Gender and Education

ISSN: 0954-0253 (Print) 1360-0516 (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cgee20

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To cite this article: Corina van Doodewaard & Annelies Knoppers (2018) Perceived differences and preferred norms: Dutch physical educators constructing gendered ethnicity, Gender and Education, 30:2, 187-204, DOI: 10.1080/09540253.2016.1188197

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2016.1188197

Published online: 26 May 2016.

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GENDER AND EDUCATION, 2018
VOL. 30, NO. 2, 187–204
https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2016.1188197

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Perceived differences and preferred norms: Dutch physical educators constructing gendered ethnicity

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ABSTRACT

Many physical education (PE) teachers have been challenged by the shift from teaching in primarily ethnic homogenous contexts to multi-ethnic (ME) classes. Teachers in secondary schools often experience difficulty in class management in such classes. This difficulty may limit their ability to create a positive student–teacher relationship and may result in practices of inclusion, exclusion and marginalisation. The purpose of this paper was to explore how Dutch PE teachers construct their relationship with their students and manage differences in ME classes. Using video stimulation, we interviewed 11 Dutch secondary school PE teachers about their teaching and managing of ME classes. Findings showed that these teachers tended to target a specific group of boys in their teaching and class management. In addition, their class management seemed to be based on an invisible norm about appropriate student behaviour.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 25 January 2015
Accepted 25 April 2016

KEYWORDS
Teachers; students; ethnicity; care; national identity

This paper describes research on class management in Dutch multi-ethnic (ME) physical education (PE) classes. We explored how teachers manage inclusivity in their classes. How does this ME social context inform how they engage in class management?

We begin by situating the issue in a broader social, political and historical Dutch–European context of power and hierarchy and then describe how this context is embedded in schools and informs teacher behaviour.

The Netherlands has a long history of immigration and has been a European frontrunner in multicultural policies since the 1980s (Maussen and Bogers 2012). In 1983, the Dutch government wrote its first policy paper about minorities. It advocated equal opportunities for minority groups from former colonies (Indonesia, Surinam and Dutch Antilles), for foreign workers (especially those from Morocco and Turkey known as guest labourers) and their families, for refugees, for those granted asylum and for gypsies and nomads (Eldering 2006). Equality of opportunities was, however, an elusive goal as other ideologies captured the public debate (Naber and Knippels 2013). Maussen and Bogers (2012) have pointed out that:

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> Whereas the Netherlands used to have a reputation as a country welcoming other cultures and respecting the rights of immigrants, it is now often mentioned as an example of the ways the critique of Islam and multiculturalism dominate public debates on immigration and integration issues in Europe. (104)

Current Dutch government policies label immigrants as Western or non-Western. Immigrants from non-Western countries (such as Morocco, Turkey, Surinam and the Dutch Antilles) are often referred to as 'non-Western allochtonen',[1] based on their country of birth or of their parents.

Dutch debates about ethnicity have been dominated for a long time by discourses of difference and deficit, especially when it concerned non-Western immigrants (Essed and Nimako 2006; Essed and Trienekens 2008). 'Difference discourses' assume that ethnic differences enrich human relations, and that intercultural conflicts can be solved through discussion. 'Deficit discourses' are based on the assumption that ethnic minorities lack the necessary skills, values and norms to function well in Dutch society and therefore need to learn them (Essed and Trienekens 2008). In all cases, the norm has been the white Dutch non-immigrant citizen. In addition, in the Netherlands, the dominant discourse about education assumes that there are no gender differences that need to be taken into account and therefore boys and girls should be treated similarly.

As a result of a stricter assimilation policy and a growing focus on personal and national security, schools are currently seen as important socialising institutions where youth from ethnic minorities learn skills they need to assimilate and integrate into society (Vedder 2006). This means educational politics now focus on the obligations of citizenship and the prevention of radicalisation (Spee and Reitsma 2015; Tweede Kamer 2015). This focus demands cultural disciplining of children and youth, especially of immigrant pupils (Leeman and Wardekker 2013). It tends to reinforce a hidden curriculum in which Dutchness is positioned as normative and superior, while those who are constructed as non-Dutch and non-Western are placed in a lower position in the nation's racial/ethnic hierarchy (Weiner 2015). Weiner characterised Dutchness as consisting of racialising discourses that emphasise a strong work ethic, punctuality, order, cleanliness and Christian Dutch cultural supremacy. Dutchness is a location of structural privilege, a standpoint from which to see oneself and 'others'. It is a product of history and like whiteness intersects with gendered and classed identities (Weiner 2015).

Teachers are assumed to play a very important role in the assimilation and integration of ethnic minority youth (Thijs and Verkuyten 2012). Dutch teachers in secondary schools have, however, reported difficulties in class management in ME classes that prevent them from creating a positive student–teacher relationship that they assume contributes to the goals of assimilation and integration (Leeman and Saharso 2013; Thijs, Westhof, and Koomen 2012; Van Tartwijk et al. 2009). In this study, we focus on PE as a site in ME schools where youth are constructed and regulated into compliance with dominant Dutch discourses about appropriate behaviour (Hill 2015).

PE teacher education in the Netherlands

PE in the Netherlands is a compulsory subject for all children from 4 to 18 years. It is scheduled for 2 hours a week. Students receive instruction in a broad spectrum of activities consisting of games and athletics (70% of the time) and gymnastics and dance (30% of the

time). Activities tend to be group oriented and usually non-competitive. In 1993, all PE classes became co-educational/gender-mixed so that the objectives of and curriculum for PE apply to both boys and girls. Although there is some concern that boys seem to underperform in general education (Driessen and van Langen 2010) and although some policy documents emphasise the role of teachers in challenging gender differences (Voskens, Janssen, and Evers 2010), there is little research that focuses on PE in these areas (Janssens 2015).

Curriculum standards in PETE emphasise that teachers should use a child-centred and child-sensitive approach (Bax 2015; Van Essen 2003). This approach means that PE teachers are required to develop interpersonal, educational, pedagogical and managerial skills in their professional education training (Aloco 2013). Cultural competencies, however, are only mentioned in these standards as a small aspect of interpersonal skills[2] and do not deal with educational, pedagogical or managerial issues that may arise in ME classes. This means that PE teachers may not be adequately equipped to teach and manage ME classes.

International research (e.g. Dagkas 2007; Dowling, Fitzgerald, and Flintoff 2012; Hill 2015) has shown the importance of teachers being competent in creating inclusive ME PE classes. The attainment of this competency is assumed to minimise student marginalisation. Others (Azzarito 2009; Flintoff, Fitzgerald, and Scraton 2008) contended that PE teachers need to be critical of and knowledgeable about intersecting discourses on gender and race. Together, these scholars recommended that teachers know how to develop positive student–teacher relations, have knowledge about the backgrounds of students and develop insight into the dynamics and intersections of gender and ethnic discourses in PE.

Other research has emphasised the crucial role the sociocultural context plays in sensitivity to gender and race. Meier (2015), for instance, who studied the value of female sporting role models, showed that opportunities to promote gender and ethnic sensitivity do not depend on whether teachers are male or female, but on context, mindset and training. Teachers in general, however, tend to have limited knowledge of the sociocultural context and ethnic background of their students (Dagkas 2007). Teachers in ME classes who do not adapt their teaching to the specific context tend to draw on competitive sport discourses as being most important in PE, but this focus may exclude many minority students, especially girls (Lundvall 2006). Similarly, Atencio and Koca (2011) showed how in a specific context, the celebration of only one version of sporting masculinity marginalised others.

Processes that reproduce or challenge gender and ethnic relations can play a significant role in daily practices of inclusion and marginalisation. Relatively little is known about how teachers in ME PE classes try to manage inclusivity. What choices do they make, for example, in their daily routines of teaching? In this study, we explored how teachers in ME PE classes reproduce and challenge gender and ethnic relations and how these relations may intersect. We focused especially on the assumptions that guided the teachers' daily routines of class management.

Pedagogy and class management in PE

Azzarito and Solmon (2005) argue that PE is a site of complex knowledge building and socialisation. They define knowledge and learning as socially constructed phenomena.

According to them, PE teachers need to recognise and address their assumptions about race/ethnicity and gender in teaching and develop a curriculum that creates positive opportunities for all boys and girls. The actions teachers take to create meaningful, supportive and facilitating learning environments are often called classroom management (Evertson and Weinstein 2006).[3]

Teachers, including those in PE, use their assumptions to create and assign meanings to students about ethnicity, gender and ability (Rink 2006). Specifically, their assumptions inform their daily teaching and managing practices and their efforts to maintain order to facilitate learning. When PE teachers, for example, implicitly assume boys as being better athletes than girls, they may expect less of girls than they do of boys in PE (e.g. Azzarito and Solmon 2009; Flintoff and Fitzgerald 2012; Wright 2004). Findings also suggest that many teachers teach to the 'sporty boys' (e.g. Connell 2008; Drummond 2003; Fagrell, Larsson, and Redelius 2012), and give them most of the attention in class management issues. Teachers not only construct gender, however, but also other social relations such as ethnicity. These inform their class management and subsequently, influence how students experience PE.

Scholars have explored how an immigrant background can shape the experiences of students in PE. Barker et al. (2014), for example, studied the experiences of three immigrant adolescents (boys and girls) from Turkey, Iraq and Greece participating in Swiss PE classes. Barker et al. (2014) not only found that ethnicity influenced how these students made sense of PE but also concluded that adolescents with immigration backgrounds are not a homogenous group and therefore should be treated and seen as unique individuals. Barker et al. (2014) focused primarily on students, however, and not on how their teachers perceived these students and how this perception intersected with gender. Their study is also an exception. Little is known about how teachers including those of Dutch PE classes construct ethnicity, their underlying assumptions and how they connect this to their class management in ME classes.

Theoretical framework

We situate our research in a critical social constructionist perspective. We assume that people assign meanings to the world around them and that these meanings are often based on implicit or invisible assumptions (Andrews 2012). Teachers use and create meanings to make sense of the social world that is present in their classes and to define what they see as appropriate and normal behaviour with respect to class management (Wright 2004). Flintoff and Fitzgerald (2012) have argued that perceived differences in PE classes are not fixed nor a result of inherent differences between groups. The differences are socially constructed and embedded in social practices of marginalisation and privileging. A social constructionist perspective about gender and ethnicity therefore assumes gender and ethnic relations and subsequent categorisations, are not essential or fixed, but fluid social constructions.

These constructions emerge from experiences and social interactions that are situated in dominant societal discourses about PE, ability, ethnicity and gender. Dominant discourses become powerful when they create norms, often invisible, by which behaviours are judged to be normal or deviant. These norms are enacted; they are not what individuals have, but what they do, and inform how teachers assign meanings to their students

and their behaviour in their management of PE classes (Flintoff 2014). The results of research on how teachers construct gender in PE suggest that these constructions often result in practices of inclusion, marginalisation and exclusion (e.g. Flintoff 2014; Van Amsterdam et al. 2012; With-Nielsen and Pfister 2011). This may also occur in ME classes where teachers deal with constructed binaries such as gender and a multiplicity of ethnicities that intersect with gender (Flintoff 2014).

Research is needed to explore how PE teachers construct class management in ME classes, and how their assumptions about and constructions of gender and ethnicity guide their ways of managing. Their class management might enforce practices of marginalisation, exclusion and inclusion. The results of such studies may provide insights that enable teachers to manage their classes in inclusive ways. The research question that guided this study was: How do PE teachers construct class management within ME classes and how do their constructions (re) produce differences that become part of processes that empower, marginalise and exclude based on gender and ethnicity?

Methodology

ME classes and PE teachers

We defined an ME class as one in which at least 50% of the students are classified as non-Western (Vedder 2006). In the Netherlands, 58% of the students in secondary schools in the four biggest cities are classified as immigrants. The majority (85%) of these immigrant students are labelled as non-Western immigrants ('allochtonen') (Statistics Netherlands 2014). We focused on experienced teachers, which meant that they had tenure and had taught for at least three years (Kessels 2010). To find schools and experienced teachers who taught ME classes, we contacted PETE universities who gave us information about potential participants. Through purposive sampling, we contacted 20 teachers who differed by gender and ethnicity. Our initial contact with them was via email and telephone. We interviewed until data saturation was achieved and no new themes or subthemes emerged. This meant that 11 teachers participated in the study.

Five of the teachers were male and had a Dutch background; three men had an immigrant background. We were not able to find a female teacher with an immigrant background who taught ME PE classes; the three women participating in the study can be labelled as Dutch.[4] The two researchers had a Dutch background while the research assistant had a Moroccan background.

Due to the relatively small number of ethnic minorities and women teaching secondary PE, we were concerned about preserving their anonymity and confidentiality as we had promised the participants (Flintoff and Webb 2012; Van den Hoonaard 2003). In addition, as we explained in the beginning of the paper, ethnicity has been defined in unique ways in the Netherlands. To prevent readers from projecting their assumptions about ethnicity and gender on the data and to ensure anonymity, we do not identify the individual ethnic background or gender of the participants in the study. We identify them only as teacher 1, 2, 3, etc.

All of the schools were of the same school type (VMBO: occupation oriented) that is the most popular form of secondary education in the Netherlands. The schools were situated in urban or suburban regions.[5] The Dutch Inspector of Education classified every school as

'adequate'. The average student population was 1140 within a range of 617–1700 students. In 8 of the classes we visited, the majority of students (68%) had a Moroccan or Turkish background. The other three classes were more mixed in regard to backgrounds. The gender composition of the classes differed. Seven classes were almost equally mixed with boys and girls, two classes had a majority of girls and two classes had a majority of boys. The filming took place in Grade 2 or 3 of secondary schools. Students in a class were all about the same age, ranging from 13 to 14 in Grade 2 and 14–15 in Grade 3.

Video-stimulated interviews

We conducted video-stimulated interviews (VSIs) (Van Tartwijk et al. 2009). Through the use of this cooperative, in-depth interview method, we facilitated the teachers in talking about their beliefs and assumptions. During our visit to a class, we also conducted observations, which assisted us in asking questions of and discussions with the participating teachers.

We filmed a lesson taught in an ME class and conducted the interview with the teacher immediately after the lesson. We focused on teacher perspectives on and solutions to daily challenges in class management in their ME PE classes. We tried to let teachers think through the practices and processes of constructing and managing their class.

The researcher (assistant) and teacher watched the video recording together. Teachers were asked to stop the videotape whenever they remembered thoughts, emotions or feelings. The researcher also stopped the videotape at specific moments, such as the start and end of the lesson, at transitions between lesson phases, or when problems related to class management seemed to occur. After each stop, the teachers were asked to describe the situation and their own behaviour and thoughts during these moments (Van Tartwijk et al. 2009).

Most of the teacher conversations were based on practices. VSI helped to focus their attention on their teaching and enabled them to situate their notions on gender and ethnicity in daily practice. This stimulation by watching their own practice often worked as a trigger that led them to expand their stories that also included their practices in other ME classes.

The interviews took about one and a half hour each. Although while watching the video fragment the teachers discussed with the researcher what they did, their descriptions and remarks about their management of ME classes were not required to be confined to the class where the filming took place. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. Interview transcripts were sent to the respondent for consent or correction. All of the participants asked their students for consent for filming. None of the students or parents refused permission.

Data analysis

We closely read and discussed the interview transcripts and then analysed them using constant comparative analysis (Boeije 2005). We started a process of open coding for the first four interviews and subsequently discussed and modified these codes. To organise the data and codes, we used Maxqda qualitative data software. The meaningfulness and consistency of the codes in relation to the focus and research questions were explored

in the following four interviews. This focused coding (Armour and Macdonald 2012), led to a new set of codes, which we explored in three additional interviews. No new codes emerged so that saturation was reached. The codes were then clustered into emerging themes (selective coding) around the key issue of the creation of a positive atmosphere.

Results and discussion

Although each teacher is unique, there were few, if any, differences in the ways that the teachers perceived their students in terms of gender, ethnicity and 'needs'. In addition, revealing gender and ethnicity of a teacher may lead to their identification. We therefore do not distinguish between male or female, immigrant or Dutch teachers. A process of selective coding revealed two major themes that emerged from all interviews and were seen as critical for positive class management in ME PE classes. These themes were: (1) creating a caring relationship with students and (2) constructing 'fair' assessments. In the following sections, we present and discuss these themes and situate them within relevant literature.

Creating a caring relationship with students

The teachers participating in the current study constructed care as inherent and essential to their teaching and to managing ME classes effectively. Flory and McCaughtry (2011, 53) defined such care as global care. This means being concerned about the general well-being, happiness, and physical and emotional safety of students. The teachers worked on developing caring relationships in various ways. Almost all (10) teachers stood in the doorway at the beginning of the lesson to greet and meet with the students. Several (5) teachers used introductory games at the beginning of a school year to invest in this relationship. All teachers emphasised the importance of 'knowing students'. They understood this 'knowing' in various ways.

Most of the teachers' statements about 'knowing students' focused on 'what is going on in their lives?'. Some teachers highlighted knowledge about different cultural backgrounds. Others emphasised the need to stay tuned, or 'just showing interest in them and their lives'. Although the teachers thought that they should know the needs of every student in their class, they highlighted the importance of knowing the immigrant students in their ME classes. They constructed this 'need to know' as a means to explain students' behaviour and to adjust their class management to students' needs. Teacher 1, for instance, explained this knowing or global care as: 'Being sensitive to differences, having knowledge about different cultures but above all, giving the children a sense of self worth, especially "allochtonen". This, I think, is most important.' Teacher 10 argued knowing or caring meant, 'having strict rules and maintaining these rules'. Similarly, Teacher 3 asserted that: 'The students need to know what you want from them.' Together, these explanations suggest that teachers constructed themselves as caretakers of the needs and general well-being of students and especially of non-Western immigrant students.

In addition to the need to 'know' their students, teachers emphasised the need to develop mutual trust in the teacher–student relationship. 'You need to be trustworthy' (Teacher 3). They built this trust in various ways. Teacher 3 for instance claimed that trust was important to let 'children know what you expect from them and know you

are available when they need you'. Teacher 6 used a lot of humour and small talk to build trust. Teacher 4 constructed trust as a special need of 'allochtonen' because 'they have a difficult time already'. Developing caring relations, trust and understanding were therefore constructed as very important values for class management in ME PE classes. These teachers adjusted their practices to these values and constructed ethnicity as an important source of difference that they had to take into account.

Teachers 1, 2, 3, 4 and 11 adjusted their practices of class management to their assumptions about the cultural or ethnic background of their students. Teacher 3 described this as follows:

> T3: These (immigrant) children don't have a home situation. Or well, they do have a home situation but not the same as many other children.
> I: What do you think is the difference?
> T3 : Well, some hang out on the streets all the time, because their parents aren't at home. They have little money, but nothing to eat … this [hanging out] creates cultural pressure as well: the older ones have to take care of the youngsters … . So, they have that pressure. It is totally different from how I grew up.

Implicitly this teacher compared perceived differences between immigrant home situations with his/her own background to create a preferred norm. Teacher 5 also spoke about the disadvantaged home situations of students, but did not connect this explicitly to ethnic background.

While these teachers agreed that understanding or at least knowing the background of their students was important to build a positive teacher–student relationship, other teachers tried to ignore the background of their students when it concerned PE. Teacher 6, 9 and 10 were very explicit about the need to keep home and cultural or religious habits separate from and out of PE. They emphasised what they called 'appropriate language, rules and clothes' as a desirable norm for both minority boys and girls in PE and constructed it in ways that Flory and McCaughtry (2011, 53) call a discipline-specific form of care and the actual content reflects what Weiner (2015) defines as Dutchness. Teacher 6 summarised this by stating that 'The rules of PE count in PE regardless of other rules, habits or manners at home.' The only background that mattered to Teacher 7 was the sport experience children brought into the PE class.

This discipline form of care with a strong emphasis on appropriateness in use of language, clothes and habits seems to suggest a hidden norm in which Dutchness is positioned as normative and superior. As we show further on, both boys and girls were subjected to this disciplinary process but sometimes in different ways. Teacher 6 described a practice of discipline care as follows:

> If a student comes to me … . girls, especially 'allochtone' girls – they try to get you involved by playing on your emotions by making up beautiful stories. Then they say: 'this and that, I don't have to … ', 'I'm not allowed to … '. You mustn't fall for that. In a nice and firm manner you just say: 'Well, listen, these are the rules and if you have a problem with that, bring a note from your parents.' And it's the same with the boys: you have to be firm and consistent in enforcing rules. Yeh, clarify the rules and actually follow the rules. And no discussion, never discussion …

Caring relationships seemed to be very powerful constructs of class management that provided these teachers with strong tools to force assimilation into PE and Dutchness (see also McCuaig, Öhman, and Wright 2013).

The results reflect similar understandings American and Israeli teachers have about caring in ME classes (Ben-Peretz, Eilam, and Yankelevitch 2006; Gay and Kirkland 2003). These studies also found that teachers, who wished to create a caring culture in their ME classes, felt that they had to work hard to understand and know their students. Flory and McCaughtry (2011) found that similar to our results, PE teachers in urban classes prioritised 'care'. They wanted students not only to do well in PE but also to enjoy learning and coming to school. This care, as expressed by the teachers in our study, seemed to be centred primarily on non-Western students.

The teachers in the current study also extended global care to facilitating social integration. Teachers 2 and 3 thought that this integration was easier when students had role models. Teacher 2 explained that:

> … these types of children need role models more so that others do. They need a frame of reference for how to act and behave. When some of the older students come and demonstrate or participate in a PE class, they give these kids a specific frame or they model ways to behave. Such a role model gives the kids ideas about possibilities; that is the idea: these students have to see possibilities. … I tell them: 'See that? If he can do that, so can you!!!'

Teachers 2 and 6 were adamant that students should be challenged to learn responsibility and respect for themselves and each other, not only in PE but in all subjects and in the whole school. They saw it as a necessity for establishing a culture of care in their classes.

The teachers involved in our study talked a lot about 'they'. The teachers linked ethnicity to gender and repeatedly referred to a specific group of non-Western boys and described them with words as: 'these boys', 'these rambunctious boys' and as 'tough guys' who engaged in 'provocative macho behaviour'. They described the boys as 'fearless youth who needed to be challenged and to achieve' and who 'needed a lot of attention'. Teacher 5 explained:

> Well, you know these tough macho guys want to be the funniest, the best. They are the ones who are in charge, and it is never their fault if they lose. This does not mean that other kids don't behave like that, of course some of them do that too, but in the past years this group has really caught my eye.

The teachers seemed to draw on dominant Dutch discourses about gendered ethnicity that frames those from Morocco and Turkey as 'other' to construct the identity of a small group of minority boys (Essed and Trienekens 2008). Often, the teachers ascribed observed differences to 'their' culture when referring to the boys. In doing so, they implicitly constructed the cultural background of some boys as deficient as well, and seemed to reinforce the political–social climate that we described at the beginning of this paper. This is a climate in which those boys are categorised as non-Western immigrants. They are assumed to need to learn what counts in Dutch culture: being on time, wearing the right clothes, listening and showing respect for authority (Weiner 2015). Teacher 8 summarised: 'I know they are raised differently, but I think they have to learn about and adjust to Dutch culture.' This assumption implicitly produced a dominant norm of what was seen as Dutch and what teachers should do to teach these boys to be compliant with Dutchness. Teachers seem to prioritise ethnicity above gender, although both categories intersected with each other.

The participating teachers worked on the assimilation of their students not only through overt class management but also through the use of a hidden curriculum

consisting of unwritten social rules (see Verscheure and Amade-Escot 2007). The teachers in the current study implicitly drew on ethnic discourses of deficit to emphasise and prioritise assimilation when they taught 'more than PE' in ME classes.

References to dominant norms and values seemed to be used more explicitly to manage boys' behaviours than that of girls. Teacher 9 noticed that some boys needed more support to be able to 'play fair'. Teacher 5 claimed that these boys needed more attention because: ' … these boys are not able to work as independently as the girls are. I just trust them [the boys] slightly less; they joke a lot and they fool around more'. In general, however, both Dutch and immigrant girls tended to be constructed as followers, in need of more time and less able. Teacher 7 asserts that: 'I think it's fine for the boys to do and learn the somersault as a whole. But [when working with] girls: you have to break the skill down into more steps or smaller learning parts and guide them.' Such comments or insights about girls were rare, however.

Girls seemed to be invisible to their teacher. Some of the teachers attributed this invisibility to the girls themselves. As Teacher 7 said: 'Boys want to show what they can do and girls want to hide their failures'. A teacher who used small talks to build a relationship with girls, asserted that immigrant girls were 'not willing to chat with a male teacher'. He realised that it was easy to forget or ignore girls:

> Yeh, they [immigrant girls] are easy to ignore. If a man wants to talk with them they behave like dead birds when sitting next to him in the gym. They don't want to engage in a conversation with men. It is easy to forget them but that is wrong.

This lack of attention meant that immigrant girls did not always acquire the necessary skills. They were constructed as 'less sporty' by almost all of the teachers. During an observation, we saw this explicitly being managed in the PE class. A group of girls was divided into two groups: able or less able to jump into a somersault. Implicitly, all immigrant girls were assigned to the less able group. Teacher 5 realised this while we watched the video. The teacher was shocked at the implicit use of stereotypes and said:

> My assumption seems to be that if you wear a headscarf then you cannot be good at sports. But that is crazy. We have many, many kids here who are Muslim or have a different history and who are good at sport.

Teacher 5 was not the only one who constructed immigrant girls as less able in PE, however. Others described immigrant girls with words like 'possessing little ability' 'needing more sequential steps to learn a skill', or sometimes 'not excited about performing' or 'lacking motivation'. Teacher 2 hypothesised: 'they [immigrant girls] feel many eyes on them and that negatively affects their performance'. This construction of less able immigrant girls is another example of how ethnicity and gender intersected and reinforced an 'in need of' care practice.

Male teachers perceived trouble with some immigrant girls when manual guidance was needed for instruction, because 'girls cannot be touched'. When asked why touch is problematic, a male teacher explained, '[men] coming too close [to a girl] is culturally unacceptable'. The female teachers recognised touch in PE as a possible problem that male teachers could have but advised them 'not to make a big issue about it' and 'try to talk about it with the girl'.

In summary, these teachers said that they tried to establish a caring relationship with their students as a way of managing their classes. However, the priority these teachers gave to global and discipline-specific care for non-Western immigrant boys seemed to be at the expense of attention paid to other, non-rambunctious students in the class. By describing certain boys as rambunctious or noisy, the teachers implicitly suggested that the norm for behaviour for Dutch boys and girls is being relatively quiet and compliant. We return to this notion of the implicit Dutch norm further on.

Constructing 'fair' assessments

Whereas the teachers engaged primarily in global care when talking about relating to their students, they also invoked discipline-specific care that emphasises mastery of content when talking about assessment (Flory and McCaughtry 2011). They framed this mastery in terms of improvement and effort. The teachers had to deal with three issues related to performance or ability assessment: demands of the school system, educational needs of students and their own beliefs about how to deal with differences among students in grading. The school system requires teachers to report a measure of ability. In the Netherlands, most school subjects are graded on the basis of ability with the use of numbers ranging from 1 to 10 (Overheid.nl 2014). Many Dutch PE teachers, however, use process- or participation-focused assessments to assign grades in PE and hesitate to transform their written data, into numbers for a report card (Brouwer 2008). In part, this hesitation may be due to the ambiguity inherent in the objective of Dutch PE that all students must become competent in movement and sport skills to enable them to lead active, healthy lifestyles (Stegeman 2012). This ambiguity tends to create dilemmas in the assessment of grades in PE (Brouwer 2008). Although the National Institute for Curriculum Development (SLO) does supply curricular frameworks for PE, it does not provide formal guidelines or restrictions for assessments. The meanings of 'competence' and 'active, healthy lives' are not operationalised. This means that every teacher or school can measure competence or ability in their own way.

This vagueness is not unique to the Netherlands, but part of a global issue in PE (e.g. McCaughtry, Tischler, and Flory 2008; Redelius, Fagrell, and Larsson 2009). In the current study, almost every teacher recalled discussions on assessments and grades with competitive immigrant boys. They reported that discussions with 'these boys' often centred on their wish to be assessed on ability instead of effort. These teachers, however, did not want to assess ability or competence but effort and improvement. Teacher 5 explicitly explained how assessments were connected to his/her teaching philosophy of equal opportunities for every student. Every teacher agreed with the notion that not every student is able to participate equally at the same level in PE (see also Redelius, Fagrell, and Larsson 2009; Van Amsterdam et al. 2012). Research has shown that, globally, PE teachers believe that physical talent or ability is a given and a given cannot easily be fairly assessed (see also Hay and Macdonald 2008; McCuaig, Öhman, and Wright 2013; Van Amsterdam et al. 2012). Baghurst (2014) has argued that this manner of grading based on improvement or effort is unfair to students who demonstrate a high level of skill and do not need much effort to do so.

Teachers 2, 5 and 7 acknowledged that some of the immigrant students, especially 'these boys' were ability oriented and that this orientation was incongruent with the

teachers' views on class management. They recounted how 'these boys' often wanted to know how to obtain higher grades and where they stood relative to their peers. The teachers attributed this desire for a visible formal ranking to 'their culture'. Teacher 2 explained:

> It's a strong internal drive these 'allochtonen' (non-Western immigrant) boys have, you know? It's about … well, in daily life they often say: 'What's in it for me?' And in PE they ask: 'How do I get the 10 [highest grade possible]? What grade does this jump give me??'

Some of the teachers thought the 'macho' immigrant boys wanted high grades to enhance their image and status in PE class (see also Poorthuis et al. 2015). Teacher 7 gave the following explanation:

> It's about ranking in the class of course, but also for the family. Or for example a junior student who is able to say to a well-known senior student: 'Do you know how high my grade was?' Yes, that is absolutely very important for them.

Teacher 4 situated this wish for grading on ability in relationship to other school subjects:

> It is easy for them to score a good grade in PE. If you try hard enough you will always get a high score; that is easier than learning mathematics or Dutch for instance. And if you see the progress students can make – yeh, it is a real kick for me to give high grades then.

Not only the demands of the rambunctious immigrant boys seemed to inform the grading discussion but also constructions of the participation of immigrant girls. Several teachers described how assessment and the behaviour of some immigrant girls became a stimulus for them to reflect on the relationship between the grades they assigned and their expectations for these students. The following conversation with Teacher 5 illustrates this idea:

> I: So you think the lower self expectations of these [Hindu] girls play a role [in the grade you assign]?
> T5: Yes and so do my expectations. Cause if you think: 'Well, she's probably not so good at it' you might underestimate her as well, and as a result she performs less well.

This quote and the foregoing suggest that some teachers were aware that the ways they grade and what is defined as success were related to their own expectations, teaching philosophies and the gendered cultural identities they constructed of students (see also Azzarito and Solmon 2005). The teachers seemed to think that if they were to acquiesce to the grade-demanding boys, the boys might want to use their high grades to emphasise their superiority to students with lower grades. Teacher 5 explained:

> In fact, I do hope that every student improves, but I also think: 'Please, don't let being the best be too important to you'. Of course it's nice for these boys and girls to know they are very good in sports. Maybe these boys do jump a little higher but the others jump well too and work hard for a good grade as well.

Again teachers constructed need and care as important issues in their ME class management and implicitly positioned themselves and PE as a place for caring for and about students. In their assessments, their care seemed aimed at protecting the less able students and transforming the demanding attitude of 'these' boys into acceptance. This reflected not only discipline-specific care but also global care, as teachers were concerned about those who may have little ability but exert a great deal of effort. Possibly, this grading

in the Netherlands also reflects a construction of Dutchness that implicitly suggests that talents should not be flaunted publicly and that there is no place for those who stand out (De Boer, Minnaert, and Kamphof 2013). A dominant Dutch discourse posits that an individual should not visibly strive for better grades since that may be demeaning to others who are less gifted (Van Amsterdam et al. 2012).

The teachers seemed to situate their grading discussions with the group of immigrant boys as inherent to 'their' way of being, by saying 'That's just the way these boys are … '. They did not reflect on how their assessment philosophy might be a reflection of their own ethnicity and might be used as a way to discipline their students into Dutchness. Their explanations reveal the complexity of PE as a site where gender and ethnicity (as well as other social relations) intersect and are continually (re) constructed.

Conclusion and discussion

Global meanings about teaching in ME classes vary across different contexts. Our results must be seen in the light of PE classes that take place in Dutch schools and society. As we indicated, the Dutch discussion about ME classes and ethnic backgrounds of students are often situated in deficit and difference discourses and unidirectional assimilation policies (Essed and Nimako 2006; Essed and Trienekens 2008; Leeman and Wardekker 2013; Vedder 2006). The PE teachers complied with these discourses by constructing contextual forms of care in their class management.

Although the ethnic background of students in ME classes may vary, teachers, regardless of country studied, seem to assume that the development of positive teacher–student relationships facilitates and enhances student learning (e.g. Azzarito and Solmon 2005; McCaughtry, Tischler, and Flory 2008; Tsangaridou 2002). Den Brok and Levy (2005) argue that this positive relationship is more important for immigrant or 'allochtoon' students than for non-immigrant students. The participating teachers seemed to agree with this. The results suggest that they are influenced by dominant political and societal rhetoric about the need for non-Western immigrants to assimilate into Dutch society (Van Huis 2014). It is not surprising then that the teachers in our study focused their care on what they saw as a homogenous group of non-Western immigrant boys and used Dutch norms about order and justice to teach or discipline the boys into compliance. Weiner (2015) connected these norms to a national identity constructed in discourses about Dutchness. As we discussed earlier, these racialised discourses are deployed through a hidden curriculum that reflects white Dutch values such as hard work, punctuality, order, humility, cleanliness and Christian Dutch cultural supremacy. 'Teaching' becomes synonymous with an assimilation process into Dutchness, which may be similar to what Carrington and Skelton (2003) described as occurring when teaching is equated with whiteness. This Dutchness is positioned as normative and superior, while non-Western immigrants are racialised to an inferior position.

Our research also showed how this push towards compliance into Dutchness was embedded in/intersected with a gender discourse. In their efforts to socialise 'macho' boys into Dutch society, teachers used specific forms of care that endorsed practices of masculinity enacted by 'these boys' (Van Huis 2014). These practices of masculinities, often described as hegemonic, are also embedded in many discourses around 'sporty boys' that are often constructed as the desirable norm in global PE (Connell 2008;

Drummond 2003; Fagrell, Larsson, and Redelius 2012). How teachers position themselves with respect to objectives of PE seems to be therefore strongly related to what they consider to be a gendered able body and an appropriate bodily performance (Redelius, Fagrell, and Larsson 2009; Van Amsterdam et al. 2012). This norm combined with a norm of Dutchness suggests that the implicit norm in ME PE classes is embodied by the sporty Dutch boy.

This norm reflects an intersectionality of ethnicity and gender, which resulted in practices of privileging and empowering care for the so-called 'macho' non-Western sporty boys. Yet, this emphasis on care in their class management also served to mask the lack of attention to differently embodied experiences of other boys and all the girls (McCuaig, Öhman, and Wright 2013; Mirza 2009). The emphasis on gendered 'ethnic deficit' in teaching may mean that questions about the importance of normalisation or assimilation are only superficially addressed (Van den Brink 2009).

The results showed that most of the efforts and energy of teachers in their class management focused on a group of non-Western immigrant boys who were described as rambunctious as they dominated the class with their energy, noise and skill. The teachers worked hard to develop a personal relationship with this group. Although these rambunctious boys may be excluded, negatively stigmatised or marginalised in other subjects, in PE, they were included and privileged. The curriculum, with the exception of assessment, was largely shaped to meet their needs and skills. The teachers had high expectations for this group of immigrant boys, wanted them to be successful, and to have a positive self-image (see also Niyozov and Pluim 2009). In contrast to teachers of other subjects (e.g. Leeman and Saharso 2013; Thijs, Westhof, and Koomen 2012; Williams and Bedward 2001), the PE teachers in our study appreciated 'these boys' for their work ethic, focused their teaching on them, and had high expectations for and about them. They constructed PE as a more appreciative setting for these boys because it was congruent with their supposed need to be active and to engage in bodily performance and in opposition to their perceived abilities in other subjects.

Yet, this construction seems to carry a bias in it as well. Paechter (2012), who called it a 'big man bias', argued that this big man bias also constructs 'otherness' and leaves less space for students to engage in their own ways of doing 'boy' or 'girl'. When we looked more carefully at our results, we realised that we were initially caught by this bias as well and failed to notice the lack of discursive attention paid to other (immigrant or Dutch) boys and girls.

By characterising 'these boys' as sporty and noisy, the teachers seemed to suggest that quieter students or those who acquiesced to the demands of the teachers were the implicit norm. Their construction of 'these boys' determined much of the curriculum and assessments. As we explained in the results, the teachers rarely referred to girls in their descriptions of class management except when we explicitly asked about them. Here too, however, they often referred to non-Western immigrant girls as being different, and thereby implicitly suggesting that Dutch girls were the invisible norm. Similar to research that has explored what a teaching focus on sporty boys means for non-sporty boys and girls, more research is needed that focuses on the implication of teachers teaching to boys who comprise only about a quarter of the students. To what extent do other students feel marginalised, included or excluded in PE classes? This marginalisation and exclusion may not always be easy to detect.

The combination of the use of videos and semi-structured interviews seemed to serve as an intervention for the teachers, as it enabled them to reflect on their assumptions and class management. The interview process enabled some of them to see that they held low expectations for some of the students such as the Hindu girls and those wearing headscarves. For many of the teachers involved in the current study, the project may have constituted their first reflection on their class management in ME classes. We suggest that schools and PETE programmes need to stimulate such critical reflections and enable teachers to frequently rethink their practice, and personal frameworks and assumptions.

Teachers and scholars who study them are often part of the same societal context. We recognise our own Dutch ethnic background as researchers. By using a re-iterative cycle of reflection, self-reflection and critical scholarship, we tried to be alert to our own position in interpreting the data. Initially, we overlooked the meanings involved in the phrase 'these boys' and tended to foreground gender. A continual reflection on the data and on our assumptions made a hidden meaning of this phrase visible. Obviously, not only teachers but also researchers need to continuously reflect on assumptions that underlie their frameworks.

Notes

1. The Dutch concept of *allochtoon* (or in plural *allochtonen*) literally means coming from other soil/another country. Only non-Western immigrants are labelled as such.
2. The following criterion is stated for interpersonal competency: 'contributes to integration and collaboration between students with different cultural background or sexual orientation' (Aloco 2013: 38).
3. Since a gymnasium is usually not considered to be a classroom, we use the phrase class management.
4. The number of female teachers participating in the study reflects the percentage (33%) of women teaching PE in the Netherlands, while the number of participating immigrant teachers (37% of our sample) exceeded the national percentage (5%) (Stamos 2015; Van den Berg, Van Dijk, and Grootscholte 2011).
5. Location is not a determinant of the socio-economic status of the students attending a school, however. Parents can choose to send their children to any school in the country.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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