their quality in relation to the words on the criteria sheets. The criteria are based on three of the four general objectives of the syllabus: acquire, apply and evaluate. Appreciate is the fourth objective and this is not represented in the criteria and standards. According to the syllabus.

- 'Acquiring involves the retrieval and comprehension of information and the reproduction of learned physical responses' (QSA, 2004, p. 5);
- 'Applying involves the application of acquired information and learned physical responses' (QSA, 2004, p. 5);
- 'Evaluating uses information, understandings and skills previously gained in Acquiring and Applying to make decisions, reach conclusions, solve problems and justify solutions and actions' (QSA, 2004, p. 6).

There are five standards for each criterion (A, B, C, D and E). The 'standards descriptors' associated with each standard for each criterion are what the teacher uses to make a judgement about the quality of the performance. For each task, the students receive a grade for each criterion. The grades for every task are recorded in a student profile that allows a judgement to be made about your PE standard for each reporting time (i.e. for your report cards at the end of each semester).

Matt: So are there exams in Senior PE? Like, do we have a running performance exam or assessment day as well as skill acquisition exam?

PH: In relation to the assessment of your physical performance, there are no exams. Teachers may choose to have an assessment 'moment', like a race for swimming, to determine your grades, but this is not required. Furthermore, you shouldn't be graded on the time you achieve, but rather whether the performance reflects the descriptors in the criteria and standards (see QSA, 2004). Alternatively, the teacher can observe your performance across the unit and make a judgement based on informal observations made throughout that time. In relation to the written work, each year you will be required to sit at least one essay exam and complete two written assignments. The fourth task in each year is at the discretion of the teacher.

Chantel: Are we compared against other students in the class?

PH: No, your performances should be referenced only against the criteria and standards. The performances of other students should have no bearing on the grades that you receive.

Chantel: I think that we have been assessed this way in the past. It seemed to me that the teacher pays attention to the students he likes. They seem to get the best grades.

PH: That shouldn't happen. All students should be assessed fairly and given equal opportunity to display acquisition, application and evaluation in each physical activity and written context. Teachers need to make a concerted effort to ensure that every student has access to these opportunities.

WA...

DP: In WA, for each outcome there are course standards, set out in a framework comprising levels 4-8. There are a set of indicators of achievement for each level. Teachers will use the course standards to help them make judgements about your achievement in relation to the outcome. They will develop a scheme of assessment for each unit to ensure that you will have the opportunity to demonstrate your achievement of each of the outcomes.

Chantel: How will they do that? And how do those levels relate to the ones you mentioned earlier for HPE in WA?

DP: All courses have been designed so that the standards in the courses should line up with levels 4-8 in the curriculum framework. So, you should find that what you need to do to achieve a level 6 in the new physical education studies course has similar demands to the level 6 description in the HPE progress maps (see Curriculum Council of Western Australia, 2005). The standards will not be exactly the same as the HPE levels because this is a specialist physical education studies course. There are three types of assessment that your teachers will use in their school-managed assessment:

Types of Assessment
<p>Performance/response</p> <p>The assessment of students engaged in an activity, on-the-spot evaluation of performance and student reflective response about their performance.</p> <p><i>Two tasks of this type are required.</i></p> <p>Performance and reflection on performance in physical activity forms and settings, in the role of performer, coach and/or official.</p> <p>Best suited to the collection of evidence of student achievement of Outcomes 1 and 2.</p>
<p>Investigation</p> <p>Research work in which students plan, conduct and communicate an investigation.</p> <p>Investigation of own and others' current participation in physical activity, participation potential, physical activity issues and social contexts. The findings may be communicated in any appropriate form (e.g. written, oral, graphical, video, or various combinations of these).</p> <p>Best suited to the collection of evidence of student achievement of Outcomes 3 and 4.</p>
<p>Response</p> <p>Students apply their knowledge and skills when analysing and responding to a series of stimuli or prompts.</p> <p>Response to, analysis and evaluation of own or others' (peer or professional) participation in physical activity. Student responses may be oral, written or multi-media.</p> <p>Best suited to the collection of evidence of student achievement of Outcomes 3 and 4.</p>

(Curriculum Council of Western Australia, 2006, p.7)

Teachers will be required to report your achievement in terms of the levels at the end of each unit. They will design assessment tasks that you undertake at various points in a unit. The tasks will involve the different types of assessment and enable your teacher to gather comprehensive evidence of your achievement.

Matt: So will it be lots of written work for every unit?

DP: There will be some written work, but tasks may also involve you making oral responses or using multi-media and as you will see, for two of the outcomes the 'performance' assessment type is important. Assessment for the Self-management and Interpersonal Skills for Physical Activity outcome may well involve you in a peer coaching or officiating role. With the Knowledge and Understandings outcomes, you might well use video clips from your own or someone else's performance to look at particular aspects of performance, movement or say, tactics in a competitive or game situation. So, assessment tasks will be designed to try to make links between the various outcomes rather than treating them all as separate from one another, and using video and video analysis technology can play a part in that. In some schools the students will be developing digital portfolios as part of their school-based assessment.

Matt: What about my soccer outside of school... how can that count?

DP: Both you and Chantel should find that there are many occasions when you can focus on your particular activity in completing assessment tasks. As I mentioned before, personal relevance is a real focus in the course, so it makes sense for you to try to apply new skills, knowledge and understanding in and to your activity. For the Skills for Physical Activity outcome and possibly also the Self-management and Interpersonal Skills for Physical Activity outcome, we need to look into ways in which appropriate evidence from your activity contexts could be gathered and submitted to your teacher.

Student work submitted to demonstrate achievement of outcomes should only be accepted if the teacher can attest that, to the best of her/his knowledge, all uncited work is the student's own.

(Curriculum Council of Western Australia, 2006, p.7)

DP: What about you Chantel, how do you feel about assessment for the Skills for Physical Activity outcome?

Chantel: I have mixed feelings. I don't perform as well as I can when I have a one off assessment of a physical activity because I can get nervous. I generally do better when the teacher is observing over time. Also I think that there should be some credit given for participation and working hard. Instead of getting grades for how fast you run, or how far you throw, there should be some recognition of showing improvement. Plus, I think it would be good if my equestrian skills could be recognised.

Matt: The only problem with getting assessed by observation over time is that I have to work hard every lesson. Sometimes I just want to have fun and relax a bit with my mates and this can look like I'm not performing well.

DP: With both of you we will need to look into ways in which you can make the most of your participation and achievements outside of school.

Do you have any preferences for oral or written work?

Matt: I don't really mind. I tend to go alright in both exams and assignments. I s'pose assignments are better because I get more time to research the topic and write a better response.

Chantel: I don't like oral presentations at all because I get very nervous talking in front of groups of people. I don't mind exams but prefer to do assignments because I think I can do a better job if I don't have to cope with the pressure of the exam time. Will we have exams?

DP: That's an important question Chantel, particularly if you are thinking about going on to university.

External assessment is a requirement for students aspiring to university selection. Students need to complete two units to be eligible to sit the WACE exam.

The written examination length is two hours and thirty minutes and 10 minutes reading/planning time. It will measure Outcomes 3 and 4. The practical component of the exam will be conducted in a school setting under set conditions. It will cover Outcomes 1 and 2.

(Curriculum Council of Western Australia, 2006, p.8).

DP: So, if you want to be eligible for university selection, you will sit a Physical Education Studies written examination and also have a practical assessment at school – although as I said, there is also the prospect that you will be able to submit evidence of your achievement in your own activity. We'll follow that up and also have a look at a draft examination paper with you.

Conclusion

The above are conversations 'to be continued'. The senior school years are widely acknowledged as a 'high stakes' curriculum arena for governments, teachers and students alike (see Lumby & Foskett, 2005). Arguably, "a fundamental challenge for governments and educators worldwide is to take discourses of inclusivity and lifelong learning beyond popularised rhetoric" (Penney & Walker, forthcoming). This paper has been designed to encourage reflection on the extent to which developments in senior Physical Education can be regarded as embracing and advancing those discourses. In parallel it has endeavoured to prompt critical engagement with the current federal government policy agenda of 'an unprecedented degree of national consistency' in education across Australia (Nelson, 2005). As Graham and Martin (2006) have pointed out;

The arguments for a national curriculum generally overlook the possibility that the existing diversity in approach may have advantages for the development of curriculum quality. The capacity to learn from each other, to take the best from more than one state and territory and create something even better, and the constructive dialogue which difference engenders have served Australian curriculum development well in the past.

(p.63)

Through the dialogue presented in this paper we have endeavoured to demonstrate the way in which two different authorities have operationalised notions of inclusivity through the official curriculum for senior secondary physical education. Notably, we have endeavoured to place student interests to the fore in curriculum debate. Currently in Australia federal attention with regard to senior secondary schooling appears to be focusing largely upon comparability of achievements across states and territories. This paper reflects the shift that we advocate amidst continued debate in political and professional arenas; namely to a focus on equity of opportunity. Consideration of whether or not we are providing all Australian students with the best possible opportunities to pursue their interests in physical education and be supported in doing so into and beyond year 11 and 12 undoubtedly demands 'a forward-looking approach, driven by the needs of students in this century, not the last' (Graham & Martin, 2006, p.64).

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Appendix 1.

For details of the New South Wales *Personal Development, Health and Physical Education Stage 6 Syllabus* (Board of Studies, NSW, 1999) see <http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au>

For details of the Queensland Studies Authority year 11 and 12 listed subjects *Health Education* and *Physical Education* see http://www.qsa.qld.edu.au/yrs11_12/subjects/index.html

For details of Tasmania Certificate of Education syllabuses identified with *Adventure Education; Athlete Development; Health; Recreation and Health; and Sport Studies & Sport Science*, see <http://www.tga.tas.gov.au/1056>

For details of the Victorian Certificate of Education Studies see <http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/vce/index.html>; and

⇒ *Health and Human Development*

<http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/vce/studies/healthnhuman/healthumindex.html>

⇒ *Outdoor and Environmental Studies*

<http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/vce/studies/outdoor/outdoorindex.html>

⇒ *Physical Education* <http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/vce/studies/physicaledu/phyeduindex.html>

⇒ *Sport and Recreation*

<http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/vet/programs/sportrecreation/sportrec.html>

For details of the South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) see

<http://www.ssabsa.sa.edu.au/teacher/teachersubject.php>

Encompassing subjects (stage 1 / stage 2) identified with *Health Education; Outdoor and Environmental Education; Personal Development Studies; Sport and Recreation (VET); and Physical Education; and Higher Education Selection Subjects: Physical Education (HESS General); Health Education (HESS Restricted) Outdoor and Environmental Education (HESS Restricted); Personal Development Studies (HESS Restricted); Sport and Recreation (VET) (HESS Restricted)*.

The Northern Territory Certificate of Education (NTCE)

<http://www.deet.nt.gov.au/education/ntbos/ntce.shtml>

aligns with SACE offerings.

For details of the ACT Senior Secondary System see

http://www.bsss.act.edu.au/year_11_and_12/act_senior_secondary_system

The ACT operates a system of school based curriculum and assessment within the policy and procedures of the ACT Board of Senior Secondary Studies (BSSS). Colleges determine the courses (and units) that they offer to the students. There are no compulsory courses or units. Assessment in the ACT is continuous school based assessment. There are no examinations set by a central authority for any subject. Courses are taught and assessed unit by unit. A unit of study is organised around a particular theme or discipline. Courses consists of a combination of units with coherence of purpose. There are different types of courses based on number of units. The maximum number of standard units that a course can contribute to the ACT Year 12 certificate is 8. Type 2 courses are developed cooperatively by representatives from more than one college, and include courses associated with *Outdoor Education; Physical Education; and Sport and Recreation*.

<http://www.bsss.act.edu.au/curriculum/courses>

For details of the 'new WACE' (Western Australian Certificate of Education) see

http://newwace.curriculum.wa.edu.au/pages/teachers_home.asp

The four new courses associated with the Health and Physical Education learning area are:

⇒ *Children, Family and Community*

⇒ *Health Studies*

⇒ *Physical Education Studies*

⇒ *Recreational and Environmental Studies*