Why every child deserves "professional" teachers and coaches

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(i) Teachers and Coaches
It is widely accepted that teaching should be a ‘learning profession’ (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009) and that as professionals, teachers have both a right and a responsibility to engage in career-long professional development (CPD) (Armour & Makopoulou, 2012). While it has long been argued that CPD for teachers is a powerful tool in the quest to improve the quality of teaching and learning, research has found consistently that traditional provision fails to meet teachers’ complex and dynamic needs (Desimone, 2009). It has been argued widely that PE teachers need more CPD that is both situated and capacity-building (Armour, Makopoulou and Chambers, 2012).

The situation in sport coaching is complex, but with some similar challenges. Jones, Armour and Potrac (2004) found that professional development activities were described by top level coaches as being narrow, failing to offer scope to develop a personal style, and largely irrelevant to the development of an effective coach. Indeed, Jones and Wallace (2005) argued that most coaches are “disillusioned with professional development programmes, which they criticise as being “fine in theory” but divorced from reality” (p.121).
In essence, therefore, despite the different characteristics of the teaching and coaching workforces, with the former having acknowledged professional status and the latter often comprising volunteers, both groups have found that traditional professional development provision often lacks the depth, challenge and relevance they require.

(ii) Children and Young people as our ‘Clients’
We can all agree that children and young people, whatever their abilities, have much to gain from participation in high quality sport and physical activities. Indeed, I have argued that all children and young people have a right to sport provision that goes some way towards meeting their individual and complex needs, and that the adults teaching or coaching them – as professionals - have a responsibility to meet the needs of their young clients (Armour, 2011). It is also important to remember for children and young, the differences between teaching and coaching may count for little; i.e. a child learning to play soccer is the same child, learning the same sport, whether they are in or out of school. So how can research and theory focus more clearly on children’s needs as learners to help teachers, coaches and other practitioners to develop their professional, client-focussed approach?

(iii) Sport and Exercise Pedagogy supporting professional learning for human movement practitioners
It is argued in this presentation that PE teachers and youth sport coaches need to be professional pedagogues who collaborate to meet children’s needs and who are expert in Sport and Exercise Pedagogy (SEP). Defined as a sub-discipline located in the academic territory between education, sport, and the sport/exercise sciences, SEP is both multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary. It focuses on the individual young learner across physical activity settings as its starting point, and on the quality of the ‘pedagogical encounter’ (leach & Moon, 1999).

In summary, it is proposed that the development of SEP, and new SEP integrative and inspirational professional learning tools, could overcome some of the gaps in current CPD provision and support professional teachers and coaches to be more effective in meeting the needs of their diverse young clients.