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Why research matters: Current status and future trends in physical education pedagogy

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to consider current and future trends in physical education research in Europe. My starting point is a statement of the vital importance and relevance of research in physical education and why research matters. In preparing for this task, I reviewed current and future trends within European-authored research published in four English-language journals in the decade between 2000 and 2009 in order to provide a context and a perspective. I begin the paper with a report on the proportion of European-authored papers that were published in these journals, the country of origin of the papers’ authors, and the topics of the papers. Next, I identify some trends in this analysis of these journal publications, in particular comparing journals and the two halves of the decade. Finally, this context frames a wider-ranging analysis of research in physical education; I ask five questions which lead us into a discussion of critical issues for the future of research in our field. Through each of these questions and the issues that arise, I seek to show why research is important, and why it needs to matter more, to more people.

Keywords: Periodicals as topic. Research. Review Literature as Topic. Physical education.

1 INTRODUCTION

Writing on citation analysis in the journal Physics World in 2007, Lokman Meho (2007) suggested that 90% of articles published in academic journals are never cited. Worse than this, he estimated that up to 50% of papers are read only by the editor and reviewers of the journal in which they are published. These claims, if they are true, are rather sobering to say the least. At the same time, if 50% of all published academic research is read only by the journal editorial
team, that leaves another 50% of the tens of thousands of papers published every year that are read by other researchers. And of course Meho is describing the general situation for all types of academic research; the actual percentages of papers cited and read will vary enormously across fields and between journals.

Rather than concluding from Meho’s widely quoted summary that most published research is superfluous, I want to suggest that a vast quantity of academic research is published and read every year and that, moreover, this research matters. While it may not be possible to measure the social, educational or economic impact of much published research directly or immediately, this research nevertheless shapes our thinking and stimulates the production of ideas. For this reason, I take seriously my role as the Editor of the journal Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy. I am very aware that editors and reviewers are the gatekeepers of the knowledge economy. We are charged with the responsibility of judging which ideas will be released into the public domain to shape the future, and which will not.

In counter-point to one interpretation of Meho’s claims, then, I am suggesting that the publication of academic research does matter, very much. I am also going to argue today, however, that perhaps it doesn’t matter enough in our field of physical education. You might expect me as a journal editor and published researcher to say this, and for other journal editors and published researchers to nod in enthusiastic agreement. But my ambition for research in physical education stretches beyond the research community, to include children and their parents, educational practitioners, policy-makers, politicians and, indeed, the general public. I am going to argue that research in our field is of great importance, but that it does not matter enough perhaps even to some researchers, and that we must work harder to make it matter more, to more people.

In order to argue with conviction that physical education research is important, we need to understand what that research is, what it consists of, its form and substance. We also need to understand current trends in research and what these trends suggest about future developments. So it is from this starting point, of a
statement of the vital importance and relevance of research in physical education that I approach my topic, current and future trends in physical education research in Europe. It seems to me entirely appropriate at this particular moment in history to reflect on physical education research from a European perspective, now that borders are more open than they have ever been and countries in or adjacent to the European land-mass are ever more interdependent economically, militarily and culturally.

In approaching my task, I decided to investigate current and future trends within European-authored research published in four English-language journals in the decade between 2000 and 2009 in order to provide a context and a perspective. First of all, I report the proportion of European-authored papers that were published in these journals, the country of origin of the papers’ authors, and the topics of the papers. Next, I identify some trends in this analysis of these journal publications, in particular comparing journals and the two halves of the decade. Finally, this context frames a wider-ranging analysis of research in physical education; I ask five questions which I believe lead us into a discussion of critical issues for the future of research in our field. Through each of these questions and the issues that arise, I will be seeking to show why research is important, and why it needs to matter more, to more people.

Before I begin this analysis, I need to provide a brief explanation of how I approached the review of the journals.

2 AN EXPLANATORY NOTE ON THE REVIEW OF JOURNALS

I selected for the purposes of this paper four English-language journals, three based in Europe and one in the USA. The European-based journals are the European Physical Education Review (EPER), Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy (PESP) and its predecessor the European Journal of Physical Education (EJPE), and Sport, Education and Society (SE&S). These three are, in my view, the main peer reviewed journals for reporting scholarly research in physical education, though in two of the three cases (EPER and
SE&S) they do not limit themselves solely to pedagogy research as I will define it. I include in my analysis only those papers I judged to be focused primarily on pedagogical matters in school physical education and related activities such as sport in community-settings. I also included the North American based Journal of Teaching in Physical Education (JTPE) to provide a comparative perspective in relation to the topics of research and also to judge the extent to which European-based authors publish in journals outside Europe.

I chose English-language journals since it is these I am most familiar with (indeed, I edit PESP), and also because my foreign language competence is limited to reading French only (and a little Spanish). As I will discuss later, I think it would be interesting to extend the analysis to a study of non-European English-language research and also physical education research in languages other than English.

I am working in this paper as I have on previous occasions (eg. KIRK; MACDONALD; O’SULLIVAN, 2006) with a definition of pedagogy that includes the interacting and interdependent components of curriculum/knowledge; learners and learning; teachers, teaching and teacher education, and their embedding and enactment in particular milieux. I have used these components to select papers from the four journals in the first place, and then to identify their main pedagogical topic category, that is, whether they focus solely on one of the components, or whether they investigate the relations between components. I mainly used abstracts to determine topic category, though in some cases I also read parts of papers, particularly if a paper was unfamiliar to me.

In terms of time period, I focused on the past decade 2000 to 2009, though in the case of EPER only one issue of the annual three had at the time of writing been published for 2009, and so for that journal I included the 1999 volume to provide a complete decade. I also compared papers published in the first five years (1999/2000 – 2004) and second five years (2005-2009). Papers published in the earlier period are more likely to have impacted on perspectives on research since they have been available for longer for citation. Papers
in the second half of the decade are less likely to be cited, but perhaps signal the trend over the next five to 10 years. Comparison of the two halves of the decade also provides a more fine-grained analysis and the identification of trends.

Country of origin of publications was determined by the first authors’ institutional affiliation, with only a few exceptions (eg. SINELNIKOV; HASTIE, 2008, where the first author was based in the USA but the study was carried out in a European country). I also took a broad and liberal definition of ‘Europe’, to include not only countries that form the EU but also those that are either on or adjacent to the European land-mass or have some other European association culturally or historically.

I took as much care as time allowed me to count and categorise papers, and I am confident that the general trends I am describing here are accurate and well-grounded. I should say, however, that the analysis was undertaken specifically to provide a context for this presentation and that, because the review of journals was carried out with some haste, there will not doubt be some errors of calculation, categorisation and indeed of omission. I apologise for these errors in advance and will be happy to make adjustments on your advice.

3 PROVIDING A CONTEXT: EUROPEAN-AUTHORED ENGLISH LANGUAGE PUBLICATIONS IN FOUR JOURNALS DURING THE DECADE 2000-2009

Table 1\textsuperscript{1} shows the number and percentage of European-authored pedagogy papers published in the four journals during the period under study. As might be expected and consistent with its title, EPER has the highest percentage of European-authored papers at 83%, while again not unexpectedly, USA-based JTPE has the lowest with 15%. Just under two-thirds of the EJPE/PESP papers were European-authored at 62%, while just less than 50% was recorded for SE&S.

\footnote{1 All tables are located at the end of the article.}
When we consider the more detailed data for each journal and each of the two five year periods, however, we see some interesting trends. In Table 2, EPER shows a slight reduction in European-authored papers, falling from 87% to 79%, and an actual drop in the number of papers, from 67 to 56. Table 3 shows that the most dramatic shift is for EJPE/PESP, consistent with the journal’s change of title and focus. In the first five year period, when the journal had a specific European remit for four of those years, 87% of papers were European-authored. During the second period, European-authored papers dropped to 50%. Table 4 and Table 5 show that between the two periods SE&S and JTPE increased slightly the percentage of European-authored papers. In the case of SE&S, however, as we can see in Table 4, the percentage increase masks a substantial rise in the number of European-authored papers, from 24 during the first five years to 44 in the second; this may be explained partly though probably not entirely by an increase in the number of issues to four per volume in the second five year period. Similarly, and notwithstanding the change in the proportion of European-authored papers published in PESP, Table 3 shows the actual number of papers increased from 40 in the 2000-2004 period to 49 in the 2005-2009 period, though PESP also increased its issues from two in 2004 to four by 2008. As we might also have anticipated, European-authored papers are only a small percentage of the pedagogical output of JTPE, and this has remained stable across the decade.

Table 6 reports on the countries of origin of European-authored papers for the four journals, showing the top 10 countries in terms of total numbers of pedagogy papers, and also the numbers of papers published in each journal in each of the two five year periods, with the total for each journal in bold. We can see that England is by far the most frequent source of European-authored papers in each of the four journals, with a total of 156 papers, substantially ahead of second-ranked France with 22. Of the top 10 countries, English is the mother tongue in three (England, Scotland and Ireland). Spain ranks seventh with 11 papers overall, and is represented in each of the journals. A further 14 countries are represented, with overall totals of less than 10 papers. Only one of these (Wales) has English
as its mother tongue. Most of the countries recording only one or two publications have emerged in the 2005 to 2009 period.

Tables 7 to 11 show the numbers of European-authored papers for each of the four journals in relation to the main pedagogical topic, either with a primary focus on curriculum/knowledge, teachers, teaching and teacher education, or learners and learning, or on the relationships between at least two of these components, or on another topic such as gender, ethnicity or research.

Table 7 summarises the overall numbers of paper for each topic by each journal. EPER published the most curriculum, teaching, and learning papers during the decade under study, while EJPE/PESP published the highest number of relational papers, and SE&S the highest number of papers categorised as ‘other’. Learners and learning was the most-published topic of European authors with 112 papers, while there were 80 papers on teaching, 62 on relational aspects of pedagogy and 39 on curriculum. Given its explicit sociological discipline base, it is not unsurprising to see that SE&S accounted for half of the 22 papers categorised as ‘other’, where sociological topics were a more prominent focus than specifically pedagogical topics.

Tables 8 to 11 report on the numbers of papers published on each topic by each journal in each of the two five year periods. Again this analysis reveals some interesting trends. Table 8 shows a substantial decrease in the number of curriculum papers published in EPER between the first and second periods, but similar numbers of papers on the other topics. In contrast, EJPE/PESP in Table 9 shows some marked shifts in three of the five categories, with a substantial increase in papers on teaching (8 to 17) and on relational aspects (9 to 15), and a decrease in papers on learners and learning (15 to 9), which is against the trend in SE&S (in Table 10) and JTPE (in Table 11), which show increases, and EPER which registered a similar number of papers. Table 10 shows that in SE&S numbers of European-authored papers in three of the five categories (teaching, learning, and relational aspects) have more than doubled, while those categorised as ‘other’ have decreased from 8 to 3, perhaps signalling a more explicit focus on pedagogy by this journal. Table 11 shows
that the only notable shift for JTPE is in more than double the number of papers on learners and learning. Both EJPE/ PESP and SE&S show considerable increases in the numbers of relational papers published, rising from 9 to 15 and 4 to 13 respectively.

4 IDENTIFYING TRENDS TOWARDS THE FUTURE IN CURRENT RESEARCH

What trends in physical education and sport pedagogy research can we discern in these data? First, there has been an overall increase in the numbers of European-authored papers appearing in the four journals over the decade under study, from 146 for the 2000-2004 period to 169 for the 2005-2009 period, though a fall in the proportion of European-authored papers, from 52% to 44%. The overall increase in output from around 282 to 383 papers is good news for the field, though it does suggest that non-European countries – in particular the USA, Australia, New Zealand and Canada - have increased their productivity. At the same time, researchers working in countries where English is not the mother tongue have published increasingly in these journals; if we exclude England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland, the numbers of European-authored papers published in the second half of the decade has almost doubled, increasing from 48 to 80.

Second, while this increase is encouraging, we must nevertheless acknowledge that the European-authored work is dominated by researchers based in institutions in England. As I already commented, this is perhaps unsurprising, given that three of the journals are published and edited in England, that the journals’ networks of reviewers are also likely to be based predominately in England, and that two journals (EPER and PESP) are the official publications of professional associations in England. At the same time, in 2009 the editorial boards of each journal based in England had strong representation from countries where English is not the mother tongue, such as Spain, Sweden and Portugal in the case of SE&S, France, Belgium, Spain, Sweden and Norway in the case of PESP, and Poland, Germany, Austria, Sweden, Belgium, Norway, France, Portugal, Denmark and the Netherlands for EPER. In contrast, in 2009 JTPE listed two board members from the same institution in England, one
from Ireland and one from Cyprus, with the remaining 26 members based in the USA.

Third, the data show between the first and second halves of the decade what appears to be a decline in the publication of research where curriculum is the main focus (from 25 to 16 papers), and an increase in research on teachers, teaching and teacher education (31 to 49 papers), learners and learning (53 to 59 papers) and relational aspects of pedagogy (from 24 to 38 papers). It would be interesting to investigate whether these trends in European-authored work are also reflected in European-authored work published in languages other than English and also in non-European English language research. What we can say on the basis of these data is that JTPE is not a place to look for European-authored curriculum research, and that the curriculum research appearing in EPER has reduced dramatically (from 14 to five papers) between the two periods. At the same time, it may be that the increase in relational research has involved a re-direction of curriculum researchers’ interests, since in some forms of relational study such as didactique in the Francophone world, knowledge features prominently. And while research that takes learners and learning as its main focus has produced the largest number of papers for the decade at 112, the largest increases in the second half of the decade are to be found in research on teachers, teaching and teacher education and on relational aspects of pedagogy.

5 SOME CRITICAL ISSUES FOR THE FUTURE OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SPORT PEDAGOGY RESEARCH

In order to understand the significance of these trends, I suggest we need to look behind the numbers and to consider in some more substantive detail the nature of the European-authored research that has been published in these journals and elsewhere. I want to pose five questions for the future of research in physical education and sport pedagogy that have been suggested to me by my review of journal publications, including the silences and absences in these data. My questions are as follows:
As the field of study matures, is there a theoretical consensus emerging in terms of the proper object of study of physical education?

· Is there any evidence of the emergence of a distinctive European approach to research?

· To what extent does research in physical education and sport pedagogy provide evidence that informs policy and practice?

· Does this research recognise and attempt to theorise the crucial interdependent relationships between PETE and school physical education?

· To what extent does research look beyond the school to consider the ‘bigger picture’ of physical culture?

Responding to these questions, I want to raise some critical issues for physical education research and to continue to reflect on my claim that this research matters. I will consider each question in turn.

As the field of study matures, is there a theoretical consensus emerging in terms of the proper object of study of physical education?

We should be in no doubt that the field of research in physical education has experienced substantial growth in the past two decades, which may seem a curious counterpoint to claims that school physical education has been in decline and that the sub-disciplines of sport and exercise sciences dominate the field in universities. I cite as evidence, from the English-language literature, the longevity of JTPE (now in its 28th volume), and the emergence of EPER, PESP and SE&S as genuine alternative outlets to JTPE for the publication of high quality educational research. The Sage Handbook of Physical Education published in 2006 (Kirk it, 2006) represents, in my opinion, a substantial landmark for the field, showing in 45 chapters the state of the art and the strength and depth of research in curriculum, teaching, and learning and related pedagogical topics. The chapter authors included scholars from Spain, France, Cyprus, both
Francophone and Flemish Belgium, and the UK, as well as researchers from other parts of the world. Increasing numbers of conferences such as this here today, and other annual and biennial events run by organisations such as AIESEP, ARIS and BERA are regularly attended by researchers from a wide number of countries. All of these data point to the fact that the numbers of active researchers in the field is increasing, and many more have doctoral qualifications now than when I graduated with a PhD just under 25 years ago. So my view is that the pedagogy field is thriving and that a good proportion of the growth has been contributed by European-based researchers.

Taking a longer view, beyond the last decade and back to the emergence of a distinctive program of pedagogy research in physical education in the late 1960s, I think we can argue that as the field has expanded, so too has the object of research. The earliest focus of empirical research, which was mainly on teachers, teaching and teacher education, has endured and indeed may have experienced something of a revival in the second half of the past decade. Research methods have also developed, with increasing amounts of qualitative research complimenting the quantitative methods originating in the descriptive and process-product studies of the 1970s and 1980s. More recent topics of study of European-authored papers on teachers, teaching and teacher education include teacher learning (KEAY, 2007), teacher reflection (LEIJIN, 2008), teacher beliefs (TSANGARIDOU, 2008), professional learning within the context of continuing professional development (ARMOUR, 2007) and the history of PETE (COLLINET, 2007).

Within this broader timeframe, as we have seen from our data here in terms of the volume of outputs, the concern for teachers and teaching has been overtaken to some extent by an interest in learners and learning. In my view, it is in relation to this topic, in particular, that some of the most exciting theoretical developments have taken place, including approaches to learner cognition (SOLMON, 2006), and the various constructivist (ROVEGNO; DOLLY, 2006) and situated perspectives (ROVEGNO, 2006) on learning. While pupil conceptions (MACPHAIL it., 2004), perceptions (KINCHIN it.,
2009) and views (SMITH; PARR, 2007) have been recent topics of studies, there has been a discernable trend towards an interest in pupil motivation (eg. MANDIGO it., 2008; WARBURTON; SPRAY, 2008), particularly from the point of view of self-determination theory (eg. BRYAN; SOLMON, 2007; DUPONT it., 2009). This interest in self-determination theory has also been applied to teachers’ motivations (CARSON; CHASE, 2009). I think motivation is an important topic. At the same time, more and more, motivation does seem to be considered to be the primary outcome of learning in physical education (eg. NTOUMANIS; STANDAGE, 2009) rather than only one of several cognitive factors mediating learning in physical education (SOLMON, 2006).

While there is a range of theoretical and methodological approaches to research on teaching and learning, I think nevertheless (and notwithstanding the apparent demise in curriculum research, which I will return to) that we have witnessed during the past decade a consolidation of the proper object of educational research in physical education, which in English language terms is pedagogy. For me, the growth in publications that focus on the relations between two or more components of pedagogy is confirmation of this consolidation, and is also the most exciting development in our field. Relational research has taken a number of forms, and deals with a range of topics. For example, Cardon it. (2009) investigated how school-based self-management lessons to promote physical activity – a curriculum/knowledge aspect – were perceived by students, their parents, and teachers. Another Belgian paper by Seghers et al (2009) considered the relationships between curriculum, teaching, and the health-related outcomes for students. Redelius et al (2009) focused on teachers’ talk about grading criteria to understand the relations between assessment, the social construction of pupils’ abilities, including gendered ways of being, doing and knowing. Marsden and Weston (2007) considered the relations between physical literacy, developmental movement and movement play in early years education, and children’s participation in and enjoyment of physical education.

In most of this diverse relational research, curriculum/knowledge is an important feature, but I would argue that there is no
explicit pedagogical theoretical perspective informing this work; that is to say, the relational character of the work is present, but it is not theorised. There are however two specific forms of relational research in physical education and sport pedagogy where the curriculum/knowledge component is a key feature and, moreover, which rest on explicit pedagogical theories that require the study of relations between components of pedagogy. These are the Anglophone research on models-based practice (MBP, this concept derived from the work of Metzler, 2005 on what he calls instructional models), and the Francophone tradition of didactique.

As a strategic approach to physical education, MBP seeks to align curriculum/knowledge, teaching strategies and learning outcomes, in ways that take account of the setting or milieu. Pedagogical models such as Teaching Games for Understanding and Sport Education feature, as ‘hard-wired’ aspects of their design, the interdependency of knowledge, teaching and learning; in Metzler’s (2005) terms, it is the relations between the components that becomes the organising centre for pedagogy, rather than any one of the components by itself. Indeed, Metzler (2005) developed benchmarks for teachers and pupils to provide a means of checking that a particular model is being practised faithfully, and that all three components remain aligned during a unit of work. In terms of European-authored work on MBP, MacPhail et al’s (2008) study of throwing and catching as relational skills within a TGfU unit, theorised from the vantage point of situated learning, provides one example of relational research. Other theoretical perspectives are also well-suited to relational research on MBP, as demonstrated in Sinelnikov and Hastie’s (2008) study of Sport Education framed by Walter Doyle’s classroom ecology paradigm.

While it has developed within a separate research tradition, the Francophone didactique has much in common with MBP in terms of the focus on the relations between the components of pedagogy. The majority of this research has been published only in French. Increasingly, however, didactique research in physical education is being published in English. Amade-Escot (2006) has provided an English-language overview of this research in physical education, and also co-edited with O’Sullivan a special issue of PESP on...
theoretical perspectives on content (curriculum/knowledge), in which several *didactique* studies were published, one North American which, interestingly, brings MBP and *didactique* together (WALLHEAD; O’SULLIVAN, 2007), and two by French authors (VERSCHURE; AMADE-ESCOT, 2007; WALLIAN; CHANG, 2007). Grehaigne et al. (2005) have further developed the coming together of MBP and *didactique* through their work on team invasion games, while other studies have contributed to the theoretical development of relational research from the perspective of the French ‘course of action’ socio-cognitive model (eg. GUILLON; DURNY, 2008).

In this context, it is interesting to consider the nature of the work of researchers based in Spain that has been published in each of the four journals during the past decade, in order to consider how it is positioned in relation to these trends. The 11 papers I found in these journals are listed in Table 12. According to my categorisation of the studies, seven were concerned with teachers, teaching and teacher education, three with learners and learning and one with relational aspects, of transfer of learning between games and curriculum planning. Four of the papers appeared in SE&S, three in EJPE/ PESP, and two in each of EPER and JTPE. The forthcoming publication by Devis and colleagues (DEVIS-DEVIS et al., in press) which reports an analysis of 1786 papers from the best 16 Spanish journals of sport sciences between 1999 and 2005 shows that these 11 papers represent only a tiny amount of the output of physical education research in Spain, where they counted over 380 papers for only half the period covered by my review. Devis et al used a more detailed number of categories to identify topics of research in physical education and sport pedagogy, so it is not possible to make any straightforward comparison to the analysis reported here. This disparity in volume of output nevertheless places in very clear perspective the dangers of attempting to identify research trends in Europe through the filter of English-language publications only, a challenge, as I will suggest in my conclusion, that the native English-speaking research community must address if it is to be seriously considered to be in any sense ‘European’.

My view is, then, that a theoretical consensus is emerging on the proper object of study of physical education in the English-language
literature, centred either on one of the key components of pedagogy or on the relations between at least two of the components. This, as I have already commented, is of crucial importance since this consolidation provides physical education research with a distinctive voice and a legitimate place in the academy. Research matters, in this context, because a legitimate place in the academy, both in the larger field educational research and among our colleagues in the sub-disciplines of the sport and exercise sciences, has not been automatically given. Nor will it be easy to maintain, since many interest groups, including those concerned with children’s health, the identification of sporting talent, and the production of better behaved citizens, consider that they have claims on physical education and thus seek to define the kinds of research that is of most relevance or importance.

The opportunity to enhance this theoretical coherence of our field lies, I suggest, in the development of programmes of research that seek to develop interlinking projects and facilitate collaboration, rather than isolated, one-off studies, a matter the BERA PESP SIG will consider in some detail at a one day conference to be held in Bedford in March 2010. In my opinion, one-off studies are able to proliferate because of the poor citation practices that characterise research in our field. I see this problem often as a journal editor and reviewer, that researchers seem reluctant to cite key published studies that relate to, provide a precedent for, and sometimes directly inform their own work. This may simply be a matter of poor scholarship, or perhaps physical education research does not matter enough even to some researchers. Whatever the explanation, the net effect of not citing others’ work is to exaggerate the originality of your own, which may or may not be an intentional strategy by some individuals. A programmatic approach to research, on the other hand, seeks explicitly to identify relationships between studies and to build coherent bodies of knowledge that can impact on policy and practice, a matter I will come to shortly. Before doing so, I want ask next:

Is there any evidence of the emergence of a distinctive European approach to research?

This is a difficult question to answer since we are only dealing
here with European-authored English-language research and so, as I have already noted, any response must be heavily qualified. Also, in order to provide a definitive answer to the question, we would need to carry out a detailed content analysis of non-European English-language research so that we have something with which to compare the European-authored work, and that analysis lies beyond the scope of this presentation. Nevertheless, I think the question is still worth posing, if only to raise it for future consideration and investigation. In light of the delimitations just noted, in posing this question I will mention briefly only some of the main features of the studies published in the four journals and elsewhere.

While we have noted what appears to be a decline in curriculum research, it may be that some of this research has been relocated from the curriculum to the relational category. The social construction of knowledge has been an important concern in many European-authored relational studies. There can be no question that, in this respect, the European-authored work on MBP has been strongly influenced by research from the USA and has been concerned particularly with knowledge at the program level; there is, in other words, a strong curriculum component in research on MBP. In the Francophone didactique research, on the other hand, the focus is often on the learners’ knowledge. That said, in both cases of MBP and didactique, there is often a concern to theorise the relations between learners’ knowledge and some curricular aspects such as game strategies, tactics and skills.

My point is that the curriculum/ knowledge component of pedagogy seems to be an important aspect of European-authored English language research, though whether this is also distinctive in relation to non-European work remains to be seen. As for relational research, it seems to me that only the Francophone didactique is distinctive, though the extent to which this distinctiveness can be described as European is another matter, since relational research of this kind is conducted in other parts of the Francophone world besides European countries such as France, Belgium and Switzerland, for instance in Canada.

As for research on learners and learning, and teachers, teaching
and teacher education, it seems to me that much of this is consistent with research carried out in non-European countries. This is because, as I have argued recently in my book *Physical Education Futures* (KIRK, 2010), the similarities between the practice of physical education in many economically advanced countries around the world are far more significant than the local and nuanced differences. Philosopher John Gray (2002) has argued persuasively that globalisation does not mean that all societies become more and more alike in their responses to challenges such as economic recession and climate change. But globalisation does mean that they face the same or similar challenges. Physical education and sport pedagogy, like other forms of educational practice, must address changes to the structures and processes of schooling, to the nature of teachers’ work, to the lifestyles, interests and values of young people, and to government’s increasing micro-management of the educational provision it funds (this latter in Australia and the UK at least). In this context, there is strong cross-referencing among European countries and between European and non-European countries around research on learners and learning and teachers, teaching and teacher education.

Two trends in particular which I think have their origin and initial impetus in the USA are beginning to be embraced by researchers elsewhere, including Europe. These trends are the increasing numbers of papers appearing in pedagogy journals on pupil and teacher motivation, a matter I have already mentioned, and on exercise, health and lifestyle. I believe we should be monitoring them closely because both have the potential if practiced and applied unproblematically, too literally and technically, to mis-direct the attention of researchers and educational practitioners away from the proper object of physical education research. For physical education research to matter more to more people, it should reflect a wide range of interests and concerns. At the same time, I believe it will be of less value if there is uncertainty or confusion or incoherence about the proper object of research, which is why such trends need to be monitored.

So, while we may not be in a position to say whether a distinctive European perspective on research in physical education and sport...
pedagogy research is emerging without a much larger-scale study of both non-European and non-English language research, there are nevertheless particular features of the European-authored English-language work, including enduring concerns for the social construction of knowledge and for a socially-critical perspective, a matter I will come to shortly. At the same time, especially in the areas of learners and learning and teachers, teaching and teacher education, there appears to me to be considerable coincidence between European and non-European publications, with the emergence of increasing numbers of papers on motivation and health in pedagogy journals, a matter on which I sound a note of caution.

**To what extent does research in physical education and sport pedagogy provide evidence that informs policy and practice?**

This issue goes to the heart of the claim that physical education research matters. Is our research ignored by the majority of potential users? Is it read only by members of the researcher community or, worse still, does the majority of it, as Meho claimed, remain unread and uncited?

I think, in part response to these questions, that there is evidence of physical education research being taken up in practice. Good examples would be specific pedagogical models such as Sport Education and TGfU. Metzler (2005) and others (eg. KINCHIN, 2006; OSLIN; MITCHELL, 2006) show that there is a strong and growing research base underpinning both models. But even so, it is difficult to judge the extent to which these models have become widespread practice in physical education, and more difficult still to say that they have impacted at a policy level. I remain convinced that the ‘orthodox’ approach, as I named it some years ago, where research is carried out by researchers then passed down to teachers through teacher education courses and on professional development days, where it is then implemented faithfully, is a flawed way of thinking about the relationship between research and practice (KIRK, 1989). Neither is it clear that alternatives to the ‘orthodoxy’, such as practitioner research, provides a means of bridging the ‘research-practice gap’ (CASEY, 2010; TINNING it., 1996).
To illustrate the complexity of this issue and the challenges we face in promoting the use of research to inform policy and practice, I want to provide a brief case study of recent developments in Britain. When the Blair New Labour government came to power in the second half of the 1990s in the UK, it set a requirement that all government policy across a wide range of fields must be ‘evidence-based’. While these notions of evidence-based government and evidence-based policy are contentious, Davies (2004) has argued that they are now widely accepted by a number of countries around the world and, moreover, that the practice of evidence-based government is also well-established in the UK. This may be the case in some fields, but it is not so, in my view, in physical education. Since 2003, the British government has spent around £2.2 billion on various initiatives associated with its policies for physical education and school sport. Davies argues that governments use a wider definition of evidence than some academics are prepared to acknowledge. This may be true, though personally I suspect most academic researchers would be happy to accept a wider definition of evidence so long as this wider definition does not exclude more established forms of peer-reviewed research. In the case of physical education in the UK, while many of the government-funded initiatives were accompanied by commissioned evaluations, little if any published academic research appears to have influenced the policy decision-making about physical education. Indeed, and unacceptably, most of the commissioned evaluations, only some of it carried out by academic researchers, did not consider the available research literature either.

This situation may be unique to the UK in terms of the scale of the investment in physical education and the Labour government’s policy agenda. I suspect that this omission from the policy development process of research in physical education and sport pedagogy points to a more widespread problem and an enormous challenge not just for our field but for the research community writ large. The recent scandal over the dismissal of Professor David Nutt, who was Chairman of the UK governments’ Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, undermines Davies claims about evidenced-based government being well established in the UK, and points to a wider
problem in some fields, including physical education, between university-based researchers and policy-makers.

But it is too easy to lay the blame for the omission of physical education and sport pedagogy research from policy-making solely at the feet of government. We must consider, as Penney and Chandler (2000) propose, what it is we as a community of researchers and practitioners are doing in terms of addressing this issue. Is our research too concerned to remain within the Ivory Tower? Are the topics we are studying out of touch with the realities of practice, as many teachers are quick to suggest? Does our concern for methodologically sound and sophisticated studies stand in the way of carrying out practice-referenced research? I suspect that a qualified yes may be a reasonable answer to each of these questions, though I believe we need to resist the current trend in the UK for research in all fields, including the humanities, to demonstrate in simplistic ways its impact, whether this be social, educational or economic.

**Does this research recognise and attempt to theorise the crucial interdependent relationships between PETE and school physical education?**

To make my point even more sharply, I cite the example of one of the most significant absences in the physical education and sport pedagogy literature, which is research on the relationships between PETE and school physical education. I argued recently in Physical Education Futures (KIRK, 2010), that physical education teachers educated over the past 20 years, through no fault of their own, know substantially less about their subject matter – which is primarily games and sports and other socially valued practical physical activities – than earlier generations. Daryl Siedentop (2002/1989) among others pointed to this coming crisis in PETE well over two decades ago. The ongoing academicisation of PETE and consequent erosion of subject matter knowledge I suggest has been one reason among others for the resistance to change and perpetuation of a form of
Why research matters: current status and future trends in Physical...  31

physical education that is concerned almost entirely with the teaching of de-contextualised sports techniques and what Inez Rovegno (1995) has called the *molecularisation* of physical education.

My point is that we have failed as a research community to see the importance of using our research to understand this interdependent relationship between forms of PETE and forms of school physical education. We have studied these pedagogical topics, but separately, and we have also failed to use the evidence that is readily available to us to understand how one might affect the other. It is little surprise to find, as a result of Kathy Armour’s (ARMOUR; DUNCOMBE, 2004) pioneering work on continuing professional development (CPD), that much CPD is a poor attempt to compensate for a lack of appropriate initial teacher education.

**TO WHAT EXTENT DOES RESEARCH LOOK BEYOND THE SCHOOL TO CONSIDER THE ‘BIGGER PICTURE’?**

These shortcomings in our capability as a research community to think innovatively and radically about the uses of our research and to use research to get to grips with a crisis that is under our very noses – since so many of us are pedagogy researchers and teacher educators – is that we have yet collectively to routinely and regularly incorporate into our varied pedagogical studies sufficient awareness of what I call in *Physical Education Futures* ‘the bigger picture’. This is, in one sense, surprising. Research that does consider the relations between physical education and physical culture, even if it is not distinctively European, has strong roots in Europe. Typically, this is research that takes a socially-critical perspective and which foregrounds concerns for social justice and equity. Indeed, by way of example, most if not all of the English-language publications contributed by Spanish-based researchers foreground moral and social issues and concerns. In my view, it is important that this work continues to appear in pedagogy journals, and is not siphoned off to other journals in critical sociology and cultural studies. I accept that much of the early research from this perspective had deficiencies, that it unreasonably took the moral high ground and that it was jargon-ridden and remote from the realities of
practice in school and community *milieux*. I believe these deficiencies have begun to be addressed.

While I have argued here that our field of physical education is increasingly consolidating the proper object of our research as pedagogy, we have some distance yet to travel in developing concepts and theories that allow us to consider the relations between curriculum, teaching, and learning carried out in specific *milieux* and the broader physical culture in which school physical education and other forms of sport pedagogy are embedded. Clearly this is no easy task, but I do believe we have tools at our disposal that could be put to this use; for example, the notion of *transposition didactique* within the Francophone approach, Basil Bernstein’s concept of the pedagogical device, Lave and Wenger’s notion of situated learning as legitimate peripheral participation in communities of practice, Pierre Bourdieu’s notion (after Marcel Mauss) of the *habitus*. Each of these concepts and others are available to us to increasingly develop a level of coherence in defining the proper object of study of our field in which research that attends to the most micro matters of learning and teaching in specific and local *milieu* can also be located within the bigger picture which contains the globalised challenges I mentioned earlier. Without theoretical perspectives and concepts that bring the relations between pedagogy and wider cultural phenomena into view, we are seriously hampered in our capacity to think about how our research as a collective endeavour can inform policy and enrich practice and in so doing make a difference for the better.

6 Conclusion

I began this paper with a claim that research in physical education matters, but that it needs to matter more, and to more people. I believe, on the basis of this analysis, that as a field of research we are reaching a more mature phase of development, and that there is evidence of a theoretical consensus over the proper object of study in physical education, which I have argued is pedagogy. Evidence of publication trends in the three main European-based English-language research journals shows that they serve European-
based researchers well compared with a USA-based journal such as JTPE, and that the output of papers focusing on teachers, teaching and teacher education, learners and learning, and relations between pedagogical components increased in the second half of the past decade. I argued that these trends show a consolidation of research on pedagogy as a topic, and I highlighted MBP and *didactique* as two examples of relational research which is informed by strong and cohesive theoretical perspectives. While the data do not allow us to say whether there is a distinctive European identity emerging, we can say nevertheless that this research makes a good contribution to a concern for the social construction of knowledge within either curriculum or relational categories of study, and on socially critical issues.

But we also face a number of challenges to more people understanding that research in physical education matters. I referred to government investment in various strategies for physical education and school sport in the UK to suggest that there is little evidence in this case of evidence-based policy-making. Indeed, the majority of peer-reviewed and published research in physical education has been ignored completely as £2.2 billion of public money has been spent on physical education and school sport. While it may be relatively easy to criticise government for failing to see the importance of this research, I argued that we as a community of researchers are not above criticism for this failing, and that we need collectively to engage in radical re-visioning of our work and its impact. I cited the lack of research into the relationship between PETE and the dominant form of school physical education as an example of a problem most of us see on a day-to-day basis as researchers and teacher educators but that we fail to better understand and resolve. Carrying out research that can make a difference requires the development of theories that allow us to connect the practice of physical education and sport pedagogy to the broader physical culture of societies and that allows us in a reflexive act to locate ourselves within ‘the bigger picture’.

The obvious limitation of this paper is that it deals only with European-authored English-language research, and so provides only a partial view of trends towards the future of research in physical
education in Europe. And it is here that we encounter another challenge, which is the advantage native English-speakers have to shape the field of research, and the inevitable need for researchers whose mother tongue is not English to read and publish in English. There is clear evidence of a trend here in the four journals I reviewed, with almost double the numbers of European-authored papers from countries where English is not the mother tongue published in the second half of the decade compared to the first. I believe that such is the dominance of English that this trend is bound to continue. But this ought not to be a matter for celebration among native English-speaking researchers, and it ought to make those of us in this group feel very uncomfortable about the inequitable power relations inherent in this situation. One of the ways to subvert to a small extent the privileged position of English would be for each native English speaking researcher to learn one other language well enough to be able to read our colleagues’ research in its mother tongue, with all of the nuance and richness and difference this would afford. The collective impact of such a counter-hegemonic strategy could be huge and would provide a degree of consolidation and strength to the field that we can only dream of at the moment. For research in physical education to matter more, to more people, it is not enough that more Spanish or French or Polish or Lithuania researchers learn to read and write English. There must also be a shift from a mono-lingual to a multi-lingual field for native English-speaking researchers. Unlike many other big challenges that will shape our collective future in physical education research, this is an issue that is entirely in our own hands.
Porque es importante investigar: situación actual y tendencias futuras en la educación física.

Resumen: El propósito de este trabajo es examinar las tendencias actuales y futuras en la investigación en educación física en Europa. Mi punto de partida es la afirmación de la importancia vital y la pertinencia de la investigación en educación física y el por qué la investigación es importante para la educación física. Para alcanzar ese objetivo, he revisado las tendencias actuales y futuras de la investigación europea publicadas en cuatro periódicos científicos editados en inglés, en la última década (2000 y 2009) a fin de proporcionar un contexto analítico y una perspectiva. Empiezo el artículo con un informe sobre la proporción de trabajos europeos publicados que se encontraban en dichas revistas, el país de origen de los autores, y los asuntos de los artículos. A continuación, identifico algunas tendencias analíticas en estas publicaciones y, en particular, hago una comparación entre las dos mitades de la década. Finalmente, estructuro un contexto de análisis más amplio que alcance la investigación en educación física e formulo cinco preguntas que nos llevan a una reflexión crítica de importantes temas para el futuro de la investigación en nuestro campo. A través de cada una de estas preguntas y las cuestiones que se plantean, pretendo poner de manifiesto por qué la investigación en educación física es importante, y por qué es necesario implicar más, a más gente.


O porquê de investigar: estado atual e tendências futuras nas pesquisas em Educação Física.

Resumo: O objetivo deste trabalho é analisar as tendências atuais e futuras nas pesquisas em educação física na Europa. Meu ponto de partida é a afirmação da importância vital e da relevância da pesquisa em educação física e o porquê da investigação é importante para a área. Para atingir esse objetivo, comento as tendências atuais e futuras da investigação europeia publicadas em quatro periódicos científicos editados em Inglês na última década (2000-2009), para fornecer...
um contexto analítico e uma perspectiva. Começo o artigo com um relatório sobre a percentagem de trabalhos europeus, que foram publicados nessas revistas, o país de origem dos autores e dos assuntos dos artigos. Em seguida, identifico algumas tendências nestas publicações e analiso, em especial, uma comparação entre as duas metades da década. Finalmente, estruturo o país de origem dos autores e dos assuntos dos artigos. Em seguida, identifico algumas tendências nestas publicações e analiso em particular, uma comparação entre as duas metades da década. Finalmente, estruturo em âmbito mais vasto o contexto da pesquisa em educação física e formulo cinco perguntas que nos levam a uma reflexão crítica sobre temas importantes para o futuro da pesquisa em nosso campo. Através de cada uma destas questões e problemas que surgem, procuro mostrar porque a pesquisa em educação física é importante, sendo, por por isso, necessário envolver mais e mais pessoas.


REFERENCES


### Tables

**Table 1:** Number and percentage of European-authored pedagogy papers published in four journals between 1999/2000 to 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Journal</th>
<th>Total number of pedagogy papers</th>
<th>Number of European-authored pedagogy papers</th>
<th>% European-authored papers/Total pedagogy papers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EPER</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EJPE/PESP</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE&amp;S</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JTPE</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2:** Number and percentage of European-authored pedagogy papers published in EPER in two periods, 1999/2000 to 2004 and 2005 to 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total number of pedagogy papers</th>
<th>Number of pedagogy papers with European authors</th>
<th>% European authored papers/Total pedagogy papers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1999/2000 to 2004</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005 to 2009</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3:** Number and percentage of European-authored pedagogy papers published in EJPE/PESP in two periods, 2000 to 2004 and 2005 to 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total number of pedagogy papers</th>
<th>Number of pedagogy papers with European authors</th>
<th>% European authored papers/Total pedagogy papers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000 to 2004 (EJPE/PESP)</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005 to 2009 (PESP)</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Number and percentage of European-authored pedagogy papers published in SE&S in two periods, 2000 to 2004 and 2005 to 2009.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total number of pedagogy papers</th>
<th>Number of pedagogy papers with European authors</th>
<th>European authored papers/Total papers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000 to 2004</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005 to 2009</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Number and percentage of European-authored pedagogy papers published in JTPE in two periods, 2000 to 2004 and 2005 to 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total number of pedagogy papers</th>
<th>Number of pedagogy papers with European authors</th>
<th>European authored papers/Total papers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000 to 2004</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005 to 2009</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Top 10 countries of origin\(^1\) of European-authored pedagogy papers in four journals, 1999/2000-2004 and 2005-2009, with journal subtotals (X/X) and totals (totals in bold)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
<th>EPER</th>
<th>EJPE/PESP</th>
<th>SE&amp;S</th>
<th>JTPE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4/1: 5</td>
<td>0/7: 7</td>
<td>2/1: 3</td>
<td>4/3: 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2/1: 3</td>
<td>0/7: 7</td>
<td>0/4: 4</td>
<td>0/1: 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2/2: 4</td>
<td>1/1: 2</td>
<td>1/2: 3</td>
<td>2/2: 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2/5: 7</td>
<td>3/0: 3</td>
<td>1/1: 2</td>
<td>0/1: 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2/5: 7</td>
<td>2/1: 3</td>
<td>0/2: 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1/1: 2</td>
<td>1/2: 3</td>
<td>0/4: 4</td>
<td>0/2: 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1/3: 4</td>
<td>0/2: 2</td>
<td>1/2: 3</td>
<td>0/1: 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4/2: 6</td>
<td>0/1: 1</td>
<td>1/2: 3</td>
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<tr>
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<td>10</td>
<td>1/1: 2</td>
<td>3/1: 4</td>
<td>0/2: 2</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

\(^1\)Other countries were Wales (9); Finland (8); Germany (6); Cyprus (5); Denmark (4); Netherlands (2); Portugal (2); Estonia (2); Russia (3); Turkey (2); Slovenia (1); Malta (1); Czech R (1); Switzerland (1)

Table 7: Numbers of European-authored papers on pedagogy topics in four journals, 1999/2000-2004 and 2005-2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Curriculum/ Knowledge</th>
<th>Teachers, teaching and PETE</th>
<th>Learners and learning</th>
<th>Relational</th>
<th>Other</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EPER</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EJPE/PESP</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24</td>
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<td>JTPE</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>39</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>112</td>
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<td>22</td>
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</table>

Table 8: Numbers of European-authored papers on pedagogy topics in EPER, 1999/2000-2004 and 2005-2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Curriculum/ Knowledge</th>
<th>Teachers, teaching and PETE</th>
<th>Learners and learning</th>
<th>Relational</th>
<th>Other</th>
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<tr>
<td>EPER</td>
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<td>1999/2000 to 2004</td>
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<td>30</td>
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<td>2005 to 2009</td>
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<td>TOTALS</td>
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<td>8</td>
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Table 9: Numbers of European-authored papers on pedagogy topics in EJPE/PESP, 2000-2004 and 2005-2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Curriculum/ Knowledge</th>
<th>Teachers, teaching and PETE</th>
<th>Learners and learning</th>
<th>Relational</th>
<th>Other</th>
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<tr>
<td>EJPE/PESP</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000 to 2004 (EJPE/PESP)</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>2005 to 2009 (PESP)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTALS</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Table 10:** Numbers of European-authored papers on pedagogy topics in SE&S, 2000-2004 and 2005-2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Curriculum/ Knowledge</th>
<th>Teachers, teaching and PETE</th>
<th>Learners and learning</th>
<th>Relational</th>
<th>Other</th>
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<tr>
<td>2000 to 2004</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005 to 2009</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Table 11:** Numbers of European-authored papers on pedagogy topics in JTPE, 2000-2004 and 2005-2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Curriculum/ Knowledge</th>
<th>Teachers, teaching and PETE</th>
<th>Learners and learning</th>
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<tbody>
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