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Swimming Education in Australian Society

TIMOTHY LYNCH

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Swimming Education in Australian Society

Timothy Lynch, Monash University, Australia

Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to explore a community swimming program using autoethnography qualitative research. Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno) (Ellis 2004; Holman Jones 2005). Through childhood reflection of lived swimming experiences, and adult life reflection of lived swimming teaching experiences as a primary school teacher, health and physical education (HPE) specialist teacher and teacher educator, the author, illustrates how aquatic practices and education has shaped his belief, and consequently his drive to initiate a community swimming program. Furthermore, through this illustration, the reader is invited to enter the world of the author as a program pioneer, and share examination of dynamics involved in initiating opportunities for collaboratively developing swimming ability and confidence in primary school children, pre-service teachers and classroom teachers. More specifically, this involves critical analysis of course preparation, participant benefits and barriers during a collaborative swimming education process within Australian society.

Keywords: Swimming, Water Safety, Health and Physical Education, Collaboration

Introduction

Australia is a proud sporting nation, particularly with swimming, the nation's most successful Olympic sport. Almost half of Australia's Olympic gold medals have been won through swimming events. Subsequently, Australia is the second most successful Olympic swimming nation after the United States of America (Swimming Australia 2012). On the eve of the 2012 London Olympics it is most appropriate that swimming education, at the grassroots of Australian society, is investigated. These experiences are reflected upon to share through expository narrative - a 'storyline'. Professor of Teacher Education and the Arts at the University of Sydney, Robyn Ewing, refers to a 'storyline' as narrative threads interweaving to emerge ideas, themes and patterns (2010). This storyline reflection accentuates the author's belief of inclusive swimming and water safety education, and explores one such collaboration process within the community of Gippsland (Victoria), Australia. The exploration of this community program adopts autoethnography qualitative research. Autoethnographies are "highly personalized, revealing texts in which authors tell stories about their own lived experiences, relating the personal to the cultural" (Richardson 2000, 931). Thus, readers are invited into the world of the author and reflect on their own experiences in relation (Sparkes 2008). It is important to note that although qualitative research has developed over the years to gain a level of acceptance within the Sport and Physical Education domain and is the preferred research within education, it remains the minority in many countries (Sparkes 2008).

It is common knowledge that aquatic activities such as swimming play a large part within Australian culture and lifestyle. Swimming and aquatic activity is part of the 'social makeup' of the country (Australian Water Safety Council 2008) as the majority of Australians have access to water and water activities.

At 30 June 2001 more than 8 in 10 Australians (85%) lived within 50 kilometres of the coastline of Australia, up slightly from 1996 (83%). Most people living near the coast live in capital cities as seven of these are situated on the coast. However, there has been rapid growth of coastal areas outside of Australia's capital cities. (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2004).

As so many Australians live within close proximity to waterways, it becomes even more pertinent that everyone has the opportunity to develop competency at swimming and water

safety. However, there is an increasing concern that water education is decreasing (Peden et al. 2009). Furthermore, “A collaborative approach is required to tackle this problem and we all need to take responsibility in ensuring that children do not miss out on learning these essential life saving skills” (Larsen, 2013). Hence, it is argued that swimming and water safety be an integral part of the school curriculum using a strength-based approach, potentially decreasing drowning fatalities in both the short and long terms (Lynch 2012). A strength-based approach “supports a critical view of health education with a focus on the learner embedded within a community’s structural facilitators, assets and constraints and is enacted through resource-oriented and competence raising approaches to learning” (Macdonald 2013). Research suggests that the more knowledgeable teachers are about swimming and water safety concepts, the more confident they will be in becoming involved at the pool (Peden et al. 2009).

This belief stimulated the drive necessary to create the pathways established within unit EDF2611 ‘Experiencing Aquatic Environments’ within the Bachelor of Primary Education course, Faculty of Education at Monash University (Gippsland campus). Within the course, education students choosing the Physical Education major stream or selecting EDF2611 ‘Experiencing Aquatic Environments’ as an elective gain swimming and water safety discipline knowledge, and subsequently, qualifications (a Victorian Institute of Teachers registration requirement) in: the Australian Swimming Coaches and Teachers Association (ASCTA) - Swim Australia Teacher (SAT), Royal Life Saving Society Australia (RLSSA) Bronze Medallion and RLSSA Resuscitation courses. ASCTA is Australia’s peak professional swimming body and courses are recognised by the International Federation of Swim Teachers Association (IFSTA). As part of the SAT swimming and water safety course/ EDF2611 unit workshop pathway, the university students provided low ratio, quality free lessons for local primary school children.

Such pathways enabled the development of swimming ability and confidence for children in primary schools, Initial Teacher Education students (pre-service teachers) and school teachers. This paper explores this collaboration, the first of its kind, which planted the seed of opportunity for many children to one day possibly compete in the Olympic Games if their ability permits, or to enjoy healthy and safe wellbeing through physical activities involving water.

Swimming Background: My Story

It is through describing and analyzing my personal experience, my story, that the reader is invited to enter the storyline to better understand the cultural experience within Australian society...

As a child I was an average swimmer. I can however vividly remember my love for water and my confidence of being able to endure various water environments and conditions. I didn’t learn to tread water and venture into water deeper than I could stand until Year 3 at school (approximately 8 years of age). The school was fortunate enough to have a swimming pool, but my progress was only made possible due to one particular teacher who was willing to give up their time to supervise children swimming after school. We did have swimming lessons as part of the curriculum but the time spent in the water was not long enough for my development to progress. It wasn’t until the age of eleven that I could swim various strokes.

The development of my swimming ability was due to opportunity. My family moved to a small country town in north central Victoria where like so many Australian rural towns, sport was regular community practice. There was easy access to the local swimming pool where my two brothers and I would spend a considerable amount of time each summer. This opportunity nurtured my swimming confidence and ability. Self and peer taught, I developed into a strong swimmer. I loved to swim in the local pool, perform copious amounts of bomb dives and display my daring skills on the diving boards. Along with friends and family we would paddle in dams when yabbing, swim in creeks, rivers and lakes to escape the heat and also to enjoy water activities such as fishing and water skiing. It was the opportunities at the local swimming pool in country Victoria that laid the foundation for safe and enjoyable water activities later in my life.

Hence, the best time to prepare children for safe aquatic participation and provide the skills and knowledge needed to have a lifelong safe association with water is during childhood (Royal Life Saving Society Australia 2010).

Not learning to swim until the age of ten, I can clearly remember the fear and embarrassment that is often associated with not being able to swim, accentuated when other children and/or peers are competent. This is an experience that placed me in good stead for providing swimming opportunities for children later on in my teaching life. Not everyone has the life experiences and opportunities that I had. Hence, primary schools and in particular primary school teachers play a vital role in providing access to and opportunities for all children.

Teacher: Swimming Experiences

The description and analysis of personal experience underpinning the autoethnography approach continued into my adult life. The early sentiments from my childhood experience have been reinforced during my 18 years of professional life as an educator. In just my second year of teaching in 1996 at the young age of 21, I taught a Year 4 class at St. Matthew's Primary school in Brisbane. This class like all classes in the school went swimming in first term, once a week for six weeks and would culminate with the school swimming carnival (gala). During swimming lessons the teachers would supervise the children on a bus, and then observe from a distance as the swimming instructors would deliver the 40 minute lesson. Another six week block would be implemented in term 4 (Australia has four terms per year).

The purpose of the swimming carnival was for everyone to come together and compete in a wide variety of events designed for diverse abilities. Children would give their best efforts for their house colour, ideally within an enjoyable and friendly atmosphere. All abilities and improvements were to be celebrated during the carnival, but it also served an ulterior purpose of enabling a representative swimming team to be justly chosen so that talented swimmers could extend as far as their ability would permit. This swimming structure was the norm for Queensland primary schools and remains so today.

One talented swimmer in this particular Year 4 class who went on to represent the school was Alicia Coutts. Alicia, now 24 years of age, will be swimming for Australia at the London Olympics competing in the 100 metre Butterfly, 4 X 100 metre Freestyle and 200 metre Individual Medley Women events. Alicia reached her lifetime dream of swimming at the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008 when she came 5th in the 200 metre Individual Medley. Alicia was awarded the 2010 Telstra Swimmer of the Year after being the best individual performer at the 2010 Commonwealth Games in Delhi, winning five gold medals. "Recording the fastest time ever in a textile suit in the 200m Individual Medley, Coutts was chosen to carry the Australian flag at the Commonwealth Games closing ceremony." (Australian Olympic Committee 2012). Alicia is older in years than most swimmers in the team and has had to overcome much adversity.

As a junior, Coutts had a promising career until a bout of glandular fever stifled her ambitions to qualify for the 2006 Melbourne Commonwealth Games. In 2007 she moved to Canberra to join the Australian Institute of Sport but was again affected by illness. After having surgery to repair intussusceptions of the bowel, Coutts recovered to qualify for her first Olympic Team in 2008. In 2009, Coutts found herself again having abdominal surgery after suffering complications to her original operation. (Australian Olympic Committee 2012)

As a young girl Alicia lost her father to Hodgkin lymphoma in November, 1994.

Alicia displayed natural swimming ability from a very young age. "Dad said to me when I was six he thought I would go to the Olympics" (Grossetti 2012). It was when Alicia was nine (Year 4) that she met her former swimming coach David Urquhart at Brisbane's Cleveland

Aquatic Centre and her talents were nurtured by the present Swimming Australia President. Mother, Julie Coutts, who raised Alicia and her two older brothers, donated her life to enabling Alicia every opportunity to reach her potential, driving her to early morning and evening trainings which was to become a daily event. "As a sole parent, Mum was facing real financial hardship and Dave never once asked Mum to pay for my lessons." (Grossetti 2012). Alicia's story has been a fairytale come true regardless of where she is placed in London.

Coincidentally, it was around this period of time when John Seebohm and wife Karen moved from Adelaide, South Australia to Brisbane, Queensland. John was my football coach (Aussie Rules football) in 1996 at Mayne Tigers Australian Football club in the Queensland State Australian Football League. John was a talented footballer playing 319 SANFL (South Australian National Football League) games for Glenelg Tigers which included the 1985 and 1986 SANFL premiership teams. Karen, also a talented sportsperson having played representative state league netball in South Australia, was also an open swimmer. "Karen returned to swimming in her 20s as a surf and ocean racer in her time away from a stellar state league netball career". (Magnay 2008). Karen is also a swimming coach at the Brothers Swimming Club, Nudgee College in Brisbane and has been for many years. John and Karen have four children; Tom, Jack, Emily and Will. Emily, their only daughter, will be Alicia's teammate at the London Olympic Games, swimming for Australia in 100 metres Backstroke.

In 2008 at the Beijing Olympics at the age of 16, the youngest member of the team, Emily won a gold medal in the 4 X 100 metre medley and came 9th in the 100m backstroke. She followed this with eight medals at the 2010 Commonwealth Games in Delhi. While sacrifices, commitment, hard work and dedication are required for anyone to become an Olympic swimming champion it is not a possible reality for many hopeful swimmers. John openly admits that Emily's swimming ability is from her mother. "I was a terrible swimmer, just ask my old teammates what I was like," (Homfray 2012). Karen is an experienced swimming coach and teacher, understanding the diverse range of abilities children have and how to encourage all to be pleased with giving their best effort. "We had other kids who were all doing their best at their own things and it wasn't all about Em or swimming. We made sure she knew that she was a great person regardless of whether she was getting a world record time at 14, or whether she was not doing so well." (Warren 2012).

Emily's swimming opportunities began when she was still a baby. She was just three when her family moved to Brisbane and I remember her as a toddler following John around at times before or after football training. Similarly, Karen describes her early experiences at the pool. "Emily was just a toddler hanging around the pool, but she was stubbornly determined to keep up with her bigger brothers Tom and Jackson, not just in the pool but across a range of sporting activities". (Magnay 2008).

The reason for reflecting on Alicia and Emily is because they have reached the pinnacle of swimming and will be representing Australia in the London Olympics. They have both endured obstacles, had extremely supportive and understanding families, made incredible sacrifices, and endured many hours of training- everyday twice in the pool along with other resistance and cardiovascular sessions. The reflection accentuates that both young women were once typical little girls whose swimming talents may never have even been discovered if not introduced to the water at a young age.

Limited Swimming Experiences

Not every child is introduced to swimming from an early age nor do they have the guidance of expert coaches or have the natural ability to experience elite levels such as the Olympic Games. In contrast to investigating the accolades of Alicia and Emily, there have been many experiences where children have had such a limited experience of water that they become fearful. In some cases this fear is passed on through their parents, caused by their parents' limited experiences.

I remember one particular boy I taught also in Year 4, not long after Alicia, whose family had just migrated from Poland to Australia. Even though there was a 'beginners' group for him to participate in during swimming lessons, many of the children were well beyond his level of water familiarity. I empathized with the young boy as he struggled to enter the pool let alone submerge his face or head. At the time I was not a swimming instructor and I was not overly confident with correct technique, but I did have the level of content knowledge, time, and encouragement that he required at this early stage. Each week I entered the pool and would give him some basic activities that I had established with the swimming instructor and the progress made was phenomenal. This experience inspired me to learn about the fundamentals of swimming and not long after, I completed an Austswim Teacher of swimming and water safety course.

Becoming a qualified swim instructor involved a weekend course and 20 hours of pool side assistance, which I gained assisting various children with limited water experience during school lessons. My knowledge of the correct swimming technique was reinforced and my confidence in understanding this increased dramatically. I loved sports and physical activities, I enjoyed being in or around water but finally I had acquired the correct content knowledge to enable this to advantage the primary children in my care. As I assisted children and witnessed their progress, I began to truly believe in the difference classroom teachers could make. A similar sentiment shared by Karen Seebohm, who recommends that prospective swimming teachers should not "be put off by your own swimming ability as in many workplaces it is virtually irrelevant; you will learn what and how to teach. The important thing is that you love being with kids." (Australian Leisure Management 2010)

In 2007-2009 I taught in Qatar (Middle East) where I was employed in an English International school, educating approximately 1200 students. This school catered for children from over 32 nationalities, and while the school was not religious the majority of students were from Islamic nations. Here I was on the school's Senior Management Team (3 – 18 years) and was Head of Foundation Stage and Key Stage One (3 – 7 years), which had approximately 410 children. Qatar is an Islamic country and while similar to Australia in that the population all live close to the coastline, a very disparate cultural perspective exists to the utilization of water for physical activities and the norms associated with swimming. As Head of the early years' children I was responsible for the school's curriculum including swimming and water safety lessons embedded within physical education. "Research suggests that primary schools are, by themselves, unable to deliver quality physical education experiences, while the contribution of PE specialists in secondary schools may come too late to impact a majority of children in relation to their competence, perceptions and motivation". (Kirk 2005, 240). Hence, I was determined to collaborate with the Physical Education department to ensure these lessons were exploited. Ninety-five percent of the children had similar swimming opportunities to the Year 4 child whose family migrated to Australia from Poland. I observed in many children a genuine fear of water often passed on from parents. My previous experiences, swimming instructor knowledge, and resources assisted in enabling many children and teachers to benefit, becoming confident and competent around water. To witness children regardless of cultural and religious backgrounds to be enjoying water activities safely, offering opportunities that often their parents did not have, was rewarding and 'life changing'.

Creating Swimming Opportunities

This storyline reflection thus far reveals the author's belief of inclusive swimming and water safety education being available for all children. This belief is accentuated through understanding the author's personal and subsequently cultural experiences, distinctive to autoethnography qualitative research. Without belief the following pathways to be explored, promoting swimming and water safety education within the community of Gippsland, Victoria (Australia), would not have been possible. Research suggests that working collaboratively enhances health and physical

activity engagement “by valuing and encouraging the building upon of personal, social, community and possibly global assets and resources” (Macdonald 2013). Moreso, collaboration is specifically recommended within Swimming and water safety (Larsen 2013). However, there were many dynamics involved in such partnerships, including barriers to overcome.

Within the Bachelor of Primary Education course at Monash University, education students choosing the Physical Education major stream or selecting EDF2611 ‘Experiencing Aquatic Environments’ as an elective are required to hold a current teacher of swimming and water safety qualification by unit completion. This is a requirement mandated by Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) (VIT 2008) for teacher registration as a Primary school Physical Education teacher. The unit at Gippsland campus previously required that students complete Swimming and water safety accreditation during their own time and present evidence of the qualification. In semester one 2011 the unit workshop programme (2 hours per week) was carefully redesigned to create a pathway between the university unit objectives and Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) swimming and water safety course units of competency.

This pathway involved collaboration between Australian Registered Training Organisations (RTO), the local health industry (local leisure and sports centre) and external swimming instructors employed at the venue, local Primary schools and Monash University. Through implementing ‘hands on’ practical teaching and learning experiences for the university students, subsequently the workshops enabled the provision of quality lessons at no cost for local primary school children from a disadvantaged socio-economic Gippsland region (DEECD 2011). This was of particular benefit as rural schools find it most difficult to conduct aquatic activities (Peden et al. 2009) and the children involved would not have otherwise received swimming lessons. Furthermore, Whipp, Hutton, Grove and Jackson (2011) found that teachers working collaboratively with external providers (in this case pre-service teachers) is associated with positive perceptions about the value of the physical activity (swimming and water safety), enables teachers to develop confidence and is less stressful.

There were two suitable programs offered by providers, associated with courses and qualifications for teaching Swimming and water safety:

- Australian Swimming Coaches and Teachers Association (ASCTA) Swim Australia Teacher
- Austswim training of teachers of swimming and water safety

Swim Australia (Australian Swimming Coaches and Teachers Association) was launched in 1997 by the Federal Minister for Sport and Recreation to assist develop the Learn to Swim program in Australia to its full potential. ASCTA is a not for profit, membership based organisation that strives to achieve the World’s best swimming and water safety Teachers and highest performing swimming Coaches (ASCTA 2011).

Swim Australia’s aim is for all Australians learning to swim and gaining water safety knowledge through safe, enjoyable and quality swimming lessons.

Austswim has a close philosophical and working relationship with Swim Australia, Royal Life Saving Society Australia (RLSSA) and Surf Life Saving Australia (SLSA) (Austswim 2009). I had completed an Austswim swimming and water safety course and had experienced the direct benefits this course had provided me. However, dissimilar to Swim Australia it is argued “Austswim has monopolized learn-to-swim and water safety training for more than 25 years and is the only body that receives government support. Austswim receives more than \$300 000 annually in federal government funding, with a total turnover of \$3 million.” (Gosper 2012). The third provider contacted was RLSSA which in the state of Victoria is known as Lifesaving Victoria. Courses in relation to Swimming and water safety Lifesaving Victoria provides include; Keep Watch, Swim and Survive, Bronze Medallion, Junior Lifeguard Club and Grey Medallion.

Correspondence with providers was initiated and it was anticipated that they would share similar swimming and water safety educational aspirations with that of Monash Gippsland. The response from ASCTA and RLSSA was very optimistic and built the foundations for strong partnerships. It was evident that ASCTA and RLSSA clearly valued the opportunity to promote swimming and water safety. Staff from these organizations moved hastily to have the courses fully prepared so that success for all stakeholders was optimised. Both organisations were flexible in their disposition and offered large discounts in courses so that they were affordable for the university students.

When choosing a Swimming and water safety course quality (safety, insurance and registered accreditation), cost and collaborative potential were considered. While both SAT and Austswim courses are nationally registered, when the two options are compared (Table 1), course advantages of ASCTA were highlighted, including: international recognition; International Federation of Swim Teachers Association (IFTSTA), less than half the cost and is valid for a longer period of time. Furthermore, Karen and Emily Seeböhm are qualified members and promote Swim Australia Teacher. As Karen explains "I've been teaching swimming now for too many years than I care to mention. I have enjoyed every minute of it. It is still a thrill to see the littlies achieve various milestones and feel good about themselves. As a parent, too, I am very conscious of the need for children to be safer around water". (Australian Leisure Management 2010).

Table 1: Comparison between Providers

Registered Training Organisation (RTO)	Austswim	ASCTA (Australian Swimming Coaches and Teachers Association)
Course	Austswim Teacher of Swimming and water safety	Swim Australia Teacher (SAT)
Minimal cost required by provider	\$215	\$100
Cost for university students	\$215	\$100
Amount of time valid	3 years	4 years
National recognition	RTO 104975	RTO20948
International recognition	–	International Federation of Swim Teachers Association (IFTSTA)
Units of competency	SRC AQU 003B SRC AQU 008B SRC AQU 009B SRC AQU 0010B SRC AQU 0011B SRC AQU 013B SRC CRO 007B	SRC AQU 003B SRC AQU 008B SRC AQU 009B SRC AQU 0010B SRC AQU 0011B SRC AQU 013B SRC CRO 007B

(Australian Government 2011)

Pathways initiated included the opportunity for the university students to obtain qualifications in Australian Swimming Coaches and Teachers Association (ASCTA) - Swim Australia Teacher (SAT), Royal Life Saving Society Australia (RLSSA) Bronze Medallion (BM) and RLSSA Resuscitation (RE) courses. By becoming an endorsed service member with Lifesaving Victoria the author was qualified to endorse the BM, RE and Bronze Rescue (BR).

The students were required to have current resuscitation accreditation to obtain a Swim Australia Teacher qualification, which was also a pathway within the course.

Children in the early years of primary school were deliberately targeted for the program as the best time for children to learn and refine their motor skills is in the preschool and early primary school years (Branta et al. 1984; Commonwealth of Australia 1992; Espenschade & Eckert 1980). Furthermore, what is done in the early years has the greatest impact on the achievement of expertise since without this foundational phase there will be no middle or later period. (Kalinowski 1985). Kirk (2005) argues that early learning experiences are crucial to continuing involvement in physical activity and that currently only particular sections of the population are in a position to access quality experiences in schools and sport clubs. In particular, young people from lower socioeconomic groups in greater numbers miss out on quality early experiences compared to children from higher socioeconomic groups. As earlier mentioned, for many of the early years' children from the local primary schools involved in the swimming program it was their only swimming and water safety education experience.

Swimming and water safety is prominent within the current Australian national curriculum document, 'A statement on health and physical education for Australian schools' (Australian Education Council 1994), where it is evident from the beginnings of school; Band A:

Students participate in water activities to develop confidence and competence. They enter and leave water safely, move through waist-deep water, submerge to retrieve an object, float with aids and propel the body through chest-deep water on front, back or side. (AEC 1994, 20)

Within Band B (upper primary) the statement expresses:

Students learn survival techniques of sculling, treading water and floating and sculling strokes and develop their skills for swimming extended distances on front, back or side, demonstrating arm action, kicking and breathing patterns. (AEC 1994, 27)

Also, it recommends, "They extend their water safety and survival skills" (AEC 1994, 30). Swimming and water safety continues to progress throughout the remaining bands of schooling.

The RLSSA 'Swim and Survive' national swimming program supports the curriculum statement and was used as a framework for the community swimming lessons. The Swim and Survive program was launched in 1982. The demand for the program was such that there were one million awards achieved in the first two years. To date it is estimated that nearly 10 million Australians have participated in the Royal Life Saving Society's Swim and Survive Program and "during this time there has been a 75% reduction in drowning in the 5-14 year age group," the program's targeted age group (RLSSA 2011). Swim and Survive is designed to ensure a continuity of skills through a child's key life stages.

Implementing 'hands on' practical learning and teaching experiences for the Teacher Education students involving children from local primary schools is endorsed by the National Education Physical Education Teacher Education Advanced Standards (USA). The Advanced Standards document states, "This integration of content and pedagogical knowledge results in and contributes to the development, application and communication of a teacher candidate's PCK (pedagogical content knowledge), which, in turn, advances the candidate's expertise and enhances student learning." (National Association for Sport and Physical Education 2008). Furthermore, it is argued that a learning environment underpinned by a "non hierarchical interplay between academic, practitioner and community expertise" (Zeichner 2010, 89) offers extended pre-service teacher learning opportunities and subsequently enhanced preparation. Zeichner describes the environment of shared partnership knowledge and collaboration as the 'hybrid space'. This learning and teaching strategy is supported by Monash University Teacher

Education student feedback. The Student Evaluation of the Teaching Unit (SETU) for EDF2611 Experiencing Aquatic Environments - Semester One 2011 (Gippsland) best aspects included:

Learning how to teach swimming and the opportunity to teach kids how to swim in prac. All aspects that we learnt about related to teaching primary kids (which hasn't happened in the last 2 yrs of PE). The Unit co-ordinator's explanations and teaching was fantastic with the use of his prior experiences etc. and also his hard work to help us reach success in all tasks. (Susan Kenton, e-mail message to author, September 2, 2011).

Creating pathways and collaborating within the Gippsland community required time, personal skills and effort. Demands were placed on the author for meeting the swimming course presenter requirements. This was necessary to grant the university students with the Swimming and water safety qualification. A requirement for the Presenter of Swimming and water safety for any provider involved completion of a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (TAE40110) (Warren Curnow, e-mail to author, February 2, 2011). It did seem somewhat of a paradox that a university lecturer with a number of education degrees, 15 years full time teaching experience in primary and secondary schools, two years full time teaching experience at tertiary and current teacher registration, is then required to complete further study to demonstrate that he can meet the unit of competencies for a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment at the appended expense of \$1600. However, feedback from various stakeholders evidenced that such effort was appreciated. The unit co-ordinator was commended by the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Swim Australia (ASCTA) based on feedback the education student participants expressed in the SAT student evaluations summary (Ross Gage, e-mail message to author, June 24, 2011).

The children from the local Primary schools were excited to be taught by the education students. Parents came to support their children and comments from teachers, teaching assistants, parents and the children expressed their gratitude for the lessons provided. One teacher wrote; "My kids had a ball with the swimming. Like I said to you then, any time you need children feel free to approach us. We are very willing to assist." (Kate Mitchell, e-mail message to author, July 23, 2011).

Conclusion

On the eve of the 2012 London Olympics this paper acknowledges Australia's achievements in swimming and delves below the surface of the eminent success to investigate swimming and water safety at the grassroots. The author shares his swimming and water safety 'storyline' through which emerges the theme of opportunity for all; creating opportunity for future Olympic champions, the next generation of Alicia Coutts' and Emily Seebohms' and for all children generally to enjoy safe physical activities in and around water.

The storyline describes the author's experiences in swimming, also teaching children with diverse swimming abilities and from various backgrounds. The paper concludes that the best time to prepare children for safe aquatic participation is during childhood (RLSSA 2010), which is why it is pertinent that primary schools and teachers value their roles in water safety education, and potential influence they have on children.

The author's strong belief in creating swimming and water safety opportunities for all children provided the drive to overcome barriers in developing pathways in this pioneer community program. Pathways, which involved various collaborating organizations to assist, develop university students', primary school children and teachers in schools' swimming and water safety ability and confidence.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Timothy Lynch: Tim is a senior lecturer in the Faculty of Education at Monash University—Gippsland campus. He coordinates the health and physical education (HPE) discipline stream within the bachelor of primary education course. He has fifteen years teaching experience as a classroom teacher (Queensland), head of Foundation Stage and Key Stage One (English International School, Qatar), and health and physical education specialist teacher (Queensland) in various school communities and education systems. In 2006, he was the Australian Council for HPE (ACHPER) Teresa Carlson Award recipient (Queensland branch) for his outstanding dedication to the teaching of HPE and promotion of its benefits within the community. His research interests include: health and physical education, pedagogy and quality teaching practices, lifelong wellness, curriculum change, enhancing all learning through physical activities and primary education.

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