International Journal of Education and Humanities
ISSN: 2770-6702 | Vol. 25, No. 2, 2026

The Role of Professional Coaching in Developing Youth Physical Literacy in Swimming Education: Perspectives on Coaching Practice and Professional Identity

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Abstract: The study investigates the function of professional coaching in the development of youth physical literacy in swimming education, from the viewpoints of coaching practice and professional identity. This study considers swimming coaching as an instructional instrument for developing movement competence, confidence, motivation, knowledge, safety awareness and long-term participation instead of focusing on swimming techniques or competitive performance. Utilising studies on coach learning, coaching effectiveness, physical literacy, youth sport development and aquatic literacy, the paper explores how professional coaches establish learning environments through task design, feedback, inclusivity, emotional climate and reflective decision-making. It also examines how coaches' professional identity affects their focus on technical selection, immediate outcomes or the larger development of young players. This is a conceptual, literature-based investigation, not original data research, review of individual coaches, or a causal analysis of a specific program.

Keywords: Professional Coaching, Physical Literacy, Swimming Education, Youth Development, Coaching Practice, Aquatic Literacy.

1. Introduction

The teaching of swimming is an important part of the system for developing the physical fitness and sports ability of teenagers, as well as a safe place for exercise. Swimming is not only about learning the technical strokes at a young age. They are learning about buoyancy, resistance, breath control, orientation, balance, cooperation, risk, self-regulation, etc., in a different way than land-based sports. Therefore, the extent of coaching will determine whether swimming is regarded as a narrow-focus high-performance sport or an all-round way to foster general physical fitness for all people.

Physical literacy provides a good conceptual system for understanding the extended educational function. Physical literacy refers to all-around development of abilities, self-confidence and motivation for participation in sports, etc.; it is not about measuring performance. These refer to a person's ability to move safely and efficiently in the water, a desire for challenge, an awareness of the aquatic environment, and the capacity to make reasonable choices in movement in swimming education.

Good coaches are needed to help students study effectively. Instructional decisions affect the practice tasks, the communication techniques, the criteria for growth, the perceptions of achievement and the relationship with young swimsuits and families. Coaches have developed their own professional cultures and place different priorities on competition, technique, safety, inclusion, etc. This paper will explore, through the lenses of coaching practice and professional identity, how professional coaching helps to develop the young physical literacy in the environment of swimming education. It is an idea or a discussion of existing studies; no new data or swimming plans are provided.

2. Conceptual Foundations: Coaching, Professional Identity, and Physical Literacy

Professional Coaching is not only about skills. Following the work of Gilbert and Trudel [1], youth coaches are improving their methods through experience, reflection, experimentation and evaluation. Coaches need to adjust to various conditions during the organization of swimming classes; for example, children vary in their water confidence, coordination ability, previous experience, learning speed and emotional response to pressure. Another manifestation of a coach's ability to motivate students is the capacity to modify training content based on the students' responses during class.

Lyle [2] considered coaching to be a whole-process of decision-making that included planning, motivation, goal setting, and all-around development of participants. In the case of teaching young children to swim, professional instruction involves choosing the order of skill teaching, balancing safety and exploration, managing fear, and setting goals for progress. A high-focus concentration on the technique of strokes may lead to good results in swimming but fail to boost the young person's self-confidence, interest or sustained motivation for learning.

These judgements are determined by the coach's professional identity. Coach learning, believe Cushion, Armour and Jones is intimately connected to experience and ongoing growth should critically engage with the practical information coaches employ on a daily basis [3]. Professional identity is not a mere diploma or work title. This encompasses the coach's attitudes about young people, expertise, authority, achievement, inclusion and the purpose of sport. In swimming education, a coach who defines success as competitive selection at an early age may structure practice differently than a coach who defines success as the development of competent, confident and responsible participants in the

aquatic environment.

Côté and Gilbert propose an integrative definition of coaching efficacy that emphasises the connection between professional knowledge, interpersonal knowledge, and intrapersonal information [4]. This three-part approach is particularly applicable to youth swimming. Professional knowledge underpins lesson design and technical correction. Interpersonal knowledge underpins communication, trust and group climate. Intrapersonal knowledge underpins self-awareness, ethical judgement and reflection. All three are required for the development of physical literacy, because youth learning is concurrently motor, emotional, social and cognitive.

These areas of coaching are connected by the educational approach of physical literacy. Whitehead's seminal work defines physical literacy as a lifelong approach to motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding [5]. This concept moves the concern from a young swimmer to be able to duplicate a perfect stroke in one session. The question is: Is the swimmer developing the attitude and capacity to engage in meaningful physical activity in a variety of environments and across a lifespan?

Developmental Model of Sport Participation A youth-development perspective. Côté and Vierimaa address the effects of routes of involvement, sampling, play, practice, and transitions on sustained engagement and development in sport [6]. While swimming is generally taught through a systematic progression, youth physical literacy is improved when coaching maintains age-appropriate enjoyment, discovery and meaningful choice, rather than hurrying all learners toward performance specialisation.

The International Physical Literacy Association formalises the widely used term by associating physical literacy with a duty for life-long commitment in physical activity [7]. This obligation in water is to know yourself, to be able to judge what is safe in the water, to show consideration for others and to know your own limitations. Professional coaching in swimming can therefore be seen as an educational technique that develops circumstances for young people to become not just better swimsuits, but also more capable and self-directed participants in aquatic life.

3. Coaching Practice as a Pathway to Youth Physical Literacy

The first pathway is designed learning activities. You get to be physically literate through active movement experiences, not by watching. Cairney et al. established an evidence-informed conceptual model of physical literacy within the framework of physical activity and health, considering cognitive, affective, physical and behavioural aspects [8]. Therefore, task design in swimming teaching should include more than stroke drills. Coaches can develop flexible water competence through games, diverse body positions, floating challenges, breath control exploration, directional changes and object interaction, and cooperative exercises.

"Building confidence and motivation is the second technique. Young children have different levels of familiarity, previous experience, or fear of water surroundings. A qualified coach can use language, advancement, feedback and peer interaction to establish whether challenge is seen as dangerous or doable. Whitehead's thesis means that confidence and motivation are important for ongoing participation [5]. Coaching technique should identify improvement, effort, self regulation and learning process and not only speed, rank or technical compliance.

The third channel is the relationship between aquatic expertise and wider understanding. Invernizzi et al. studied the effect of numerous pedagogical strategies in swimming-school training on perceptions of aquatic motor abilities of parents and children [9]. Their study emphasises the role of perceived ability and teaching technique in aquatic instruction. From this perspective, coaches might associate technical instruction with knowledge of water safety, awareness of personal limits, and adaptive engagement with aquatic situations.

The fourth avenue is student orientated pedagogy. The literature on aquatic-literacy indicates that the approach adopted to teach can alter how children and parents see aquatic participation [9]. In practice a coach can offer structured choice, support problem solving, focus through questions and customise exercises to individual readiness. Learner-centred coaching is not the absence of standards or correction. Therefore, technical instruction is related to the experience of the swimmer and young people are seen as active learners.

The fifth way is the increasing structure of involvement. Côté and Vierimaa suggest that youth sport routes should focus on involvement, human development and transition rather than only early elite outcomes [6]. Professional swimming teachers (coaches) need to differentiate between starting classes, water-safety programs, recreational squads and performance pathways. Mixing environments might lead to over-expectation, early selection or exclusion of learners with the potential to attain excellent aquatic literacy and lifelong engagement.

The sixth pathway is inclusive communications. Professional coaches establish the social meaning of competence through discussion about ability, failure, gender, body type, handicap and progress. Côté and Gilbert's emphasis on interpersonal knowing means that effective coaching includes communication customised to the learner and the situation [4]. "Inclusive communication in swimming can help to break down the embarrassment of being afraid of water, help to support each other and create an environment where young people feel comfortable to ask for help and try new skills."

These pathways illustrate that coaching practice is not merely a delivery process for swimming technique. Physical literacy is fostered or inhibited by the immediate surroundings. Coaches develop competence with confidence, understanding and ongoing motivation by creating diverse, safe, challenging and respectful learning experiences for young swimsuits.

4. Professional Identity and the Quality of Swimming Education

The qualities of a good teacher will determine what a person pays more attention to. A coach who considers himself to be a former athlete would be motivated to organise youth training according to performance indicators, quantity and technical corrections. A coach who thinks he is a teacher will probably focus more on learning and caring for all the students' needs. The above views are not mutually exclusive, and the relative weights of these ideas will affect the interpretation of physical literacy in daily swimming practice.

Research on coaches' learning has shown that identity is forged through experience and reflection, not official

recognition. Gilbert and Trudel have shown that young coaches develop strategies by means of reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action and retrospective evaluation [1]. This has direct implications for the swimming body. The design of professional development should provide coaches with a system to reflect on how their beliefs in talent, discipline, fear, involvement and success affect the learning environment.

Cushion, Armour and Jones believe that coach education often lacks sufficient connection with actual practice, and therefore, does not enable coaches to learn by doing [3]. Professional development for teachers of swimming education should not only cover new techniques and rules. Mentorship, peer observation, video-assisted reflection, learner feedback and discussion of difficult coaching cases should also be added. Therefore, the coach's professional identity can be connected to the broader educational goals.

Coaching effectiveness is also based on this idea. Côté and Gilbert have listed the attributes of good coaching as professional, interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge [4]. Even a technically proficient swimming coach will be unable to foster the all-round development of young athletes if they are uncommunicative or lack self-awareness. Conversely, a helpful coach may be unable to offer practical advice without professional training. As a physical-literacy-oriented coach, the three types of information need to be combined.

Also, current studies of aquatic literacy show that swimming education should not merely be seen as a stroke-based curriculum. In the thorough study, Mekkaoui et al. (2023) identified motor, psychological, affective, social and cognitive aspects linked to aquatic literacy in young children and highlighted limitations of the present data on interventions [10]. While the investigation is limited to children ages 4–6 years, the multifaceted paradigm given provides a helpful platform for analysing greater challenges in youth aquatic education.

Another significant angle is research on perceived physical literacy and coaching. Li et al. [11] examined the links between youth sport student-athletes' perceptions of physical literacy and coaching efficacy and leadership behaviour. This study shows that physical-literacy principles can be effectively explored in coaching situations, even if not in a swimming instruction environment. For the present conceptual debate, this finding highlights areas for future investigation of the relationship between coaches' grasp of physical literacy and communication, leadership and the quality of young learning environments.

Therefore, professional identity should be considered as a vital factor in swimming teaching. The upside question is how can professional coaches teach technique in ways that foster self-belief, safety awareness, agency, enjoyment and long-term participation.

5. Practical Development Directions

The first route of development is to create a physical-literacy framework within the swimming program. Learning outcomes in physical competence, confidence, motivation, knowledge, safety, and social involvement should be clearly articulated by coaches and program administrators. It doesn't mean abandoning stroke-based advancement. Rather it assures that technical advancement is related to broader educational goals, and that success is not measured in terms of speed or competition alone.

The second is to delineate pathways in coaching. The emphasis may need to be varied for beginner learners, for leisure participants, for young people returning after negative experiences, and for aspiring competitive swimsuits. The developmental model of sport participation implies that young routes must include possibilities for participation and personal development, as well as performance progression [6]. Therefore programs should not assume that all swimsuits are on the same trajectory.

The third direction is to enhance reflective professional growth. Informed by the coach-learning literature, swimming organisations can employ mentorship pairs, observation cycles, reflective journals, and communities of practice to support coaches' examination of real instructional decisions [1, 3]. Reflection should be on technical subjects, but also about inclusivity, managing fear, type of feedback, parent communication, group climate, and dealing with less advanced swimsuits.

The fourth direction is to employ aquatic literacy as a bridge between swimming education and water safety. Invernizzi and colleagues and Mekkaoui and colleagues define aquatic learning as competence, confidence and deeper comprehension [9, 10]. Embed safe aquatic decision-making into your regular sessions, including knowing your personal limits, knowledge of emergencies, safe behaviours around varied water situations, and respect for peers.

Develop assessments in line with the development of technical benchmarks and include them in formal evaluations; at the same time, consider confidence, self-regulation, understanding of the principles of safety, willingness to participate, and cooperative behaviour. Thus, in line with an all-around concept of physical literacy, young swimmers will not consider the temporary technological problems as their own fault.

Finally, the organisation should promote a professional culture focused on performance and the all-round development of employees. A coaching system focused solely on medals, selection rates, and short-term retention will not achieve the goals of inclusivity and education. A general assessment of coaching quality includes a safe learning environment, suitable development paths, positive relationships, the voices of participants, and continuous participation. This support will help professional coaches recognize the need for physical literacy in high-quality swimming education.

6. Conclusion

Coaches affect various practical and social circumstances of aquatic learning; therefore, professional coaching can be used to boost the development of youth physical literacy in swimming education. The Design of tasks, communication, progress reports, feedback, inclusion and safety will determine whether swimming is limited to technical demands or a valuable form of lifelong physical exercise.

Swimming physical literacy is not only about the ability to swim strokes. Competence, confidence, motivation, knowledge, understanding, safe judgement and responsible behaviour in the aquatic environment are included. Coaches can foster such qualities by applying professional knowledge and improving their interpersonal skills and self-awareness.

Therefore, the most promising way is to develop coaching practice and professional identity in parallel. Considering swimming coaches as educators of capable, confident and responsible young people can help improve performance and provide a lasting foundation for aquatic engagement and increased physical literacy.

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