



What if there was a year 7–10 outdoor education curriculum in Victoria, Australia?

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Abstract

There has been significant and sustained advocacy for a Year 7–10 Outdoor Education curriculum in Victoria and Australia for over forty years. Beginning in 2018, this prompted the formation of the Outdoor Education in the Victorian Curriculum (OEVC) project team, involving representatives from state-based professional associations: Outdoors Victoria, the Victorian branch of ACHPER (Australian Council for Health, Physical Education and Recreation), the Residential Outdoor Schools Association (ROSA), and Victorian universities with interests in Outdoor Education. The OEVC project has been formalised in recent years to focus on this vital work, consulting with teachers, administrators and academics in the drafting of a specific Year 7–10 Outdoor Education curriculum. To ascertain the perceived impact and appropriateness of a Year 7–10 Outdoor Education curriculum, teachers' insights were solicited via an online survey, administered via statewide conferences of OE teachers convened separately by Outdoors Victoria, ACHPER Victoria, and ROSA. In this paper, we share the process surrounding the drafting of this Outdoor Education curriculum and the findings of the teacher survey. These findings suggest a Year 7–10 Outdoor Education curriculum in Victoria be seriously considered because it would support teachers and students who are already studying in this area in Years 7–10. Further, we suggest a possible solution might be to offer it as an option within the Health and Physical Education learning area in the Victorian Curriculum.

Keywords Outdoor education · Outdoor learning · Curriculum · Victorian curriculum F-10

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Outdoor education in the victorian curriculum

Our focus in this paper is on Outdoor Education (OE) curriculum, specifically in Victoria, knowing that the Victorian Curriculum F-10 “incorporates the Australian Curriculum and reflects Victorian priorities and standards” (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority [VCAA], [n.d.-a](#), para. 2). At the time of writing there is no specific Year 7–10 OE curriculum in Victoria. This absence, we believe, has created numerous issues for Victorian schools, teachers and students, where OE has been taught and learned through Years 7–10 for many years in well-established units and programs, as Brookes (2002) identified more than twenty years ago. The research study we share via this paper was aimed at investigating Victorian OE teachers’ perceptions of these issues, inspired by the question “What if there was a Year 7–10 OE curriculum in Victoria?”. Our interest, then, is fixed on the inclusion of OE in formal, government sanctioned and supported curriculum in Victoria, Australia. We are aware that discourses related the content of such curriculum have been consistently present in Australia over decades (see for example Brookes, 1989, 2002, 2004), however the content is not so much the issue in this paper, but rather the basic presence of formal OE curriculum, in Victoria.

The Australian Curriculum was introduced following agreement by all Australian Education Ministers, as outlined in the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2008) and reinforced in the *The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration* (Education Council, 2019). It was designed to harmonise the various state and territory curricula in Australia. The Australian Curriculum F-10 contains three cross-curricular priorities (sustainability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, Asia and Australia’s engagement with Asia). These have been embedded within the Victorian Curriculum F-10 (VCAA, [n.d.-b](#)). The Victorian Curriculum is structured using a series of learning areas (discipline areas) and capabilities (discrete knowledge and skills not fully defined by any of the learning areas but taught in and through the learning areas, e.g. Personal and Social Capability), and managed by VCAA, the statutory authority reporting to the Victorian Minister for Education.

OE is included in Victoria’s Year 11 and 12 curriculum, the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE), as VCE Outdoor and Environmental Studies (OES). VCE OES was introduced in 1999 following a broader review of environmental education within the VCE; it replaced two predecessor subjects, VCE Outdoor Education (est. 1982) and VCE Environmental Studies (Gough, 2007). This evolution of OE into OES captured the recognised strength of OE in the area of human-nature relationships (Martin, 2004; Nettleton, 1993). Yet despite this longstanding inclusion in the VCE, OE is not currently articulated within Victoria’s F-10 curriculum. This means that students undertaking VCE OES do not have a clearly defined pathway of preparation in the F-10 curriculum (Ambrosy, 2021), as is provided in the vast majority of learning areas in the VCE, including the F-10 provision of Health and Physical Education that supports learning in VCE Health and Human Development and VCE Physical Education. This creates extra challenges for students and teachers in schools that offer VCE OES. The lack of a formal preparatory curriculum was identified by teachers

of the VCE OES course during the monitoring survey that informed the recent major review of the VCE OES curriculum (Ambrosy, 2021). Through this survey, teachers identified that even though the VCE OES study sits within the Health and Physical Education learning area, students were seeking preparation for studying VCE OES through Science and Humanities (particularly Geography), rather than through the current Health and Physical Education F-10 curriculum (Ambrosy, 2021). Such an approach to preparation highlights the gap that exists for specific OE curriculum in the F-10 years.

Regardless of the lack of formal inclusion in the F-10 curriculum, OE continues to be a key feature of the enacted curriculum (Marsh & Willis, 1999; Ross, 2024; Parker, 2023) in many Victorian schools. To consider the currency of this claim, we examined school websites of 50 schools delivering the VCE OES course, from a total of 223 schools who were registered to deliver the study in 2023. Schools delivering OES were sorted alphabetically, and the first 50 on the list were analysed. This selection process provided a sample with various school governance models (government, independent and Catholic), sizes and localities. Of these 50, 42 school websites had specific descriptions of OE at Years 7–10, with 30 of the 50 schools identifying the availability of specific OE elective subjects. This small empirical analysis of school websites adds to the previous work of Lugg and Martin (2001) and Parker (2023) in Victoria, as well as Picknoll et al. (2023) in Western Australia and Polley and Pickett (2003) in South Australia. Across their Victorian studies, Lugg and Martin (2001) and Parker (2023) traced a long-established and diverse practice of OE in Victorian schools (Brookes, 2002). This well entrenched OE practice continues today, despite a lack of formalisation within the Victorian Curriculum F-10, highlighting the need for further research into the development of OE specific curriculum. The work of teachers and the learning of students are both hindered by this situation, with OE units and programs receiving less curricular guidance and support than those of other learning areas.

The confusion for teachers between outdoor education and outdoor learning

To navigate the gap that exists for specific OE curriculum in the Victorian Curriculum F-10, teachers who coordinate and deliver OE elective subjects and/or other more intensive OE experiences (camps, residential programs, etc.) must seek to integrate content descriptions from currently existing curricula (learning areas and capabilities) that connect with aspects of these OE units and programs. When this is the approach taken to developing curriculum for OE, OE becomes a form of Outdoor Learning (OL). This is because no unique curriculum for OE exists. OL brings together curriculum content descriptions from any learning area or any general capability, noting that a unique OE curriculum does not exist. This is the core issue for OE: OE curriculum does not formally exist, and so any possibility for OE curriculum is displaced by the curriculum from other learning areas and general capabilities in the guise of OL. This creates confusion amongst teachers, and it also negates the unique curriculum offering that OE provides, beyond any of the curriculum documented in the

current learning areas or general capabilities. This unique OE curriculum offering is well-established and currently delivered across a broad range of schools, but remains missing from formal curriculum.

The confusion between OE curriculum and OL is present in version (9.0) of the Australian Curriculum, specifically within the *Curriculum Connection: Outdoor Learning* (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], n.d.-a). This confusion resulted from a compromise, following important machinations leading to earlier versions of the Australian Curriculum, wherein challenging discussions about OE (Gray & Martin, 2012; Martin, 2010) resulted in the eventual positioning of OE in the guise of OL, as one of the Curriculum Connections, allowing “educators to draw connections across the dimensions of the Australian Curriculum on various conceptual themes” (ACARA, n.d.-b). OL is a curriculum theme, not an area of curriculum itself.

As a Curriculum Connection, OL is positioned as a curriculum *resource*, not one of the three dimensions of the Australian Curriculum (learning areas, general capabilities, cross-curriculum priorities). As a resource, OL sits alongside other such resources including Consumer and Financial Literacy, Food and Fibre, Multimedia, and Online Safety. Curriculum Connections resources “provide multiple pathways to search, access and organise content to support a progression of learning in relation to a conceptual theme from Foundation to Year 10” (ACARA, n.d.-b). This positions OL as having no specific content descriptions; instead OL is a thematic approach to the Australian Curriculum that can be used to bring together content descriptions from within various learning areas and general capabilities. Hence, “outdoor learning not only addresses content across several learning areas, it is also uniquely placed to address general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities of the Australian Curriculum” (ACARA, n.d.-a).

The thematic approach to curriculum that is OL is guided by a “key difference between outdoor learning and ‘indoor’ learning,” founded in the idea “that the latter can facilitate cognitive development but the nature of the immediate classroom environment significantly limits the range and depth of sensory experience and affective learning” (Lugg, 2007, p. 106). The outdoors can thus provide a site for learning content from learning areas and capabilities, building on the notion that “the outdoor environment offers a more holistic mode of learning through direct, sensory, affective and cognitive engagement with ecological systems and processes, such that the consequences of individual and collective actions may have immediate and real outcomes for the learner” (p. 106). This outdoor (versus indoor) site character of OL is the heart of the theme that OL provides as a Curriculum Connection resource.

The lack of curriculum that details the unique learning accessible in OE means that the work of developing OE units and programs is considerably more complex for teachers than that associated with learning areas that have their own specific curriculum. Because the specific OE learning achieved via these units and programs is not able to be articulated via the Victorian Curriculum, teachers are left to create their own curriculum, in isolation of significant guidance and support. As Mockler (2018) suggests, this path of creating curriculum is “a complex process involving prioritisation, translation, and transformation of knowledge into appropriate conditions for learning, with reference to context” (p. 134). The challenge for OE teachers is

that development of the specific curriculum must be conducted by the teacher before any localised prioritisation, translation and transformation can occur. In addition, this time-consuming work is not well resourced in a system that continues to be “dominated by neoliberal ideology” (Reid, 2020, pp. 48–49), often relying on the good will of teachers. This is a very different situation to that experienced by teachers working in learning areas with their own specific curriculum, which are not only supported by this specific curriculum, but also with support materials developed by experts through ongoing consultative processes resourced by governments.

Outdoor education in the victorian curriculum (OEV) project

To contend with this situation, one that challenges both teachers and students in OE in Victoria, a collaborative group was formed in 2018, following initial conversations between VCAA, relevant professional associations of teachers, and academics with expertise in OE from Victorian universities. This collaboration evolved into a shared project known as the Outdoor Education in the Victorian Curriculum (OEV) project. The OEV project is a joint initiative of representatives from three peak bodies: Outdoors Victoria is the professional body for OE teachers in Victoria; the Victorian Branch of the Australian Council for Health, Physical Education and Recreation (ACHPER) is the professional body for Health and Physical Education teachers in Victoria; the Residential Outdoor Schools Association (ROSA) is a network of Victorian Department of Education outdoor schools focused on OE specifically for government school students (not private school students). Additionally, the OEV project includes representatives from several Victorian Universities, including Australian Catholic University, Federation University Australia, La Trobe University, The University of Melbourne, and Victoria University.

These representatives, as members of the OEV project team, have been working on the development of a draft curriculum (Ambrosy, 2022), specific to OE, with the intent that it has the potential to be included as an option in the Health and Physical Education learning area in the Victorian Curriculum F-10. An important consideration agreed to early in these discussions was that an *optional* OE curriculum within the broader Health and Physical Education learning area should not replace any element of the current Health and Physical Education curriculum. OE must indeed be a separate option, to be conducted at schools that choose to offer it in addition to the Health and Physical Education curriculum already in existence. The optional nature of this curriculum mirrors the current conduct of OE in schools, where it is often an elective subject or experience conducted by teachers teaching Health and Physical Education. In this way it also bypasses concern with expansion of the curriculum, noting here that while optional, it is supporting work that is already being conducted in schools by teachers and students.

The idea of an optional curriculum existing within a learning area is available in The Arts in the Australian Curriculum, which includes the disciplines of Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music, and Visual Arts, not all of which must be taught in secondary school levels. Health and Physical Education would be the learning area home for an OE discipline, available as an option. Most relevant, however, is that the

Victorian Curriculum also includes Visual Communication Design in The Arts, offering a precedent for a state based curriculum to contain curriculum options that do not exist within the Australian Curriculum. “The inclusion of the Visual Communication Design Levels 7–10 reflects a particular Victorian approach to the Arts, ensuring students have the necessary content and skills to pursue further study in this discipline in senior secondary years” (Victorian Curriculum & Assessment Authority, n.d.-c). Awareness of this precedent formed the starting point for the OEVC project and consideration of an optional OE curriculum within the Health and Physical Education learning area in the Victorian Curriculum.

Initial work by members of the OEVC project team involved the development of this draft optional OE curriculum for Years 7–10, the administration of a survey designed to collect teacher perceptions about the need for such an optional curriculum and the draft curriculum document, and the formalisation of the OEVC project through the governance structures of both ACHPER Victoria and Outdoors Victoria. The drafting of the optional OE curriculum and the survey mentioned above are the main elements of the research project reported in this paper. Two related research questions guided the investigation: (1) how would the existence of an optional Year 7–10 OE curriculum impact teachers and students?; and (2) what refinements need to be made to the draft Year 7–10 OE curriculum?

First draft of an optional outdoor education curriculum

The optional Year 7–10 OE curriculum was drafted by members and affiliates of the OEVC project team during the second half of 2021. Two lead authors collaborated on the curriculum development and conduct of a process which facilitated wider engagement. The two lead curriculum writers were a principal of a residential outdoor school and experienced OE teacher and an OE academic with a strong research interest in curriculum theory and former OE teacher. Both are continuing members of the OEVC project team. Feedback on the curriculum as it was being developed was gained from all members of the OEVC project team, and then from a collection of experienced OE teachers and school leaders selected from amongst those who contribute professionally through Outdoors Victoria and ACHPER Victoria. A variety of teacher backgrounds were included in this group, including experienced and newer teachers and teachers from both mainstream and residential outdoor schools.

Drawing on the structure of the Victorian Curriculum that is applied across all learning areas (VCAA, n.d.-d), the curriculum writing process began with the establishment of two appropriate strands and six associated sub-strands. These were proposed by the two lead curriculum writers, with agreement reached amongst the OEVC project team. Following the development of the strands and sub-strands, the lead curriculum writers developed a series of content descriptions aligned with achievement standards. The draft strands and sub-strands that emerged from this process are listed in Table 1. This work resulted in the first draft of the OE curriculum. Importantly, building on the learning achieved via this current study, a second draft of the OE curriculum was prepared, which shall be briefly described towards the end of this paper.

Table 1 First draft Outdoor Education curriculum: two strands and accompanying sub-strands

Strand – Outdoor knowledge and skills
<i>Sub-strand</i> – Relationships with self, others and outdoor environments
<i>Sub-strand</i> – Movement in outdoor environments
<i>Sub-strand</i> – Safe and sustainable engagement with outdoor environments
<i>Strand</i> – Changing Human-Nature Relationships
<i>Sub-strand</i> – Historical relationships with outdoor environments
<i>Sub-strand</i> – Contemporary relationships with outdoor environments
<i>Sub-strand</i> – Future relationships with outdoor environments

Table 2 Example of increasing cognitive complexity through verbs and constructs in the Victorian Curriculum Health and Physical Education (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, [n.d.-e](#))

<i>Learning area</i> – Health and physical education	
<i>Strand</i> – Personal, social and community health	
<i>Sub-strand</i> – Contributing to healthy and active communities	
<i>Level</i> – 7 and 8	<i>Level</i> – 9 and 10
<i>Content Description</i> – Plan and implement strategies for connecting to natural and built environments to promote the health and wellbeing of their communities	<i>Content Description</i> – Plan, implement and critique strategies to enhance the health, safety, and wellbeing of their communities

In order to address concerns raised previously in this paper, the development of this first draft OE curriculum was guided by four key principles: (1) it should be aligned with the structure of the other curriculum areas within the Victorian Curriculum F-10; (2) there should be no duplication of other learning areas, including the already existing Health and Physical Education curriculum; (3) it should support teachers and students already engaged in established OE units and programs in Years 7–10; and (4) it should offer a pathway supportive to studying VCE OES. We discuss each of these underlying principles below.

Alignment with the structures of the victorian curriculum F-10

Both the Australian Curriculum and the Victorian Curriculum articulate a continuum of learning within the strands in the Health and Physical Education learning area by using variations in cognitive level described by Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives (Armstrong, 2010). As students progress through the levels of the curriculum (associated with year levels in the Australian Curriculum but not directly so in the Victorian Curriculum), they are asked to apply themselves at increasingly complicated cognitive levels, as expressed through the verbs contained within the content descriptions. Table 2 illustrates this using content descriptions from the Victorian Curriculum (version 1.0, noting that version 2.0 has been released since this study was conducted). These content descriptions are from within the same sub-strand but at adjacent levels, highlighting the shift from “plan and implement” at level 7 and

8, to “plan, implement and critique” at level 9 and 10. Variations in cognitive level are also achieved by introducing increasingly complicated constructs. For example, in Table 2, the construct “safety” does not appear in level 7 and 8 but is introduced within the learning sequence for level 9 and 10.

As shown in Table 3, the first draft OE curriculum followed the same conventions to increase cognitive complexity. Note the shift in the verbs used from “examine” in level 7 and 8 to “evaluate” in level 9 and 10. Verbs used in the first draft OE curriculum were aligned, wherever possible, with those used at similar levels in sub-strands within the Health and Physical Education curriculum.

Avoiding duplication within the victorian curriculum F-10

One of the fundamental principles applied in development of the Australian Curriculum and the Victorian Curriculum is to avoid duplication between learning areas and capabilities (VCAA, [n.d.-b](#)). A primary concern is to avoid a crowded or over-crowded curriculum, one that has too much content, for which the Australian Curriculum has been criticised (Spillman et al., [2023](#); Willis, [2022](#); Yates et al., [2017](#)). Avoiding duplication was also a precondition articulated by the OEVC project team when initially considering the possibility of drafting an optional OE curriculum that would sit within the Health and Physical Education learning area alongside the Health and Physical Education curriculum.

Supporting teachers and students already engaged in OE units and programs in years 7–10

Knowing that many schools already taught OE units and programs in Years 7–10, and that many of these units and programs were long-established, meant that the first draft OE curriculum needed to support this work, rather than hinder it. The OEVC project team was also aware that at Years 7–10 some schools offered OE as an elective unit spanning a school term or semester, whereas other schools offered OE as an intensive program, often in the form of an OE camp. Accommodating both types of unit and program was a key principle when preparing the first draft of the OE curriculum.

Table 3 Example of increasing cognitive complexity through verbs and constructs in the first draft optional Outdoor Education curriculum

<i>Learning Area</i> – Health and physical education	
<i>(Discipline Option)</i> – Outdoor education	
<i>Strand</i> – Outdoor knowledge and skills	
<i>Sub-strand</i> – Safe and sustainable engagement with outdoor environments	
<i>Level</i> – 7 and 8	<i>Level</i> – 9 and 10
<i>Content Description</i> – Examine a range of minimal impact outdoor practices.	<i>Content Description</i> – Evaluate a range of minimal impact outdoor practices

Offering a pathway towards VCE Outdoor and Environmental studies

At the current time, there is no formal pathway that supports student learning in preparation for undertaking VCE OES, as there is for most other VCE curricula. The OEVC project team was aware that the first draft OE curriculum must provide an opportunity for students to achieve learning appropriately sequenced towards the curriculum of VCE OES, as is the case with Visual Communication Design in The Arts in the Victorian Curriculum (Victorian Curriculum & Assessment Authority, [n.d.-c](#)). This was an important consideration during the drafting of the first OE curriculum.

Methods

In order to investigate teachers' perceptions of the first draft OE curriculum developed by the OEVC project team, guided by the research question identified earlier in this paper, a survey was designed and administered. A cross-sectional survey design was chosen as an economical and efficient means of gathering a range of opinions (Cresswell, 2020) from participants. Surveys have proved to be a useful tool for examining issues about OE curriculum in Australia over time. For example Lugg and Martin (2001), Parker (2023), Polley and Pickett (2003), and Picknoll et al. (2023) all used surveys to consider the role and place of outdoor education in schools. The survey administered in this OEVC project study was granted ethics approval from Federation University Human Research Ethics Committee (approval reference 2022/056).

The survey design employed a mixed methods approach, with participants asked to respond to a series of five sentence prompts using a range of response options, along with being given the opportunity to provide open-ended qualitative detail to clarify each choice.

Question 1 "I think that development of an optional curriculum for Outdoor Education in Years 7–10...". Response options (*can choose one or more of*): will help teachers to better articulate intended learning; will support student achievement of intended learning; will create unnecessary work for teachers; will impede student learning; will impact in other ways – *and can add further detail*.

Question 2 "I think that this curriculum... my understanding of Outdoor Education". Response options (*can choose one or more of*): fits well with; adds important elements to; overlooks important elements of; does not support – *and can add further detail*.

Question 3 "I think that this curriculum... current Outdoor Education programs/units". Response options (*can choose one or more of*): generally supports; will enable positive development of; will create some issues for; does not support – *and can add further detail*.

Question 4 "I think that this curriculum... students participating in Outdoor Education". Response options (*can choose one or more of*): will appropriately challenge;

will improve the learning of; will confuse; will detract from the experience of – *and can add further detail.*

Question 5 “If this curriculum was available as an option in the Health and Physical Education learning area for Years 7–10...”. Response options (*can choose only one of*): I would use it in my teaching, or I would recommend it to others because...; I would not use it in my teaching, or I would not recommend it to others because... – *and can add further detail.*

The survey employed this semi-closed questioning style (Creswell, 2020) to enable quantification of participant responses in connection with the two research questions. A descriptive analysis (Creswell, 2020) of the qualitative detail provided by some participants was also undertaken. This method of analysis was appropriate for the relatively small sample size, the categorical nature of the data gathered, and the strongly articulated trends.

Participants were recruited via two methods. First, a link to the survey with the plain language statement was circulated via Outdoors Victoria and ACHPER Victoria, through their online newsletters to members. Second, members of the OEVC project team presented workshops about the first draft OE curriculum at three state conferences: (1) the ROSA internal staff conference; (2) the ACHPER Victoria secondary teacher conference; and (3) the Outdoors Victoria annual conference – all were held in May and June of 2023. At the conclusion of each of these workshops, conference delegates were invited to complete the survey online via a QR code.

The survey received 51 responses during May and June 2023. Most survey respondents identified themselves as working in secondary schools ($n=44$) and primary schools ($n=9$). Other respondents identified themselves as working for universities ($n=2$), government departments ($n=2$), and educational associations ($n=1$). Most respondents ($n=47$) identified their role as a teacher, while a small number identified as holding other roles including administrator ($n=4$), student ($n=3$), or other education-related roles ($n=4$; e.g., professional learning coordinator).

The validity of the survey responses was checked using three methods. First, the IP addresses of devices were collected and checked for uniqueness to ensure individuals did not submit multiple responses to the survey. Second, each respondent’s approximate geographical location was checked (based on their IP address) to ensure their location was relevant to the survey material (e.g., Victoria). Third, each survey was manually checked for validity, particularly for responses where all boxes were checked without any qualitative explanation, as inverse questions were built into the survey design, but also for situations where participants had ticked a negative response to a statement, then contradicted these results with a positive qualitative commentary. These responses were not included as data. All other responses were found to be valid and, accordingly, were included in the analysis.

These methods resulted in two major limitations that need to be highlighted. First, the study has a small sample size ($n=51$), especially when this is positioned as a sample of a population of greater than 140,000 teachers currently registered in Victoria (Victorian Institute of Teaching, 2023). Second, due to the recruitment being

conducted via Outdoors Victoria, ACHPER Victoria and ROSA, the responses were limited to those already teaching and familiar with OE.

Findings and discussion

In this section we present our analysis of the data. This analysis resulted in two themes that aligned with the two research questions, as expressed through the survey questions. These themes acknowledged issues related to (1) the impact of an optional OE curriculum and (2) the appropriateness of the draft OE curriculum, suggesting refinements that would need to be made.

Impact of an optional year 7–10 outdoor education curriculum

Understanding the impact of the first draft OE curriculum was connected directly to our first research question, which sought to investigate how the existence of an optional Year 7–10 Outdoor Education curriculum would impact teachers and students. Participants were asked to respond to two questions that would illuminate the impact that the draft curriculum might have on their work as teachers, as well as student achievement of the intended learning (Questions 1 and 4). In the first of these questions, participants were asked to respond to the prompt, “I think the development of an optional curriculum for Outdoor Education in Years 7–10....” As shown in Fig. 1, nearly all participants were supportive of the development of an optional OE curriculum, with 49 of 51 selecting the option “will help teachers to better articulate intended learning,” and 41 of 51 selecting the option “will support student achievement of intended learning.” Only a very small number of participants (3 of 51) selected the option “will create unnecessary work for teachers.” However, no further details were given by these respondents to explain this position. Of the small number of participants (8 of 51) who indicated this curriculum “will impact in other ways,” those who choose to provide qualitative commentary (5 of 8) all described the positive impacts that such a curriculum would have on student learning. No participants selected the option “will impede student learning.”

In Question 4 (Fig. 2), participants were asked to respond to the prompt “I think that this curriculum... students participating in Outdoor Education” programs/units. Most participants (46 of 51) selected the option “will improve the learning of.” Approximately two-thirds (33 of 51) of participants selected the option “will appropriately challenge.” No significant qualitative commentary was provided as to why participants did or didn’t support their responses to this sentence prompt. A small number of participants (3 of 51) selected the option “will confuse.” Here qualitative comments expressed concerns about possible overlap with other areas of the current curriculum and that the proposed draft was quite different to some current OE school curricula at these levels. A similarly small number of participants (4 of 51) selected the option “will detract from the experience of.” Here, noted issues included that such a curriculum may push for greater academic integrity or reduce the flexibility experienced by OE teachers. However, such comments were offset by others who selected

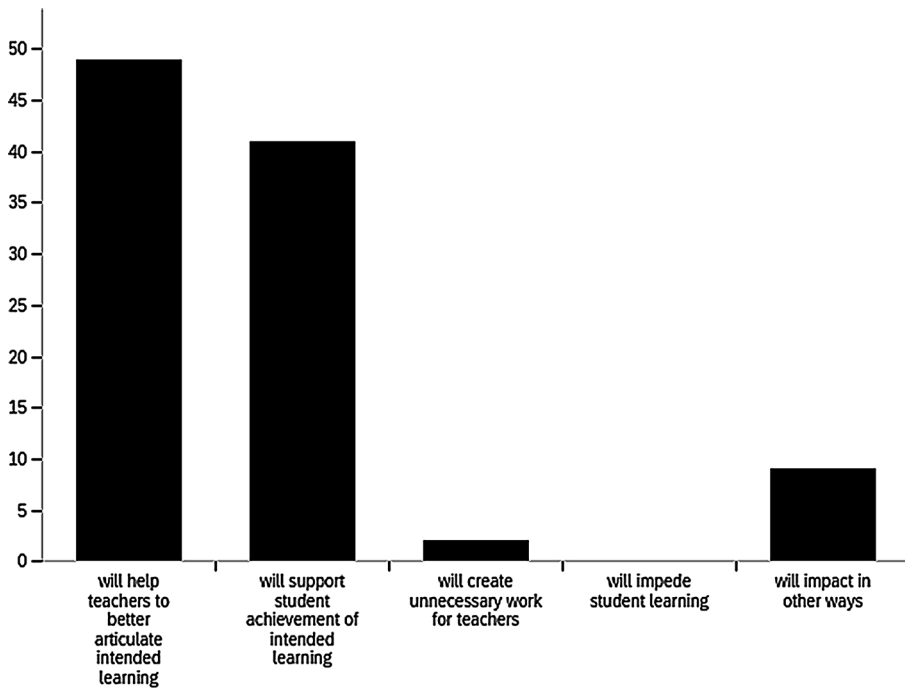


Fig. 1 Responses to Question 1: “I think the development of an optional curriculum for Outdoor Education in Years 7–10...”

more positive options, with one participants stating that, “if delivered well, it could enhance the experience” of students.

Appropriateness of the draft year 7–10 outdoor education curriculum

Understanding the appropriateness of the draft OE curriculum connected to our second research question, which sought to investigate the refinements that might need to be made to the draft Year 7–10 OE curriculum. Participants were asked three questions that related to the appropriateness of the draft curriculum. The first (Question 2; Fig. 3) sought participant responses to the prompt “I think that this curriculum... my understanding of Outdoor Education.” Most participants responded positively, selecting the options “fits well with” (37 of 51) or “adds import elements to” (32 of 51) their understanding of OE. Participants’ more detailed commentary connected with these responses indicated the draft curriculum aligned well with the current practice within their OE units and programs.

A small number of participants (7 of 51) indicated that the proposed curriculum overlooked elements important to their understanding of OE. The reasons cited aligned with two rationales. First, the draft did not cater to students at Levels A–D (which articulate pre-Foundation knowledge in the Victorian Curriculum, typically relevant for students with additional learning needs) or F–6; in other words primary or elementary school levels. Second, participants commented about the lack of social and

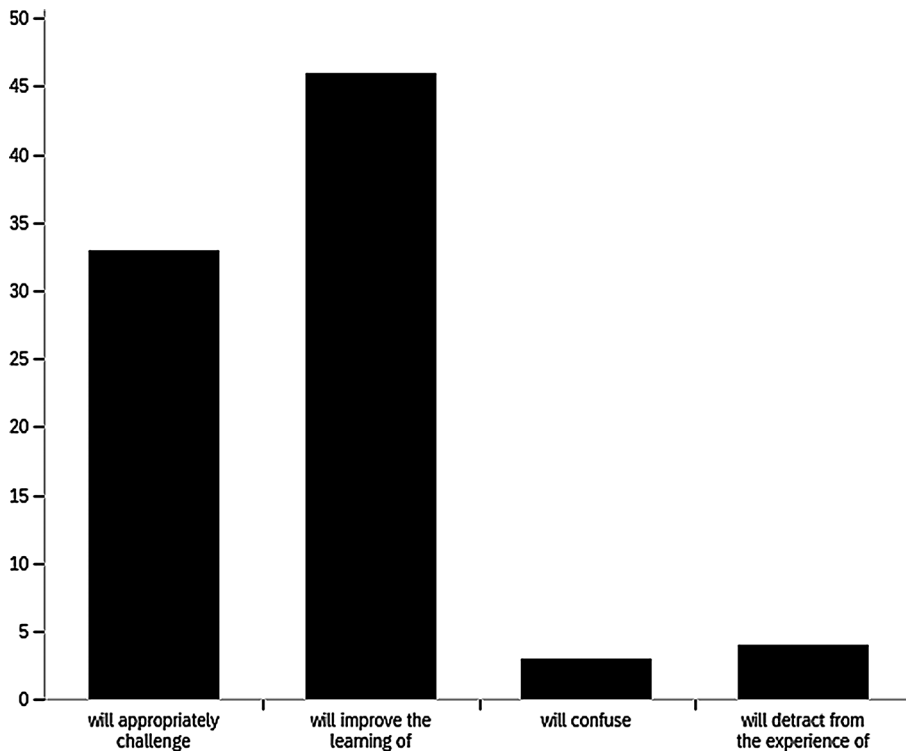


Fig. 2 Responses to Question 4: “I think that this curriculum... students participating in Outdoor Education”

emotional learning within the curriculum. However, it should be noted that this social and emotional learning curriculum is articulated in the Personal and Social Capability (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, [n.d.-b](#)), and, accordingly, was intentionally not written into the first draft OE curriculum, to avoid duplication.

In Question 3 (Fig. 4), participants were asked to respond to the prompt “I think that this curriculum... current Outdoor Education programs/units.” Around half of the participants selected “generally supports,” but significantly, a large number of participants (44 of 51) selected “will enable the positive development of” current OE programs and units, suggesting that the draft curriculum would enhance OE programs and units, particularly in relation to teaching and learning. A smaller number of participants selected “will create some issues for” and “does not support.” In the detailed comments some participants acknowledged that the first draft OE curriculum could have a stronger alignment to the VCE OES curriculum, although others pointed out that there was a good amount of scaffolding provided in this regard.

In Question 5 (Fig. 5), participants were asked to respond to the prompt “If this curriculum was available as an option in the Health and Physical Education learning area for Years 7–10...”. Nearly all participants (50 of 51) said they would use it in their teaching, whilst four (4 of 51) stated they would not. This indicated that three participants thought they both would and would not use it. This was explained

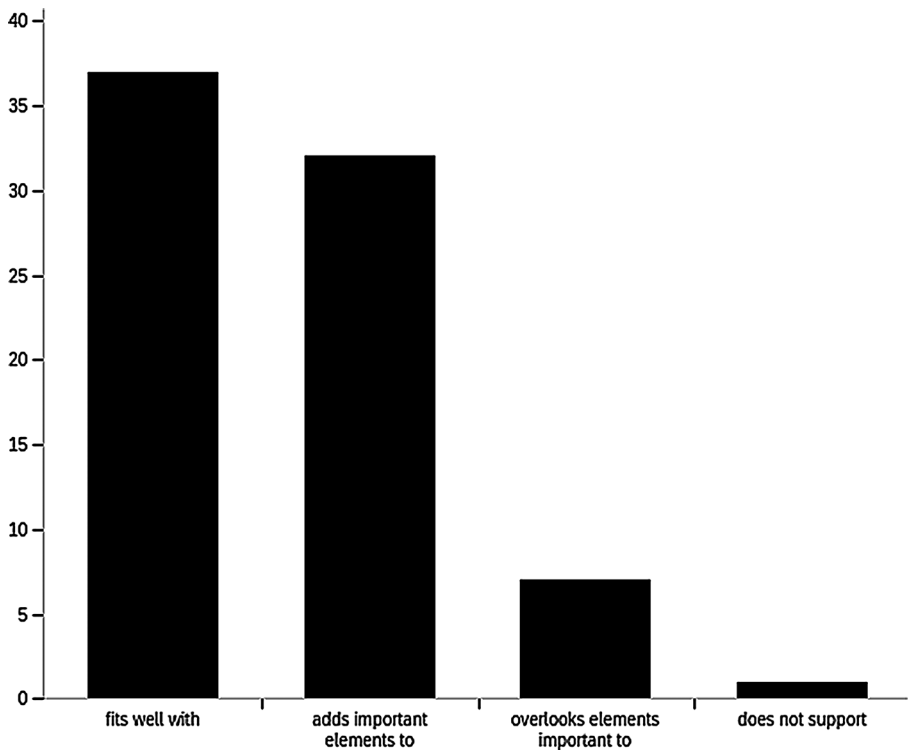


Fig. 3 Responses to Question 2: “I think that this curriculum... my understanding of Outdoor Education.”

through the qualitative responses to this question, where some were only working in primary settings, so they may not use it at the moment; however, they would use it if they were teaching Years 7–10.

Finally, participants were given a further opportunity to provide feedback in an open-ended qualitative response, asking them to provide any further thoughts and comments on the draft. The feedback here has been analysed and affirms the points made in our descriptive analysis of the other survey items. Many of the qualitative comments simply stated that teachers were happy to see this project moving forward. Further qualitative comments were categorised as being *challenges* to the inclusion of an optional Year 7–10 curriculum, *opportunities* for the inclusion of the OEVC draft curriculum, and *commendations* to the draft. They are included in the table below (Table 4).

Conclusion

The evidence made available through this investigation, conducted as part of the OEVC project, provided access to the voices of teachers whose professional responsibilities include achievement of student learning in OE. Having asked two questions

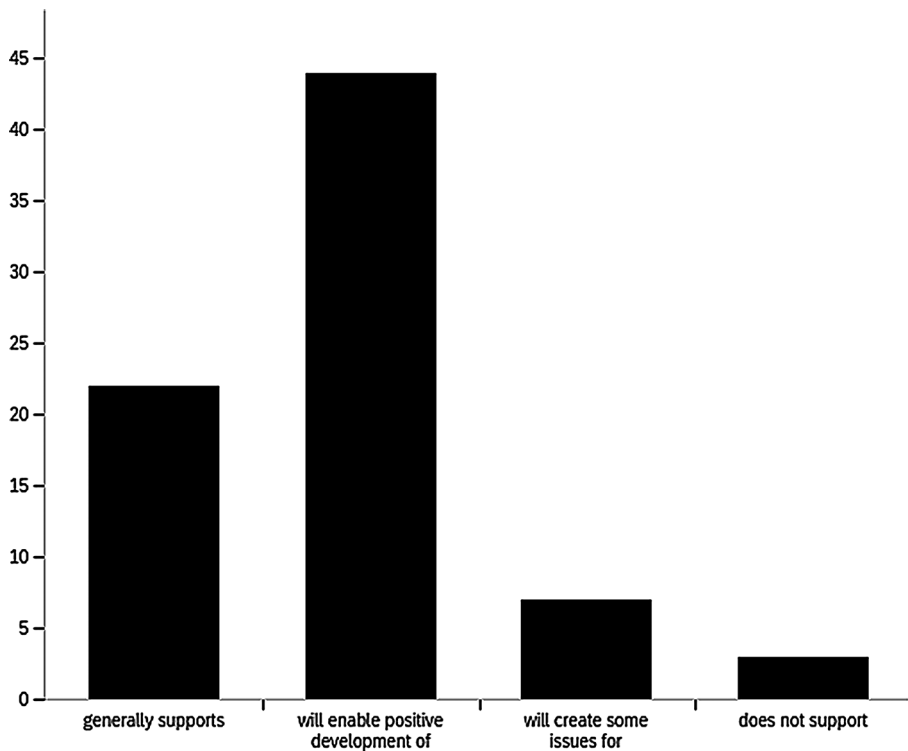


Fig. 4 Responses to Question 3: “I think that this curriculum... current Outdoor Education programs/units”

of teachers concerning (1) the impact of an optional OE curriculum as a part of the Health and Physical Education learning area in the Victorian Curriculum, and (2) the appropriateness of the draft curriculum developed via the OEVC project team, analysis of the survey response data suggested that teachers considered the impact would be profoundly positive for their work and that the first draft OE curriculum was generally appropriate, with the emphasis being on the need for such curriculum in the primary school levels as well, to complement the Year 7–10 draft.

Subsequent to this study, the first draft of the OE curriculum has been further developed by the two lead curriculum writers of the first draft, as well as other members of the OEVC project team, including both primary and secondary school teachers of OE, a curriculum expert in HPE from ACHPER Victoria, and another university academic with expertise in OE. A second draft of the optional OE curriculum has since been produced, with the strands and sub-strands evolving to those presented in Table 5.

These findings, along with the further advancements available in the second draft OE curriculum, have important ramifications, particularly pertinent in Victoria, considering that the Victorian Department of Education operates “Outdoor Education Schools” (Victorian Department of Education, 2024) specifically designed to cater for the learning needs of students from across the State, at both primary and second-

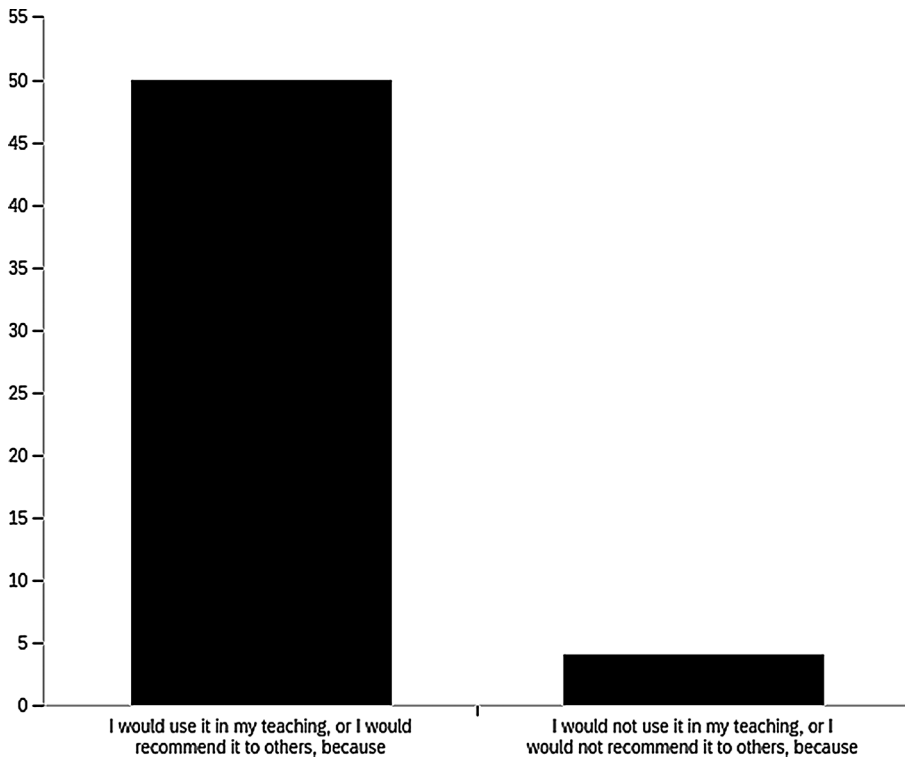


Fig. 5 Responses to Question 5: “If this curriculum was available as an option in the Health and Physical Education learning area for Years 7–10...”

Table 4 Challenges, commendations, and opportunities from Open-Ended qualitative question

Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Government schools could struggle to deliver excursions and camps with the incoming workplace agreement and inability to require families to pay.” • “I think the challenge will be finding time in already full timetables to fit this curriculum in”
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The curriculum could be expanded to map a continuum from “bush kinder style programs to emerge at the VCE level”. • The curriculum would support teachers to advocate for OE in schools. • “Year 7–8 is clear, Year 9–10 could be made a little clearer, keep it simple and relevant.”
Commendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Makes for consistent programs and will improve student outcomes” • “Much needed addition to the curriculum to help build skills and knowledge of students preparing for VCE” • “We have been making our own curriculum and strands for reporting for years. This helps with reporting, structure of programs and makes OE a prominent domain in secondary teaching!” • “I have been waiting for this for many years and I feel that it will give us more power to develop OE programs 7–10 especially in DET schools where it is seen as an optional extra in maybe 9 and generally 10.”

Table 5 Second draft Outdoor Education curriculum: two strands and accompanying sub-strands

Strand – Experiencing Outdoor Environments
<i>Sub-strand</i> – Planning for outdoor experiences
<i>Sub-strand</i> – Learning through outdoor experiences
<i>Sub-strand</i> – Reflecting on outdoor experiences
Strand – Relationships with Outdoor Environments
<i>Sub-strand</i> – Responsible relationships
<i>Sub-strand</i> – Influencing relationships

ary levels. Without OE curriculum, these schools, and the many other schools that offer elective and intensive units and programs in OE leading up to the VCE OES, have been left to navigate a gap in curriculum that cannot be filled via OL, because OE contains unique curriculum strands, sub-strands and content descriptions that cannot be replicated through other learning areas or capabilities.

Following the precedent set in Victoria with the inclusion of Visual Communication Design as an option in The Arts, which does not exist in the Australian Curriculum (Victorian Curriculum & Assessment Authority, n.d.-c), the Victorian Department of Education and VCAA could lead the way in supporting Victorian teachers and students through provision of an optional OE curriculum in the Health and Physical Education learning area, distinct from the Health and Physical Education curriculum which already exists. This support would then naturally extend to development and provision of curriculum resources and other materials aimed at further enhancing the professional work of teachers to achieve student learning outcomes in this well-established discipline area. This would enable better positioning the Victorian Curriculum to address its own “Cross-curriculum Priorities” (VCAA, n.d.-f) in the areas of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, and Sustainability, both of which are embraced by an OE curriculum.

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Declarations

Conflict of interest The authors do not wish to declare a conflict of interest.

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