

'Engaging with academic and institutional changes'

**Engaging with academic and institutional changes: Physical Education and Sport  
Pedagogy's interest and ability to 'survive and thrive'**

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**Abstract:**

Acknowledging differences in contexts, the purpose of this paper considers how physical education and sport pedagogy (PESP), while maintaining our collective identity, can most effectively develop a capacity to engage with academic and institutional changes in productive, proactive ways. This, we contend, entails considering extending the groups or communities in which PESP is represented to increase the potential to access substructures with other academic communities. We have chosen a metaphor to frame this work, acknowledging that metaphor can often open-up new ways to view a specific aspect or phenomenon that has been conceived in a common, or perhaps static way. Worked examples of the metaphor are presented from an Irish and Canadian perspective and implications of these examples pose possible ways forward.

Keywords: disciplines, boundaries, metaphors, physical education, sport pedagogy, kinesiology

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## **Engaging with academic and institutional changes: Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy's interest and ability to 'survive and thrive'**

### **Introduction**

Metaphorically speaking, never before have there been so many ships sailing on the sea of sport pedagogy research. However, it is a serious problem that too many of the helmspersons do not know the direction they are heading or the cargo they are transporting. Consequently, they are not able to inform fellow sailors about their compass courses or practitioners on shore waiting for their cargo about where and what they are going to unload (Crum, 2001, pp. 185-186).

Bart Crum's (2001) comment still rings true today with the confusion that surrounds which direction sport pedagogy should be heading, what cargo we should be transporting, and little understanding about those waiting on the shore ahead.

If we consider the degree to which disciplines are freestanding international communities with their own professional associations and specialist journals (Becher & Trowler, 2001), then we can consider physical education and sport pedagogy (PESP) as an 'academic discipline'.

However, we question the perceived binaries this creates as well as the perceived stability of these disciplines as disparate. We also fully appreciate that this is made more complicated by the fact that each discipline is subject to both historical and geographic variation (Becher & Trowler, 2001). Bamber (2014) adds to this level of complexity and challenges us to consider disciplines as a, 'splintered combination of academic identities, discourse and practices' or a 'hybrid' discipline, whose discourses and practices draw on many other influences, leading to 'multiple, metamorphosing identities' (p.104).

### **Purpose of the paper**

The paper is concerned with the positioning of PESP and the potential for engagement with other (sub)disciplines. Such consideration includes, by association, some reference to the potential ramifications of this on the possibilities for PESP to be part of a wider network of knowledge production. This, however, is not the primary focus of this paper but rather is explored further in a companion paper that examines the potential impact for physical education (PE) and physical education teacher education (PETE) when PESP is part of a wider network of knowledge production.

Kirk and Haerens (2014) note a concern about the extent to which research in PESP appears to be less frequently cited, having less impact in the field of school PE and sport more broadly. Acknowledging differences in contexts, the purpose of this paper is to consider how PESP, while maintaining our collective identity, can most effectively develop a capacity to engage with academic and institutional changes in productive, proactive ways. This, we contend, entails considering extending the groups or communities in which PESP is represented to increase the potential to access substructures with other academic communities. That is, 'adjoining territories' (Becher & Trowler, 2001) that afford us access to opportunities that we would be unlikely to secure as a freestanding international community. There would be an anticipation of making connections that allow collaboration with colleagues in other disciplines and related professions. This could result in a 'give and take' if you will; a reciprocated relationship that would increase the meaningfulness, visibility and credibility of PESP and, in turn, PESP doing the same for other disciplines. We want to caution here that we are mindful of how credibility may be measured completely differently by a PESP researcher than it might by 'the corporate University'. Credibility from a University perspective, linked to an audit type culture of today, is

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often focused around accountability measures that pertain to research and grant money. While this is not a new phenomenon, it has certainly intensified over the past decades (Acker & Webber, 2016). Credibility from the PESP community perspective might be measured more around the impact a project has on the effectiveness of a PE programme, or perhaps the enhancement of a teacher education programme. What we are arguing here is that for better or worse PESP researchers are to be credible in both worlds and that a reciprocated relationship with other related professions may enhance credibility on both fronts. Such reciprocation could result in increased opportunities to secure external funding and, in turn, increase opportunities for inter-disciplinary collaboration and therefore overall impact. We admit that a consequence of this may be the extent to which PESP can maintain its (preferred) identity while at the same time traversing disciplines.

We have chosen a metaphor to frame this work appreciating that metaphors, “act as powerful cognitive models through which educators and learners can understand educational phenomena by relating them to something previously experienced” (Botha, 2009, p. 432). At the same time, while a metaphor draws on past experiences it can also often open-up new ways to view a specific aspect or phenomenon that has been conceived in a common, or perhaps static, way.

### **Metaphor: Concepts that we live by**

We draw on Lakoff and Jonson’s (1980) work to help us think about why we might want to use metaphor to help us conceptualize the discipline of PESP and how it may or may not fit within other disciplines. They argue that, “the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (p. 5). Our ordinary conceptual system is metaphorical in nature. Thus, using different language, and creating different metaphors for concepts allows a shift in the language structure used and, in turn, shift how we conceive of specific concepts.

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Metaphor helps us describe the concepts that in many ways provide a framework for our thoughts and ontologically provides a grounding for what we perceive as real. Using metaphor is not just a writing flourish that allows for a more engaging style of writing or argument. It can be used to help define dominant discourses and, in our case, perhaps to disrupt dominant discourses or metaphors currently used. For this reason, it is important to understand the current metaphors being used to think about both disciplines and the boundaries that exist between them.

### **Current metaphorical conceptions: Disciplines and boundaries**

Drawing on the metaphorical concept of academic territories, Becher and Trowler (2001) argued that knowledge structures of disciplines strongly condition, or even determine, the behavior and values of academics, who live in disciplinary tribes with common sets of practices, at least as far as research is concerned. However, over time, Trowler, Saunders and Bamber (2014) have given up the essentialist claims that see disciplines from a crude disciplinary perspective. They pose the question, "What is the significance of disciplines in contemporary higher education across the world?" They address the key question about the significance, relevance and power of disciplines today, and offer a new framework for thinking about the drivers of academic practices. They question the continued purchase of the 'tribes and territories' metaphor and offer a more nuanced understanding of the nature and extent of disciplinary influence on academic practices, continually reminding the reader that we are witnessing a major transition in the relationship of higher education to state and society.

Disciplines are deployed in different ways, for different purposes and with varying degrees of purchase. Lawson (2009) has noted that where PESP (and more specifically PE and PETE) has had difficulty with this is in appreciating how sub-specialties are part of the same structure / discipline. He used an elaboration of Becher & Trowler's (2001) work to illustrate how sub-

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specialties belong together, providing a framework of paradigm, exemplar, segment, network and gatekeeper. As Lawson (2009) notes, in a collaborative way the concepts within this framework show the temporal nature of the field and shed light on researchers’ identities. This, in turn, influences not only what they see but also the silences and blind spots and who has the power to decide what is deemed as research and what research is valued (Lawson, 2009). This becomes extremely important when thinking about the afore-mentioned audit culture, the credibility of PESP and addressing questions surrounding the legitimacy of PESP research;

(...) in navigating their way through their everyday work there is both alignment and discrepancy between what individual academics are committed to, what they actually do, and the priorities of the department in which they work (...) tensions as a reflection of changing relationships of academic identities to disciplines and institutions in new higher education contexts (Spurling, 2014, p. 78).

The ‘discipline’ and ‘university as institution’ are the key communities in which academics have built their identities and these communities can differ dependent on how the specific discipline and university context constructs role identities around ideas of core values and commitments. This is not to deny that there is also a link between the academic and their relationship / networks in the professional context, e.g., special interest groups at conferences, professional subject discipline conferences, writing with international colleagues. Disciplinary boundaries seem to be less significant. That is, departmental strategy and culture set in institutional contexts within the frame of higher education systems and policy frameworks are more important now than disciplinary distinctions in conditioning what people do. While we might choose this vein with regard to how an audit culture has shaped these decisions, this is not the scope of the paper.

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An interesting and related construct is Lawson’s (2016) development of the notion of ‘boundaries’ within and between academic disciplines. Using Kinesiology as a working example he develops two versions of a discipline - an academic discipline versus a helping discipline (Lawson, 2016) and shares two contrasting models of ‘fortress discipline’ and ‘adaptive, connected discipline’ (Lawson, 2012). An ‘academic discipline’ and ‘fortress discipline’ are identifiable by strict boundaries with criteria for uniqueness and exclusion. A ‘helping discipline’ and ‘adaptive, connective discipline’ constitute shifting boundaries within and across individual disciplines that allow for a collective, meaningful contribution (and accountability) to important economic, political and societal outcomes.

While this section is complex with respect to the concepts and metaphors being used to think about disciplines, we hope we have accomplished two things. Firstly, we hope to have shown the shifting conception of disciplines from separated, static bodies to fluid complex entities that are shifted and shaped by a variety of internal and external factors. Secondly, we hope that illustrating current metaphors will allow the reader to both systematize and operationalize the new metaphor we introduce below with regards to thinking about PESP, disciplinary boundaries and the credibility of PESP in the university setting.

### **Understanding the spaces that now define disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity**

As introduced in the introduction, Bamber (2014) helps us to imagine disciplines as ‘splintered combinations of academic identities’ (p.104). Thinking with this image, we began to see the complex nature of disciplines as the multifarious ecosystems that make up oceans. We then moved beyond using a metaphor of ‘oceans’, and other bodies of water, to seeing ‘oceans’ as a metaphorical concept that helps us to better illustrate how PESP may, or may not, fit within other disciplines. In thinking about disciplines as ‘rivers’ that lead into larger bodies of water, we are

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drawing attention to both the *systematicity* of the metaphorical concept, what the metaphorical concept both hides and highlights, as well as how using metaphorical concepts allows an *orientation* of PESP with respect to other disciplines (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). While *systematicity* and *orientation* are extremely complex concepts, for the scope of this paper they allow us to think about how the use of a new metaphor allows for both resonance with past metaphors, presented in the last section, as well as a re-orientation of how we conceive of PESP’s relationship with other disciplines.

We introduce Manathunga and Brew’s (2014) metaphor of ‘oceans of knowledge’ to understand the spaces that now define disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity, and by association the potential positioning of PESP within those spaces. We are not suggesting that this is a safe way to politically anchor a field in the corporate, audit culture university, but rather that it provides us with the impetus to seriously consider how PESP can most effectively develop a capacity, specific to the focus of this paper, to engage with academic and institutional changes in productive, credible, proactive ways;

(...) using the notions of an ocean of possibilities, disciplinary and interdisciplinary spaces can be considered in an infinite variety of combinations. Such spaces ‘flow’ into each other, merging to form different kinds of knowledge groupings as problems and needs arise (...) Oceans have tides, displaying tendencies for different aspects to dominate at different times (...) Rivers run into the ocean at which point they may constitute estuaries where several rivers join (...) and inlets where the water is cut off from other tributaries. Using these metaphors we can similarly describe researchers as traditionally fishing in well-defined rivers and not venturing out into the unknown ocean where knowledge streams blend and merge (...) the rapid pace of change has forced

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researchers to venture out into interdisciplinary oceans of knowledge and to meet the challenges of joining together (...) The use of watery metaphors does not deny the solidity of disciplinary and interdisciplinary spaces. There is (...) a solid surface underneath the ocean and from time to time, the ocean floor rises to form an island, which might be a kind of new territory; previously unknown (pp. 51-52).

The complexity and uneasiness of positioning PESP within such a metaphor and its potential alignment with other disciplines and / or contributing to interdisciplinarity is also captured in the metaphor;

By and large, an ocean is constantly moving. Seen as an ocean, knowledge is wild, vast, unpredictable, treacherous, deep, windy, becalming, life-giving, fluid, liquid, powerful, invigorating. It has slipstreams, currents, waves and travel routes. New research specialisations that emerge and then form part of the larger whole flow into it like rivers (...) Without the safety of disciplinary rivers, academic and researcher identities can be all at sea. Harvesting ideas and approaches from the sea of knowledge can be a risky venture because there are no knowledge borders or boundaries; no hierarchies of knowledge; and no order (...) interdisciplinary research is full of uncertainties and risks. Voyaging across knowledge oceans can be an uncomfortable experience (p. 53).

### **Expanded and additional maritime considerations**

We clarify the intended use of ‘oceans’, ‘rivers’ and ‘inlets’ from Manathunga and Brew’s (2014) metaphor of ‘oceans of knowledge’. **Oceans** are vast bodies of salt water that cover almost three quarters of the earth’s surface. As a metaphor, this can convey a very large expanse or quantity of knowledge related to addressing current and essential social, cultural, political and economic issues. **Rivers** are large natural streams of water flowing in a channel to the sea, a lake,

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or another river. In some cases, a river flows into the ground and becomes dry at the end of its course without reaching another body of water. Rivers signify the temporal nature of both knowledge, experience and disciplines in always offering a past, present and imagined future. This can also convey the individual paths of established academic discipline areas that become stagnant and fail to prosper. **Inlets** are indentations of a shoreline, usually long and narrow, such as a small bay or arm, that often lead to an enclosed body of salt water, such as a sound, bay, lagoon, or marsh. This can convey a safe-haven for discussion and consideration at various points of time in considering the extent to which multi-disciplinary opportunities can or should be contributing to the collective activity. It could also constitute a space where specific constituents reside, biding their time, until an appropriate opportunity, 'a market niche' (Lawson, 2016), presents itself in the dominant orientation of the 'ocean'.

To extend the 'oceans of knowledge' metaphor, we introduce additional maritime considerations to capture the full complexity of the factors at play when considering how to most effectively develop a capacity to engage with academic and institutional changes in productive, proactive ways. **Estuaries** are part of the mouth or lower course of a river in which the river's current meets the sea's tide. An estuary has one or more rivers (or streams) flowing into it and with a free connection to the open sea. Estuaries form a transition zone between river environments and other maritime environments. This can convey the merging of established academic discipline areas. **Confluence** is the meeting of two or more bodies of water. Also known as a conflux, it refers either to the point where a tributary joins a larger river or where two streams meet to become the source of a river of a new name. This can convey sub-disciplines that come together to inform and establish an academic discipline.

**Using the metaphor to explore capacity**

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An interesting challenge in considering the applicability of the ocean metaphor to our intention of considering how PESP can most effectively develop a capacity to engage with academic and institutional changes in productive, proactive ways, is determining where to start. Do we begin mapping our construction and subsequent understanding of what is determined as the ultimate knowledge base ('ocean') or do we begin with the more discrete area of PESP? Given the infinite variety of combinations and constant 'flow' conveyed through Manathunga and Brew's (2014) metaphor, it is perhaps not as important to consider the starting point but rather to ensure that we accurately map the factors and forces that contribute to the realization of PESP developing a capacity to engage with academic and institutional changes in productive, proactive ways. Again, it is important to consider the reciprocal relationship, the 'give and take'. That is, consider effective teaching and learning in schools (and associated spaces such as after-school physical activity and community-school programmes) and determine what it means to be physically educated. At the same time, considering how this knowledge might be valued beyond the discipline of PESP, and what other disciplines might inform our understanding of what might be valued.

### *Confluence:*

'Confluence' encourages us to consider how the established academic disciplines have come to be. Different authors have chosen to construct PESP in different ways and include the teaching and learning of purposeful human movement (Crum, 1986; Schempp, 1996), educational aspects of physical activity and sport (Grupe & Kruger, 1996; Haag, 1989), inquiry into teaching and coaching in a variety of contexts (Pieron, Cheffers & Barrette, 1990) and dimensions of knowledge (curriculum), learners and learning and teachers/teaching and coaches/coaching (Armour, 2011). In considering each of these constructions (potentially aligned with 'bodies of

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water’), the challenge is to determine the underlying principle that determines PESP (as a ‘river’). We suggest that it is to consider effective teaching and learning in schools (and associated spaces such as after-school physical activity and community-school programmes) and determining what it means to be physically educated (i.e., the source of the river). Lawson (2009) introduces an emergent conceptual framework for studying the relationship among researchers’ social-cultural organization, the dynamics of PE’s research-based knowledge system(s) and specific school programme preferences and prototypes. Paradigms for PE and PETE follow suit and the associated categories and labels signal important internal dynamics regarding what knowledge and whose knowledge counts, and consequently what constitutes ‘research’, within the PESP space. Lawson (2009) also explores how the discipline power of the ‘gatekeeper’, “enables them to keep ‘insiders in’ and ‘outsiders out.’ Significantly, gatekeepers’ disciplining activities and social sorting impacts PE’s knowledge production, dissemination and utilization. After all, when researchers are excluded from paradigms, exemplars, segments and networks, so are their research frameworks, questions, and resultant knowledge” (p. 106). This is an important conversation to allude to when we consider how such gatekeepers’ involvement can determine the extent to which PESP is positioned not only as a respected academic discipline (a ‘river’) but also as a discipline that wishes to avail of opportunities to work with others (culminating in an ‘estuary’) in a bid to access, and contribute to, what is determined as meaningful knowledge and the dominant orientations of universities (the ‘ocean’).

*River:*

Academic disciplines have established their own unique way in which they contribute to specific knowledge bases, e.g., kinesiology to the physiological, mechanical and psychological study of human movement; public health to establishing how best to improve and support the health of

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people and communities; teacher education to how best to prepare (prospective) teachers to be effective practitioners. Each can be conceived as a 'river' with the potential, if they wish, to work with, and learn from, each other in a bid to merge as an 'estuary' and gain access to the 'ocean'. That is, dependent on the context in which the specific disciplines reside at a specific point in time, they can be considered as 'bounded' disciplines as well as cross-disciplinary.

Drawing on the work of Golde and proceeding with a specific focus on Kinesiology with its sub-disciplines, Lawson (2016) explored the preparation and support of faculty stewards in a special framework that emphasizes important boundaries. He emphasized needs and opportunities for disciplinary stewards to analyze, strengthen, and alter as needed the inherited boundaries for the sub-disciplines, Kinesiology overall, and the host university. He also interestingly considers additional opportunities that reside at the boundaries between Kinesiology, the host university, and a global society's needs and opportunities.

*Estuary:*

Those who wish to gain access to, and contribute to, the 'ocean', need to consider how best to work with, and position themselves alongside, others to be a strong and compelling entity that can be competitive in securing funding that will allow them to contribute to the expanse and quality of knowledge (related to policy and practice) residing in the 'ocean'. The undisputable end goal would be increasing lifelong activity in a way that enhances quality of life. In many instances this encourages multi- and inter-disciplinary paradigms in a bid to compile comprehensive, multi-method and competitive research projects. This merging of established academic disciplines (potentially each conceived as a 'river') aligns with the 'estuary' metaphor in that it provides a transition zone from individual rivers to a collective body of rivers accessing the 'ocean' at the same point. Holding with the metaphor, like estuaries, the transition zone is

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often turbulent, as currents push against one another to find ways to get to the rivers and then to the ocean.

*Inlet:*

The constant changing flow conveyed by the metaphor is encouraging for disciplines to consistently consider making connections and pursuing collaborations among colleagues and other disciplines in that they are strategically positioned when the tide changes ('inlet'), or indeed to influence the direction of the tide.

*Ocean:*

Higher education can be aligned with the notion of the corporate, audit culture, university. That is, a higher-education model that is focused on status, its view of students as consumers and a reliance on top-down administration that often values research funding as more valuable than quality teaching and service. Perhaps the most visible sign of corporate higher education is, as it is in many countries, the strive to score well in national and international ratings exercises completed across universities. Scoring well in such exercises results in universities, not unsurprisingly, shaping their internal policies to align with, and increase their performance in, the metrics that determine the rankings of the university. The QS World University Rankings evaluate six metrics with the highest weighting (40%) allotted to an institution's 'academic reputation' score regarding teaching and research quality. A further 20% weighting is allotted to citations per faculty (deemed to capture the research output) so it becomes evident that the focus on research activity, across the two metrics, results in a considerable contribution to the final score. It is made blatantly clear to all academics in Irish university contexts, as well as many Canadian university contexts, that productive research activity is not only the dominant discourse but the path on which academics, and in turn the university, are rewarded in terms of (monetary)

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status. Perhaps not surprisingly, but of specific importance to PESP academics and this paper, is the finding that ‘disciplines strongly oriented to training practitioners are slowest’ in their rates to promotion (Ornstein, Stewart & Drakich, 2007, p. 1).

Given that universities do not have an abundance of money to finance the high levels of research to make themselves competitive against other universities, there is continual pressure on academics to secure large research funding streams external to the university. We contend that the prevalence of such a strong research culture constitutes what ‘counts’ as valuable knowledge, i.e., areas of knowledge that are attractive to external funding bodies. This brings about questions surrounding how all academics, particularly PESP professionals for this paper, negotiate their own identities, values and dispositions within the hyper-competitive environment that may or may not prescribe to the same values. This, in turn, determines the expanse and quantity of knowledge that resides in the ‘ocean’, acknowledging Manathunga and Brew’s (2014) observation that ‘oceans’ have tides, displaying tendencies for different aspects to dominate at different times.

### **Worked examples of the ocean metaphor in an Irish and Canadian context**

#### **Irish example**

*Confluence:*

PESP at the University of Limerick resides in the Department of Physical Education and Sport Sciences. There is a distinct demarcation between the two ‘subject areas’, i.e., PE and sport sciences, not only in the areas of teaching but also in research groupings. In terms of research interests and expertise, all eight sport pedagogues are grouped under ‘Sport Pedagogy’ and the sport science colleagues reside in one of three groups - ‘Food for Health’, ‘Physical Activity and Health’ and ‘Sport and Human Performance’. Interestingly, all eight sport pedagogues share

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similar philosophies of what constitutes meaningful and relevant knowledge in the field of PETE and (by association) research interests and expertise. Such a critical mass of like-minded individuals certainly strengthens the positioning of PESP as an academic discipline in the Department. However, it is likely that the unity of such a group may in some way have contributed to a lack of engagement and exploration in challenging the extent to which the underlying principles of PESP could be extended to contribute to other disciplines or indeed the potential of other disciplines to contribute to PESP. An example of this lack of reciprocity between Sport Pedagogy and Sport Science in the Department was the evolution of two formalized research centers. These two research centers involve physical activity in one way or another in the Department, the ‘Physical Education, Physical Activity and Youth Sport (PEPAY) Ireland Research Centre’ and the ‘Centre for Physical Activity and Health Research (CPAHR)’. The reason that this arose was because two communities of academics within the one department (i.e., PESP and Physical Activity and Health) were overly protective of what they believed was the central focus of their research, i.e., PE and health respectively, and consequently being unable to agree to a shared title and vision for a research center. In this specific Department context there has been limited consideration of how potential PESP sub-disciplines (in addition to PETE) could contribute to the formation and establishment of PESP (‘confluence’).

*River:*

The individual path of PESP (as a ‘river’) as it attempts to connect (or not) with other disciplines (‘reaching other bodies of water’) is a current interest of the Faculty of Education and Health Sciences in which the PESP academic discipline resides, and more specifically an interest of the recently formed School of Education. The School of Education now houses all staff delivering

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teacher education programmes apart from PESP staff who deliver the PETE programmes and reside in the Department of Physical Education and Sport Sciences. The current proposal is to consider ‘moving’ PE (and by association the critical mass of eight sport pedagogues) from the Department of Physical Education and Sport Sciences to the recently convened School of Education. The School of Education have been honest in stating that the interest in such a ‘move’ is that the School would be inheriting more students and the sizeable research metrics that are consistently produced by the PESP group. A concern for the sport pedagogues is that such a move may diminish the current autonomy and identity of subject expertise the PESP group currently have. However, there is an attraction to the possibility that such a move could result in an increase in PESP’s exposure in the institution as credible teacher educators. That is, PESP (as a ‘river’) could work with, and learn from, teacher education (as a ‘river’) in a bid to merge as an ‘estuary’ and gain access to what the University determines as valuable knowledge and related worthwhile and rewarding opportunities (the ‘ocean’).

*Estuary:*

A recent opportunity for academic disciplines (‘rivers’) to come together in a bid to connect with the University’s strategic positioning (the ‘ocean’) was a seed funding call through an initiative to bring about closer collaboration between three partner higher education institutes in the specific area of Educational Studies. To maximize the research capacity of the collaboration, applications were required to demonstrate the need for interdisciplinary/multidisciplinary research in achieving the research objectives and the potential for establishing an interdisciplinary critical mass in the proposed research area. Applications were also to be submitted by inter-institute consortium. PESP has engaged with the opportunity and secured

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funding that results in working on one project that includes teacher education, assessment and subject disciplines and another on teacher education and technology.

*Ocean:*

The success of PESP aligning with other disciplines (the ‘estuary’) in a bid to connect with the University’s strategic positioning (the ‘ocean’) is very much determined by the extent to which the University values such activity. The University’s Strategic Plan is clear in noting that the University has competitive challenges in terms of research performance and its international profile. The nature of each of these challenges is reinforced through the University’s celebration of successful research income, research collaborations with industry and commercialization related to venture capital investment and spin-out companies sold. Such measures of success are more easily attained in specific disciplines and, it is perhaps not surprising to note in the University’s Research Strategy that, the areas considered as research strengths are advanced manufacturing, software, applied mathematical sciences, health and materials. To intensify critical mass in the identified areas of research strength, three formalized University-based institutes have been established – one to foster multidisciplinary research collaboration with health practitioners, one to build on significant strengths in applied sciences and engineering and one in software engineering.

If PESP as an academic discipline in the University wishes to connect with the University’s research priorities (the ‘ocean’), then it appears that the only way to do this is to align itself with, and work with, discipline areas that allow PESP to contribute to multidisciplinary research collaborations (the ‘estuary’) to support discovery and innovation in health and wellbeing. The extent to which the current establishment and practice of the PESP academic discipline (the ‘confluence’) in the University encourages this is questionable. PESP would be required to be

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proactive in exploring and deliberating the extent to which it would be prepared to re-constitute PESP with a view to more obviously connecting with the University's research priorities (perhaps as an 'inlet' until the right opportunity arises). It is feasible to consider that opportunities to consider re-constitution to a more obvious health agenda reside in exploring multidisciplinary opportunities with sport sciences, allied clinical therapies, education, medicine, nursing and midwifery, and psychology. Interestingly, all such disciplines reside in the same faculty as PE, that is, the Faculty of Education and Health Sciences. Such a structure could perhaps be considered as an 'already-made estuary' where there is an obvious thread on how and why such disciplines should consider working together.

### **Canadian example**

*Confluence:*

McGill University has a long history surrounding PE and PE pedagogy and in fact housed the first PE programme in Canada. Present day sees PE residing in the Kinesiology and Physical Education (KPE) Department, which is housed under the larger Faculty of Education. Within KPE we have those who consider themselves Kinesiologists (physiologists, biomechanists, and exercise psychologists) and those who consider themselves PE pedagogues (PEP) (pedagogues, teacher educators and sociologists). In a department of 17, three of us fit into the PEP area. In distinct contrast to the University of Limerick, we do not have a critical mass of scholars, and even between the three of us who identify as PEP we fish in very different rivers and have differing understandings about what would should 'count' as research. For example, each of us studies different content areas (sociology of sport, adapted physical activity and PE pedagogy), uses different methodologies (mixed, critical, interpretivist) and write for different audiences (policy makers, sociologists, teacher educators). From the metaphor of disciplinary boundaries as

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static, one might position us as being isolated even within our own small department and from one another. However, in thinking with the confluence aspect of the metaphor, perhaps unlike the University of Limerick, this offers an opportunity or need to find ways to collaborate. Within our department is the McGill Centre for Physical Activity and Health. While there are diligent attempts to incorporate the interests of the Centre with PEP (the ‘estuaries’), the tide has not met the stream. Our undergraduate students are registered in two distinct programmes that clearly delineates a distinction between who is becoming a kinesiologist and who is becoming a PE teacher. While not negative, there is a feeling of ‘us’ and ‘them.’ Different programme options, scholarship applications, practicums and career opportunities help to make explicit disciplinary differences. Those graduate students registered in a kinesiology area graduate with a M.Sc. and those registered in the PEP programme graduate with a M.A. Tensions are present between the different values, productivity, lab sizes and research funding capacity, particularly when deciding what is considered meritorious academic work.

### *The River*

While there was discussion in the past about housing PEP closer to the Education Faculty, the *river* that is PEP continues to reside in KPE. While there are political and economic reasons for this, there has also come to be. An appreciation for the knowledge and understanding that comes from engaging in social science research situated within PE and physical activity. For example, PEP scholars bring a nuanced understanding around study design and research methodologies that provides new insight for those situated in the river that is kinesiology. It is also helpful that each of the PEP individuals has been able to access large Tri-Council Funded<sup>1</sup> grants that have

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<sup>1</sup> The Tri-Councils in Canada are the Social Science Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), Canadian Institute of Health Research (CIHR) and Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC)

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enabled the funding of graduate students, publishing and international knowledge translation opportunities. Perhaps in some ways showing both the economic impact, but also the socially justified importance of our work. Thinking again about the metaphor, the conceived 'rivers' that are kinesiology and PE have the opportunity to work with, learn from each other, and perhaps merge as an 'estuary' that allows access to the larger 'ocean'.

### *Estuary*

Perhaps it is best to provide a concrete example, to give a sense of how working together has provided the creation of 'estuaries'. A partnership has been created between researchers in the Department of Family Medicine, School of Nutrition, Department of Kinesiology and PE (both Kinesiologists and PEP researchers). Researchers in Family Medicine and the School of Nutrition have been engaged in a diabetes prevention project in an Indigenous community. The PEP researchers have worked extensively in Indigenous communities offering developmental movement opportunities as well as youth development and wellness opportunities. In this project, the PEP researcher will not only create the developmental PE after-school programme but will involve pre-service teachers. The inclusion of pre-service teachers offers a number of opportunities. One is to see that, as PE teachers, they are also researchers that can contribute to the broader conversation around physical activity and quality of life. It also offers opportunities for them to metaphorically move from seeing themselves as situated in rivers, to situated in estuaries that both contribute to their development and allow them to be valued pieces of a larger puzzle. The Family Medicine and School of Nutrition research would be seen as contributing to the 'river' of health promotion. The PEP researcher would be working within the 'river' of PE and physical activity. We have also included the 'river' of physiology to better help us to measure moderate to vigorous physical activity as well as bio-metric markers related to diabetes

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prevention. In this case we have four, what would seem to be distinct, ‘rivers’ merging to create an ‘estuary.’ Drawing further on the notion of ‘inlet’, the constant changing flow conveyed by the metaphor is encouraging for disciplines to consistently consider making connections and pursuing collaborations among colleagues and other disciplines in that they are strategically positioned when the tide changes (‘inlet’), or indeed to influence the direction of the tide. While these ‘rivers’ may seem distinct, it is evident through conversations that, although we may be measuring extremely different aspects, using different methodologies and accessing diverse audiences, there is a shared end goal of understanding how physical activity relates to an enhanced quality of life.

### *The Ocean*

McGill has a strong history of achievement and consistently ranks as one of the top research universities in the world. While there are different methodologies used to rank universities, it is quite clear that McGill considers itself a research-intensive university that prides itself on leveraging external funding, international graduate students, publishing papers in high impact journals, and funding graduate students. Like all universities, there are certain disciplines that align more congruently with the metrics used to measure what a successful university looks like and in turn what a successful discipline looks like. KPE, given its small size, has had a significant impact in the areas described above with respect to partnerships with professional organizations, international graduate students, large amounts of funding and housing Canadian Research Chairs. Subsequently, KPE has found ways to become a contributing ‘estuary’ to what is envisaged as the larger ocean. However, the role that PEP has played in this, up to this point, is somewhat tenuous. In fact, up until a few years ago it looked as though the PEP programme would be subsumed by Kinesiology like some other Canadian universities. In a re-imagining of

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what a PEP researcher looks like within this KPE programme, one can appreciate how this somewhat unique merging of ‘rivers’ garners funding opportunities from diverse funding bodies. It also offers increasing dissemination opportunities, collaboration between faculty departments and, in turn, graduate students who become versed in seeing these ‘estuaries’ as something that is common practice. While not the scope of this paper, there is a cautionary tale around how the merging of disciplines into estuaries also entails a negotiation of identity that, as any passionate PESP professional knows, is a complex and difficult process.

### **Reconsidering the ocean metaphor**

In working through the respective Irish and Canadian examples, we propose Figure 1 as an illustration of the main tenants of the ocean metaphor that illustrate the thoughts and experiences we have shared above. While we are aware of not overtly supporting buying into the corporate politics of the university, by conceiving each discipline area as a ‘river’, there is continued momentum in higher education institutes to work with, and learn from, each other in a bid to merge as an ‘estuary’ / research group and gain access to the ‘ocean’ / corporatized university. This does not exclude the possibility of individual discipline areas / ‘rivers’ from making their own way towards the ocean / corporatized university, but, as alluded to in the above examples, is becoming less encouraged and supported by institutes.

[Insert Figure 1 here]

### **Concluding comments**

By presenting two worked examples, the intention is to encourage colleagues to appreciate moving beyond using a metaphor of ‘oceans’ and other bodies of water, to seeing ‘oceans’ as a metaphorical concept that helps us to better illustrate the positioning of PESP and its potential for engagement with other disciplines and related professions. This can result in a reciprocated

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relationship increasing the visibility and credibility of PESP and also in PESP strengthening other disciplines. Such reciprocation can result in increased opportunities to secure external funding and, in turn, increase opportunities for inter-disciplinary collaboration and therefore overall impact.

Areas of advocacy arise for us as sport pedagogues if we are to remain cognizant of PESP’s capacity to best position itself in the ever-changing academic climate. If we consider the extent to which experienced PESP scholars require support and a skill-set to facilitate their own ‘entry to’, and involvement in, interdisciplinary research teams, this will strengthen the confidence and subsequent contribution that PESP can make to more strategically funded research opportunities. Let us be clear. This is not a push to forgo what we do well in PESP to become more valued, but more an exercise in finding ways to incorporate what we do well into a broader research agenda. Perhaps it is an opportunity to foster *inlets* that ready us to contribute to estuaries and, in turn, the larger University. If we do not, PESP will continue to ‘fly under the university radar’ (Kirk, 2014).

If we ensure experienced PESP scholars mentor early-career / younger PESP colleagues, to encourage them to contribute to, and develop their own, interdisciplinary research themes, we instill a shared appreciation for supportive mentoring and professional development conversations. The vision for this is that it not only prepares younger PESP colleagues but offers them an opportunity to build a repertoire of work that is valued by Kinesiology programmes where many of them will be applying for jobs. If they do not see themselves as being able to create a sustainable dossier as a PESP scholar, we risk losing early-career / younger PESP colleagues to other sub-disciplines / disciplines that do offer more attractive collaborative research opportunities (Lawson, 2009), and in turn more productive research agendas.

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If we remain cognizant of the tensions between being seen ‘to do’ the scholarship related to PESP and being compliant with institutional imperatives, we remain aware of the importance and need to explore the ongoing re-positioning of the PESP discipline. This is not to deny that the continuing rhetoric from institutions to be involved in interdisciplinary research, while retaining disciplinary forms of organization through department structures, fuels this tension for some. If we do engage with the rhetoric, it can increase the groups and communities in which PESP resides, contributes and is subsequently represented. In addition, it will introduce PESP scholars to interdisciplinary approaches and access to infrastructures with ‘adjoining estuaries or confluences’. If we do not, PESP could lose out on accessing opportunities that we would be unlikely to secure as a freestanding local, national or international community. This, in turn, may result in PESP becoming detached (and irrelevant) to dominant discourse and practices being supported at institution level and beyond. It is imperative that the work shared in this paper is extended to identify the potential ramifications that PESP’s engagement with other disciplines and professions has on the possibilities for PESP to be part of a wider network of knowledge production that impacts PE and PETE.

Further tensions arise when we consider what PESP may have to ‘give up’ or compromise to become a meaningful contributor to interdisciplinary research. This may entail renegotiating PESP values, ideals and dispositions to ensure a fit with university requirements. We therefore need to consider the consequences for PESP – would this be PESP ‘selling out’ or is such exploration necessary if PESP is to become an integral part of the ‘ocean’? What impact might this have on the collective identity of PESP and in turn the individual identities of those who imagine themselves as solely PESP scholars? Such consideration encourages PESP not only to strive to survive but to thrive in doing so.

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Figures

Figure captions