A Tale of Two Words: An Exploratory Study in the Perceptions of Swimming Teacher/Coach Development in the UK

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Abstract: Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in sports has traditionally been more systematically underdeveloped, with coaches preferring informal approaches to learning. The impact of formal training has little value or impact on the practice of coaches. CPD is not compulsory and is left to the individual teacher/coach, should they choose to participate. Within the UK swimming context, the teaching and coaching of swimming are split into two distinct pathways. Coach development is controlled by the National Governing Body (NGB), but the teaching of swimming development is delegated to swimming providers. A way to address Coach Development is increasing research in other sports around the role of the Coach Developer, which is designed to support coach learning in the workplace. Whilst much of the training to be a coach developer is generic rather than sport-specific, it is necessary to investigate what they do and how they function and work with coaches to improve learning as a form of professional development. Aim: The research aimed to explore the effectiveness of the professional development in swimming practitioners (Coach Educators, Teachers, and Coaches). Methodology: An application of critical theory influenced the study, emphasizing how individuals promote democracy and equality, in particular the work of Freire (1970) and his concept of critical pedagogy. The study consisted of a semi-structured series of 25 interviews with coach educators, swim school owners, and practitioners, and a few interviewees operating at a policy level. Finally, two interviewees were senior coach developers. The questions were organized around specific themes ranging from their teaching/coaching role in swimming or a related sport, teaching and learning characteristics, and their perspectives on the state of practice and their CPD programme. Findings: There are three main themes: 1. The lack of strategic leadership does not promote effective pedagogy. Devolution of responsibility results in a lack of communication and accountability between the National Governing Body and Swim Providers. The career pathways, including the various roles and responsibilities within swimming, are unclear. 2. The practitioner is underdeveloped in their pedagogical practice. The Coach Education programme is inconsistent in preparing the Coach Educators to train teachers/coaches, especially in pedagogy practice. Consequently, the teacher/coach has shortcomings in being prepared for the world of work. 3. The weak Continuing Professional Development is impacting the practice of practitioners. There are inconsistencies in teaching, learning, and assessment within the industry. There are deficiencies in the frameworks for structures, support, and resources. Conclusion: The tale of two tails of two words joined together but working at different ends. Consequently, the professional development provision in swimming is poor. Many swim school providers endeavor to provide the best possible service. These providers do not consistently develop or support their teachers/coaches to improve their pedagogical practice. CPD is non-statutory; there are mixed perspectives on the need for improving knowledge (professional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal). There is a lack of collective responsibility and accountability of teachers in monitoring and improving practice so that standards of teaching, learning and assessment can improve.

Keywords: coach developer, pedagogy, sports coaching, swimming

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