Swimming in Schools: New Danish Directions

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This article presents and discusses results from a study on school swimming as part of physical education in Danish public schools. The aim is to compare swimming instruction in public school, as delivered by swim club trainers and school teachers qualified to teach swimming respectively, and to examine the skills that characterize the two groups of instructors in relation to the delivery of school swimming. Focus is on two main investigative areas: (1) The qualifications of the instructors in relation to the planning, organization and performance of teaching and their relational, pedagogical, didactic and classroom management skills, and (2) the pupils’ acquisition of core aquatic skills, their experience of instruction, their motivation and commitment. The study applies both qualitative and quantitative methods and data collection instruments. Information on and from a total of nine instructors and 92 pupils from six 4th and 5th grade classes are analyzed and presented. Overall, the results suggests that the quality of swim lessons has more to do with the instructor’s personal and professional competence than with their background as a teacher qualified as a swimming instructor or as a swim club trainer. The article concludes with recommendations on how to improve school swimming and a discussion on the implications of outsourcing areas of school sport and physical education to external providers like swimming clubs and associations.

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Introduction

For many years school swimming has been an important factor in the development of aquatic skills among Danish children. In this way public school (in Danish ‘Folkeskole’) has contributed to the safety of children and young people in and around water.

Danish municipalities are, as part of the overall Physical Education (PE) curriculum, obliged to offer swimming to children and young people. The ministerial aims, Common Objectives 2009 – Physical Education (Fælles Mål 2009 – Idræt), provide broad guidelines for how this part of PE should be realized (Danish Ministry of Education, 2009). However, the broadness of Common Objectives means that there are marked variations in what is offered to pupils – from classroom teaching to instruction in international-sized swimming pools.

Swimming instruction is typically delivered by teachers with supplementary training in aquatics. There have been few suggestions for other approaches to ensure that children and young people acquire necessary skills as regards swimming. However, in recent years various parties, among them core ministerial and municipal authorities, have raised the questions whether teaching children to swim should continue to be a task for schools. This development coincides with a period in which a number of the 98 Danish municipalities have chosen either to terminate swimming instruction altogether or are considering ways to reduce the number of lessons or the length of standard swimming lessons (Skovgaard, Lüders, von Seelen, Jensen, Ibsen, Nielsen & Marling, 2012; Skovgaard, 2013).

From a broader perspective there is general uncertainty as regards the position and status of PE teaching – and by extension swimming instruction – due to an ongoing and extensive restructuring of the Danish school system. In relation to PE there are potentially major changes in the pipeline; the most marked of these is that PE becomes an integrated part of an increased amount of school hours dedicated to play and movement activities. These lessons cannot, necessarily, be expected to provide opportunities for pupils to learn specific skills – for instance in relation to swimming and other water-related activities. In addition, there is some uncertainty as to the skills and qualifications that will be required of the teachers who will be carrying out these play and movement activities. Put together, these developments may well have an impact on the swimming skills of Danish children and young people – and this in a country that, surrounded by water and rich in lakes and streams, seems ideal for the practice of a range of activities such as swimming, surfing, sailing, canoeing and kayaking – not to mention a whole array of indoor swimming facilities.

There is, then, an urgent need to examine on the one hand how swimming is taught in public schools and on the other whether there might be ways to deliver swimming instruction other than the most typical method, in which the schools make use of their own teachers who are qualified swimming instructors.

Against such a background this article presents the results of the first study comparing swimming instruction in Danish public school, as delivered by swimming club trainers and school teachers qualified to teach swimming respectively. The aim has been to examine the skills that characterize the two groups of instructors in relation to the delivery of school swimming.
Aim and content

The article presents and discusses results of investigations completed in 2012 of swimming instruction in six selected school classes (4th and 5th grade) in three Danish municipalities. The focus of the article is on assessing swimming instruction as carried out by teachers qualified as swimming instructors compared to that carried out by club trainers (cf. fig. 1).

Methods

Focus has been on two main investigative areas:

1. The qualifications of the instructors in relation to the planning, organization and performance of the teaching and their relational, pedagogical, didactic and classroom management skills.
2. The pupils’ acquisition of core aquatic skills, their experience of instruction, their motivation and commitment.

The methods and instruments for data collection used in the study have been chosen and developed to secure that they would be operational and valid in relation to the study’s primary queries about swimming instruction (cf. 1. and 2. above). Allowance has been made for the resources that were available for the completion of the study. In practice this has meant applying a relatively simple framework for collecting quantitative data (cf. subsequent sections). In the qualitative approach, observation and interviews were used. In that way knowledge could be collected about the instructors’ pedagogical and didactic considerations in respect of their planning and delivery of instruction and a solid impression could be gained as regards the pupils’ learning and their experience of the instruction.
The following research methods were used:

- Structured observation of instructors and pupils
- Semi-structured interviews with instructors
- Screening of pupils’ skills and of their experience of the delivered instruction.

These methods comprise the operationalization of the principal aim of the study (cf. fig. 1 and points 1 and 2 above).

**Target groups for the study**

The study focuses on two target groups. On the one hand the teaching staff who carried out the instruction in the selected classes (n=9) and on the other 10 to 12-year-old pupils (4th and 5th graders) spread across 3 x 2 classes in three municipalities (n=92).

From the outset it was a requirement that the classes in the three municipal areas should be comparable as regards year group, learning facilities and other resources (e.g. instruction time and equipment). Criteria for comparability were met fully by two municipalities. One area could not completely adhere to the mentioned terms, because schools available for inclusion had timetabled their swimming instruction before the study was started. This meant that the target groups in that municipality were one 4th and one 5th grade class.

**Data material**

**The instructors**

To permit a comparative study of instructor’s didactic skills and reflections in relation to their planning, organization and delivery of swimming lessons, two qualitative approaches were used: 1. Observations and field notes and 2. Interviews. Focus has been on assessing the instructors’ way of securing effective learning processes for the pupils, to examine whether they have been able to create a positive learning environment – reflecting continuity and progression – and the degree to which instructors have been able to motivate, activate and maintain the pupils’ interest in swimming. Another aim has been to investigate the instructors’ ability to demonstrate authority, relational competence (generally understood as a cluster of features that allow teacher and pupils to interact with each other effectively) and classroom management.

**Observations and field notes**

A scheme for structured observations was prepared with ten main categories and a total of 83 indicators related to teaching approaches. Thus, the scheme constitutes a technical operationalization of the pedagogical and didactic qualifications of the instructors. Applying a structured observational scheme lowers the level of potential observer bias (i.e. the observers see what they expect to see) and observations are more manageable. A simple registration system was used whereby a marking was made every time an instructor acted in a way that corresponded to an indicator.
The scheme builds on Bjørndal (2003), who emphasizes four basic principles to be followed in the preparation of structured observational schemes.

- Indicators should be sufficiently well defined so that they can be identified with a high degree of certainty in relation to a graded scale (in this case a 5-point scale)
- Indicators should be formulated in such a way that the observed behavior is only registered under one of the overall categories of the observation scheme
- The number of categories and indicators should be in line with the aim of the observations
- The observation scheme should be formulated in such a way that it is easy for the observers to make their registrations.

Another background source has been Hilbert Meyer’s ten quality criteria for good teaching. These criteria are based on empirical research findings, to which Meyer has given his own independent slant (Meyer, H., 2005). Even though none of Meyer’s criteria are exclusively teacher oriented, the focus of his observations nevertheless lies on teachers and their forms of action. Furthermore, the criteria are defined in such a way that it is possible to observe, analyze and assess both direct instruction-based teaching and more open forms of instruction.

The observation scheme’s categories and indicators are also related to Nordenbo et al. (2008), who summarize what teachers have to be able to do in order to increase pupils’ learning. The authors condense the results and conclusions of their study into three competences that a teacher must possess:

1. Competence in subject-specific didactics,
2. Relational competence, and
3. Classroom management competence.

In specifying competence in subject-specific didactics, Nordenbo et al. make it clear that teachers should possess sufficient subject-specific didactic competence to be able to perform their teaching (in this case swimming instructions) in such a manner that they appear as professional authorities. When they speak of relational competence, Nordenbo et al. mean, for example, that individual teachers are able to bond with pupils, that teachers express – and possess – warmth, respect, trust and empathy. As regards classroom management Nordenbo et al. stress that individual teachers should lay down the framework for class behavior, set targets for pupils and tell them how teaching should be addressed.

The completed version of the observation scheme is dependent on a pilot test undertaken in the first round of visits at the selected municipalities and classes. After some minor adjustments the final scheme was given its final form and then used in subsequent observation rounds. In addition to the structured observation scheme, the observers made field notes.

**Interviews**

Prior to the interviews conducted with the involved instructors, a semi-structured interview guide was prepared that, in addition to questions about the instructor’s didactic and peda-
gogical thoughts about the delivery of swimming instruction, included questions based on Hiim and Hippe’s (2007) didactic relational model, which contains the following categories:

1. Preconditions for learning,
2. Learning facilities,
3. Learning goals,
4. Educational content,
5. Learning processes and

The reason for including Hiim and Hippe’s didactic relational model is that it focuses specifically on the interplay between pedagogical categories instructors should take into account in order to deliver quality teaching.

The Pupils

Skills and technique
In connection with the observed swimming lessons the pupils’ basic swimming skills and technical level was screened. Two screening schemes were applied – rating the pupil’s performance on a scale of 0-4 (cf. fig. 2).

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<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>High ability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Some Ability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Poor ability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>No ability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Cannot be assessed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2. Five point scale

The purpose of the screening process was to assess the pupils in relation to four basic skills: change of element, balance, breathing and movement (Bruun, Christiansen, Kirkegaard & Stormark, 2005), and technical performance in relation to the particular swimming styles they and their class worked on during the observation period.

Learning Rating Scale
To acquire an insight into the pupils’ experience of swimming instruction, the assessment instrument Learning Rating Scale (LRS) was used. According to the developers (Nissen, 2011), LRS provides a reliable description of pupils’ general experience of teaching – in relation to:

- learning experiences during swimming instruction (learning)
- whether they enjoy swimming instruction (feelings)
• the instructor’s way of teaching (methods)
• the instructor’s expectation of the individual pupil (expectations)

In this study LRS has been specifically adapted to swimming instruction. Pupils were given a total of four statements focusing on assessing learning and their experience of swimming instruction. For each statement pupils were asked to mark their assessment using a decimal scale from 0-10 cm. The more positive their assessment, the higher the number.

**Procedure for generating data**

**Instructors**

A total of seven observations of each class were conducted over the period of the study, which means that data was collected 42 times.

The way the observation scheme was used was that during the instruction the observers identified the indicators listed in the observation scheme. All indicators identified were crossed off in relation to a graded scale from 0 to 4. As a supplement to the observation scheme, the observers wrote down field notes during and after the lessons observed.

Interviews with all instructors were carried out in conjunction with the last round of observations. All interviews were recorded and scrutinized repeatedly in order to condense the responses and reflections of instructors in relation to the central interview themes.

**Pupils**

The pupils’ level in the four basic skills and their basic technique in selected styles (cf. section on skills and technique) were screened at the start and the end of the study to register the impact of instruction on pupils’ performance.

The children’s experience of the instruction was registered using the LRS scheme at the start of the observation period, halfway through and at the end of the study.

**Results**

*No systematic differences*

The ways swimming instruction is handled depends to a far greater degree on the personal qualifications of the instructor than on whether he or she is a certified teacher or club trainer. A number of differences between the six school classes studied became evident in the aims of instruction, its content and the ways of working, but the explanation for these differences is not to be found in the fact that the person standing at the poolside is either a club trainer or a teacher qualified to teach swimming.
**Learning facilities and the instructor’s background**

None of the instructors feel restricted by the available facilities for teaching and learning. In all cases instructors made good use of aids and equipment available to them.

The club trainers have between 3 and 35 years’ experience with swimming instruction. All trainers have been on courses hosted by the Danish Swimming Federation in relation to the learning activities presented in this article. The teachers’ experience with swimming instruction extends from 1½ to 8 years. Taken as a whole, all instructors (club trainers and teachers) appeared to be competent as regards delivering swimming instruction for children and youth.

**Knowing the children – as learners and in the round**

A recurrent theme in the interviews of teachers and trainers is that the former group, due to their regular encounters with the pupils at school, may have greater insight as regards pupils’ aptitude and ability. Trainers recognize that it can be a challenge to build relations with pupils but feel that they succeed in it. In the view of the trainers it is the same situation they are in when they instruct in club settings. In other words, they are used to assessing children’s aptitude and ability as regards participation in swimming instruction. Some of the trainers mention that at times it can be an advantage not to know that much about the pupils in advance, because as instructors they are not biased as regards, for example, ‘behavior problems’ or pupils’ social relations. It should be noted that the observations made in conjunction with this study do not suggest that there are challenges caused by trainers’ knowing less about the group of pupils they teach.

**Learning goals**

There are only minor differences in the goals set by teachers and club trainers as regards their course of instruction. Both groups stress a range of ‘soft’ values such as that ‘it should be fun’, ‘a sense of community should be created’, ‘children have to feel safe’ and ‘the joy of swimming should be a key learning goal’. In these types of targets there are only differences in emphasis between the classes from the participating municipalities and between teachers and trainers.

As regards aims that are specifically related to swimming technique, no overall differences can be seen between teachers and trainers.

Trainers take their practice instructing in clubs as their primary reference for setting targets, even though they do make allowances for subject relevant goals stated in Common Objectives and in the widely used Danish textbook on swimming instructions and aquatics, *Modern Swimming* (*Moderne Svømming*, cf. list of references: Bruun, Christiansen, Kirkegaard & Stormark). This relates to the fact that trainers do not feel that there are clear targets for school swimming. Like trainers, teachers feel that they cannot rely solely on Common Objectives and therefore to a large extent use their own experience as a reference for what they want to achieve in their swimming instruction.
Educational content

As was the case with aims and learning goals, no clear pattern emerges when the content of swimming classes, conducted by either teachers or trainers from the three municipalities, is compared. Within each municipal case there are, however, differences in the content of instruction by teachers vs. trainers. In one municipality the trainer focuses more on purely technical aspects of swimming, while the teacher places greater emphasis on open tasks. In another municipality the opposite is observed, and in the third case area there is no real difference between the content that teachers and trainers include in their lessons.

Generally it can be said that the content side of the instruction observed in all three cases tallied very well with the description relating to swimming in Common Objectives. To live up to Common Objectives, instruction in aquatic activities has to include the following content areas, water games, swimming, lifesaving and safety in water, as well as provide opportunities for increased body consciousness by sensing the body in a distinctive element. In addition Common Objectives briefly indicates the possibilities for progression that are to be found in swimming instruction: Involvement of relevant equipment in water, greater demands as regards swimming skills, improvement of technique, endurance and increasing distance (Ministry of Education, 2009).

Didactical considerations and teaching in practice

Neither teachers nor trainers plan their courses systematically using a didactic model, nor is there a firm pattern in the didactic considerations of instructors.

Even though no pattern or clear tendencies have been identified in their didactic considerations and choices, it can nevertheless be stated that there are differences in the didactical approach of different instructors. There is a general tendency for teachers to be better equipped didactically than trainers.

And even though no clear patterns can be seen in the instructors’ didactic considerations, on the face of it pupils in all three municipalities and in the six classes selected benefit from swimming. The biggest challenge is, in fact, keeping the children warm in the water.

Evaluation

Neither teachers nor trainers carry out any form of systematic evaluation of their instruction, but all conduct regular informal evaluations. In the observed classes no evaluation was carried out with the children. It is, of course, important to stress that this is not the same as saying that instructors carried out no evaluation. It can simply be pointed out that explicit evaluation with children did not take place during any of the 42 rounds of observation conducted in conjunction with this study. It is worth mentioning that neither teachers nor trainers made use of the so-called Student plans in relation to their instruction. Student plans, introduced in the Danish school system in 2006, is a written plan for all students at all form levels (Danish Ministry of Education, 2008).

The fact that neither trainers nor teachers undertake evaluations with their pupils can be seen as a problem, not simply because evaluation is a central category in Hiim and Hippe’s didactic relational model but also because evaluation is an integral part of being a teacher in the Danish school system. In addition, evaluation can help to aid reflection about
instructors’ own practice, which can promote ‘self-observation’ and thereby lead to ‘self-development’ as an instructor.

**Pupils’ basic skills and technical level in swimming**

The pupils’ development in the four basic skills (change of element, balance, breathing and movement) is, by and large, the same in all three municipalities (cf. table 1). As regards swimming styles, there is a tendency for pupils with instructors who have increased focus on swimming method rather than play and task performance to achieve greater improvements in styles of swimming. There is no distinct connection between technical development and whether the person at the poolside is a trainer or a teacher (cf. table 2).

**Table 1.** Skills. The pupils development during four months of school swimming in relation to four basic skills. Pupils have been rated on a scale from 0-4. Numbers rounded to the nearest hundredth. Class T: Instruction carried out by teachers qualified as swimming instructors. Class C: Instruction carried out by club trainers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Municipality A</th>
<th>Class T (n=17)</th>
<th>Class C (n=14)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baseline</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>2.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+4 months</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>2.46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Municipality B</th>
<th>Class T (n=13)</th>
<th>Class C (n=17)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baseline</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>3.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+4 months</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>3.44</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Municipality C</th>
<th>Class T (n=16)</th>
<th>Class C (n=15)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baseline</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>3.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+4 months</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>3.66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 and 2 should be seen against the following background: Assessment of pupil development in basic skills and technical capacity is reliant on the observer’s ability to observe, analyze and interpret what was involved in particular teaching situations – including assessing the individual pupil’s level at various points in the period of the study.

**Table 2.** Technique. The pupils development during four months of school swimming in relation to selected swimming techniques. Pupils have been rated on a scale from 0-4. Numbers rounded to the nearest hundredth. *Class T: Instruction carried out by teachers qualified as swimming instructors. Class C: Instruction carried out by club trainers. #Due to practical circumstances it was not possible to conduct a baseline assessment of swimming techniques in municipality C.*
Learning Rating Scale (LRS)

The pupils’ LRS scores reflect a range of differences. In municipality A, for example, the teacher class has a higher score on all four parameters. In municipality B the trainer class has a slightly higher score in one out of four parameters. In municipality C the trainer and the teacher class each have the highest score on two parameters (cf. table 3).

Table 3. Pupils self-rating of LRS-dimensions. Applying a 1-10 scale with one decimal place. Numbers rounded to the nearest tenth. Class T: Instruction carried out by teachers qualified as swimming instructors. Class C: Instruction carried out by club trainers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LRS</th>
<th>Learning</th>
<th>Feelings</th>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Expectations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Municipality A</td>
<td>Class T (n=17)</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipality B</td>
<td>Class T (n=13)</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipality C</td>
<td>Class T (n=16)</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipality A</td>
<td>Class C (n=14)</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipality B</td>
<td>Class C (n=17)</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipality C</td>
<td>Class C (n=15)</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Within each municipality, then, there are differences. However, pooling the pupils perceptions of the instruction from all municipalities shows only minor differences between the pupils’ scores (cf. table 4) – though classes led by teachers do have a marginally, but consistently, higher score on the four parameters.

Table 4. Pupils self-rating of LRS-dimensions. Applying a 1-10 scale with one decimal place. Numbers rounded to the nearest tenth. Class T: Instruction carried out by teachers qualified as swimming instructors. Class C: Instruction carried out by club trainers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LRS</th>
<th>Learning</th>
<th>Feelings</th>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Expectations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Municipality A, B &amp; C</td>
<td>Class T (n=46)</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipality A, B &amp; C</td>
<td>Class C (n=46)</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

So, in spite of differences in the individual cases, the pupils’ assessment of the instruction given by teachers and trainers is close to identical – when the results are assembled under one heading.

It should be mentioned that a number of pupils were uncertain as to how the four parameters of the LRS scheme should be interpreted. The questions may be too abstract for pupils in 4th and 5th grade. For example, only a minority of pupils had a basic appreciation of what the concept of ‘expectations’ meant – and by extension to what degree their instructor was to expect anything of them. This problem in understanding the scheme was in all likelihood what lay behind the fact that the scores for the ‘expectations’ parameter were the lowest of the four categories (cf. table III and IV). Certainly it is also, in this connection,
important to note that the observed and interviewed instructors did not in any clear way articulate – together with their pupils – the expectations they themselves or the pupils might have as to what should be learnt in swimming lessons. More often than not an important precondition for good learning is clarifying, through dialogue, the mutual expectations instructors and pupils have of the learning activities and one another. Thus, it is important for instructors – be they trainers or teachers – to articulate substantial, positive and realistic expectations of their pupils, which by means of further dialogue are brought into common ownership (Laursen, 2011).

Summary

Taken as a whole, this study shows that the quality of swim lessons has more to do with the instructor’s personal and professional competence than with their background as a teacher qualified as a swimming instructor or as a swimming club trainer.

Across the board, all instructors appear to be competent as regards delivering swimming instruction in public schools.

The trainers’ relatively limited knowledge of their pupils presents no problems with regard to the planning, organization and delivery of instruction.

There are only minor differences in the learning goals of teachers and trainers.

In all cases trainers primarily use their club practice as a reference for targets and choice of content – making allowances for Common Objectives and Modern Swimming. This is very much a result of the fact that trainers consider the aims for school swimming rather broad and not very operational.

Like trainers, teachers do not see that Common Objectives has much to offer – apart from overall standard requirements concerning the subjects to be taught. Therefore they also use their own experience as a key reference for what they strive to achieve.

Neither teachers nor trainers plan their courses with explicit reference to a didactic model. They involve a range of considerations regarding relevant didactic categories such as learning outcomes, pupils’ aptitude and ability, content, methods and so on.

In all the studied classes’ pupils are deemed to be highly motivated for swimming lessons.

When assessing the pupils’ development of skills and their experience of swimming instruction there is no pattern among or between teacher and trainer classes.

Neither teachers nor trainers carry out any form of systematic evaluation, but all of them make informal evaluations.

Teachers and trainers in public school swimming instruction

On the basis of the above summaries, two questions require an answer. First, can teachers with a qualification in swimming instruction and swimming club trainers complement each
other in delivering school swimming? Second, can club trainers provide school swimming
instruction of the same quality as teachers with a qualification in swimming instruction?

On the basis of this study, the answer to both questions must be affirmative, in that
the results of the study show that it makes no visible difference whether the instructor in
charge is a teacher qualified as a swimming instructor or a trainer recruited from a swim-
ming club. What this study indicates is that the decisive factor in the quality of instruction
is that the instructor comes to the swimming class well-prepared; remains up-to-date with
relevant professional developments; and deliver instruction that involves and motivates
pupils. In addition to this, they need to possess basic skills in their subject didactics, be
competent classroom managers and be able to build positive teacher-pupil relationships. In
other words, instructors need to make contact with and motivate pupils, create a workable
learning environment and be abreast of their subject and capable of teaching it. From that
perspective it is less important whether the instructor is a teacher formally qualified to in-
struct in swimming or a trainer recruited from a swimming club.

This finding is interesting in relation to the international debate about the outsourcing of
school sport and physical education (Williams, Hay & Macdonald, 2011). The debate has
not as yet made a serious impact in Denmark or in Scandinavia. The present study suggests
that outsourcing of particular areas of school sport can be carried out without compromis-
ing the quality of teaching. There is, however, a need for more knowledge about the degree
to which outsourcing processes of this kind could be instigated and managed as part of the
overall public school contribution in the area of sport and physical activity. Especially in
times of austerity, it must be stressed that the potential in outsourcing should not only be
about cutting price, but also about increasing the value and the level of innovation in public
service.

The above should also be set alongside the fact that, although the instructor is an im-
portant contributor to creating quality in school swimming, he or she is not the decisive
factor in the pupils’ learning of swimming skills. The most significant fact determining
how well pupils acquire swimming skills is to be found primarily in the pupils themselves.
Pupils are often to a considerable degree masters of their own learning processes (Laursen
2012). Even though instructors contribute to this process – giving guidance and instruction
– the learning process is largely left to pupils the moment they leave the poolside. In other
words, Danish school children can learn to swim if they are given the opportunity and if
they are involved in the instruction and motivated to practice.

**Recommendations**

- Municipalities and/or individual schools that enter into collaboration with swim-
mimg clubs must ensure that the trainers attached to the school swimming program
have a reasonable degree of experience with teaching children and youth. Further-
more, the trainers must be knowledgeable in relation to didactical theory and rel-
evant pedagogical methodology.
Swimming clubs, schools and municipal authorities that enter into collaboration should try to ensure that the club trainers involved have a permanent attachment to the club so that there are no substantial changes in personnel.

The Danish Ministry of Education should present clear goals and well-defined content for school swimming – so that teachers and/or trainers have unambiguous references from which to navigate in their preparation of learning content.

It should be a requirement that instructors incorporate evaluation as an integral part of swimming instruction.

Instructors should communicate and synchronize their expectations with pupils (cf. the fourth LRS parameter).

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