THE DIDACTIC SEQUENCE: AN ESSENTIAL PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE FOR THE AQUATIC EDUCATOR

Juan Antonio Moreno Murcia and Rita Fonseca Pinto

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A didactic sequence is a tool that enables learning in an aquatic environment to be organised in a meaningful, continuous and coherent manner. It makes it easier to adjust the level of challenge, structure progressive experiences and support pupils' emotional responses, thereby promoting safer, more meaningful teaching that is geared towards transfer of skills.

Introduction

Teaching in an aquatic environment presents a specific challenge: organising learning in a setting that combines physical demands, perceptual uncertainty and a high emotional load. Learning in the water is not limited to acquiring technical skills but also involves building a functional, safe, and progressively autonomous relationship with the environment. For this process to be coherent, it is necessary to structure the learning experiences. In this regard, the didactic sequence serves as a key tool for organising meaningful instruction. Its function is not merely to order activities, but to provide continuity to the process, so that each activity builds on the previous one and prepares the way for the next.

Working through sequences allows the educator to make more informed decisions about what to teach, when to do so, and under what conditions. This makes it easier to regulate the level of challenge, adapt tasks to students, and avoid interventions based on improvisation or on the repetition of unrelated exercises.

The aquatic environment also introduces a key variable: the learner's emotional response. The loss of familiar reference points, the need to control one's breathing, or the perception of risk can lead to a sense of insecurity if the activities are not properly tailored. In this context, the didactic sequence acts as a framework that helps to balance challenge with a sense of control, thereby encouraging engagement and continuity in learning. As the process progresses, the sequence facilitates the transition from more controlled situations to progressively more open ones, in which learners must interpret their surroundings, make decisions and adjust their

behaviour. This progression is key to ensuring that learning can be transferred to real-life situations.

From this perspective, the didactic sequence is not a supplementary element, but a necessary condition for organising teaching in a coherent manner. Mastery of this sequence enables the instructor to transform the aquatic environment into a structured learning space, where the learner progresses safely, meaningfully and in line with their capabilities. Consequently, this resource aims to provide a practical guide for the design and implementation of didactic sequences in aquatic education, designed to facilitate the instructor's decision-making in real-world teaching contexts.

The educational justification for sequencing in aquatic education

A didactic sequence is understood as an organised and progressive set of learning situations aimed at building meaningful competence, in which experiences are linked together with meaning and purpose (Dolz et al., 2004). In aquatic education, this involves going beyond the repetition of exercises and situating learning within a process that enables learners to understand the environment, adapt to it and act judiciously.

From a practical perspective, sequencing is not merely a matter of ordering tasks, but of ensuring that each activity serves a purpose within the process. This implies that there must be consistency between what is intended to be taught, what is actually done in practice, and what is ultimately assessed. When this consistency is lacking, learning becomes fragmented and loses its meaning for the students.

The need to work using didactic sequences is particularly justified in an aquatic context for three key reasons. Firstly, for psycho-pedagogical reasons. The aquatic environment often triggers intense emotional responses, particularly in the early stages of learning. A lack of postural control, difficulty managing breathing or a perception of risk can cause insecurity or tension if the level of difficulty is not properly adjusted. The didactic sequence allows this exposure to be regulated progressively, helping pupils to gain confidence as they develop the skills to function in the environment. Secondly, for didactic reasons. When teaching is organised without a clear sequence, it is common to fall into the trap of repeating exercises out of context or using activities that are unrelated to one another. This makes it difficult for pupils to understand what they are learning and how it is useful to them. The didactic sequence allows tasks to be linked to a clear purpose and provides continuity to the process, so that each experience genuinely contributes to learning. Thirdly, there is a reason linked to safety and life skills. Aquatic education cannot focus solely on technical execution, but must foster the ability to act safely, interpret the environment and make appropriate decisions. A

step-by-step teaching approach allows these skills to be developed progressively, avoiding risky situations arising from inadequate exposure or a false sense of competence.

Furthermore, the didactic sequence facilitates the creation of an initially predictable environment, in which pupils can begin to explore their surroundings with greater confidence. However, this predictability must not be maintained indefinitely. As learning progresses, it is necessary to introduce situations with greater variability that force the pupil to adapt, make decisions and adjust their behaviour. This transition is key to ensuring that learning is not limited to controlled contexts. From this perspective, the sequence not only organises learning but also directs it towards transfer. The aim is not for students to reproduce a skill under stable conditions, but for them to be able to act effectively in changing situations.

In short, working through didactic sequences allows for the meaningful structuring of teaching, the adjustment of the level of challenge, attention to the emotional dimension of learning, and the promotion of the progressive development of aquatic competence. Therefore, mastery of this approach should not be seen as a methodological option, but as a basic professional competence for any aquatic educator.

Pedagogical quality as the guiding principle of the sequence

Teaching quality serves as the guiding principle for all decisions within the didactic sequence. It is not confined to a specific stage of the process, but rather permeates the learning objectives, content, tasks, assessment and the teacher's intervention. Its role is to ensure that learning takes place under conditions that allow for meaningful, confident and progressive development. In aquatic education, this quality takes on particular significance due to the constant interaction between motor demands and emotional response. A single task may be technically sound, yet ineffective if it causes insecurity, paralysis or a loss of control. Therefore, teaching quality depends not only on what is proposed, but on how well it is adapted to the learners' actual situation.

From an operational perspective, ensuring teaching quality involves continuously addressing three key aspects. Firstly, adjusting the level of challenge. The teacher must check whether the tasks set are manageable for the students at that moment. It is not a question of oversimplifying, but of proposing situations that require effort without causing a mental block. This involves observing how the student responds, identifying signs of tension or insecurity, and modifying the task when necessary, whether using materials, the organisation of the space, or the instructions. Secondly, creating the right emotional atmosphere. Learning in the aquatic environment depends largely on the learner feeling safe and confident. This atmosphere does not arise spontaneously but is created through specific decisions: maintaining a recognisable session structure, giving clear instructions, allowing for mistakes as part of the process, and supporting learners during practice. An emotionally stable environment encourages engagement and enables learners to sustain the effort required to learn. Thirdly, the internal coherence of the sequence. Activities and tasks must align with the defined educational purpose and maintain continuity between sessions. When this coherence is broken, learning loses its meaning and progression becomes difficult. Similarly, assessment

should be used to understand what is happening during the process and to adjust the teaching approach, not merely to check results.

These three elements are not managed in isolation but require constant teacher intervention. The quality of teaching depends not only on prior planning, but on the teacher's ability to observe, interpret and make decisions in real time. In this sense, the teacher acts as a regulator of the process, adjusting the approach based on the students' responses.

In practice, this translates into a series of ongoing decisions: when to continue with a task, when to modify it, when to introduce a new situation, or when to allow more time for exploration. It is these decisions that determine whether the didactic sequence genuinely supports learning or, conversely, creates unnecessary difficulties. Ultimately, teaching quality is not about adding more activities or resources, but about ensuring that every pedagogical decision is geared towards facilitating the pupils' progress. It is the element that gives coherence to the didactic sequence and allows learning in the aquatic environment to take place in a tailored, safe and meaningful way.

The didactic sequence as an organisational framework for learning in aquatic education

The didactic sequence provides the framework for organising the teaching and learning process in aquatic education in a coherent and meaningful way. Its function is not merely to organise sessions, but to integrate the educational objectives, content, methodological decisions, tasks and assessment.

Understanding the sequence as an organisational structure implies recognising that teaching in the aquatic environment does not consist of proposing isolated activities, but rather of designing a progressive process in which each element fulfils a function within the learning process. This organisation helps to avoid fragmentation in teaching and enables learners to build a comprehensive understanding of what they are doing. From this perspective, the didactic sequence acts as a guide for the teacher's decision-making at three key stages. Before the lesson, it enables the teacher to clearly define what is to be taught and under what conditions. During the lesson, it guides observation and the adjustment of tasks based on the pupils' responses. Afterwards, it facilitates the evaluation of the process and the reorganisation of the progression where necessary.

In the aquatic environment, this organisation is particularly relevant, as learning depends not only on motor execution but also on the pupils' ability to manage the situation, interpret the environment and act with confidence. The didactic sequence allows these variables to be regulated in an integrated manner, helping learning to progress gradually.

Selection and organisation of content within the didactic sequence

Within this framework, the selection and organisation of content is a crucial factor. Before deciding what to teach, it is necessary to clarify why we are teaching it. In aquatic education,

this means taking learning beyond mere technique and focusing it on the development of a skill that enables learners to function safely, independently and with decision-making ability in the aquatic environment.

From this perspective, content must be selected based on its practical utility and its contribution to the educational objective. This avoids approaches focused exclusively on technical execution and allows teaching to be situated within a more functional and meaningful framework.
The organisation of the content is based on three basic criteria. Firstly, a functional approach, in which learning is linked to real-life situations in the aquatic environment. Secondly, an integrated approach, which simultaneously combines motor, cognitive, emotional and safety aspects. Thirdly, a progressive approach, which structures learning from more controlled contexts towards others that require greater autonomy and adaptation.

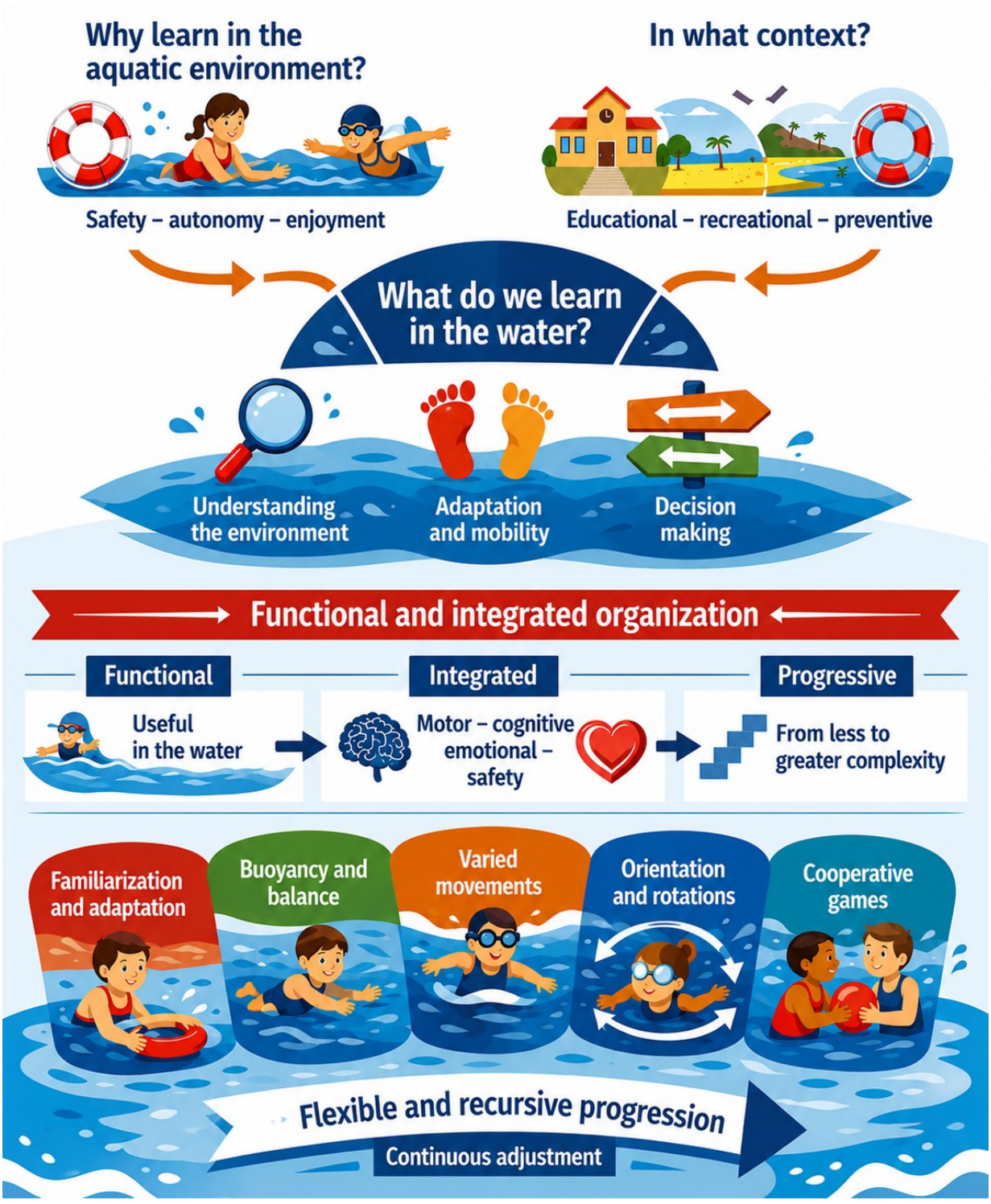
From a practical perspective, the content can be grouped into three interrelated dimensions. Conceptual content includes basic notions of the aquatic environment, such as floating, breathing and safety rules, which are developed through experience. Procedural content refers to ways of acting in the water, such as entering the water, floating, moving and regaining balance, understood as motor skills adapted to the situation. Attitudinal content includes aspects such as confidence, managing fear, cooperation and responsibility, which emerge during practice and influence learning.

In practice, this content is not taught in isolation, but is integrated into learning situations that require pupils to act, make decisions and adapt. This approach ensures that learning is meaningful and transferable.

Some comprehensive pedagogical approaches (Moreno-Murcia, 2026) organise these elements into functional modules, such as adaptation to the environment, floating, movement and orientation. These modules should not be understood as closed phases, but as overlapping areas of learning that evolve according to the pupils' response.

Progression through the content is determined not solely by age, but by the student's level of competence and perceived control. In this sense, moving forward involves reducing support, increasing the complexity of tasks, introducing variability and encouraging situations in which students must make decisions. Figure 1 shows the selection and organisation of content in aquatic education.

Figure 1. Selection and organisation of content in aquatic education.



Methodological principles applied to the didactic sequence

The design of a didactic sequence in aquatic education is not solely about what is taught, but also about how the session is organised to facilitate learning. Methodological principles guide this “how” and enable the structure of the sequence to be put into practice.

These principles do not operate in isolation, but rather guide the teacher’s decisions throughout the session. Their value lies in the fact that they allow teaching to be adapted to what is happening in the water, preventing the sequence from becoming a rigid plan. From a practical perspective, the methodological approach can be organised around two areas: regulating the learning environment and organising the practical activities.

Regulating the learning environment

The teacher’s primary aim is to create an environment in which pupils can act with confidence and assurance. In an aquatic setting, this is crucial, as emotional responses directly influence behaviour. A key decision is to maintain a consistent session structure. Organising the lesson into an introduction, main body and conclusion allows pupils to anticipate what is going to happen and reduces uncertainty. This predictability facilitates adaptation to the environment, particularly in the early stages of learning.

The teacher’s choice of language also has a direct influence on the atmosphere. Instructions must be clear, brief and action-oriented. Saying “try to relax your body a little” is more effective than giving lengthy explanations or focusing on technical correctness. The handling of mistakes is another fundamental element. Mistakes are not corrected immediately nor penalised, but are used as information to adjust the action. Allowing several attempts and offering guidance to help explore alternatives promotes learning and reduces tension. Likewise, the use of aids must be regulated. Teaching materials or the teacher’s assistance should be used as learning aids, not as permanent solutions. Gradually withdrawing these supports allows pupils to gain autonomy without causing insecurity. Teacher feedback should focus on the process. Recognising progress, highlighting what is working well and suggesting small adjustments helps students become aware of their progress and keeps them engaged.

Organisation of the practice

The second methodological area concerns how tasks, the group and resources are organised during the session. Learner-centred teaching prioritises situations that require action, experimentation and decision-making. Games and problem-solving scenarios become tools for facilitating learning, provided they serve a clear purpose.

Direct instruction is used sparingly, particularly to ensure safety or clarify key points. However, it should not become the main focus of the lesson, as this limits pupils’ active participation. The organisation of the group should facilitate adaptation to different levels of ability. Working in small groups, circuits or tasks with varying levels of difficulty allow the challenge to be adjusted and encourage the involvement of all pupils. The use of materials helps to

modify the conditions of the task. Items such as floats, boards or submersible materials can make the activity easier or more challenging without changing the learning objective. Time management is another important aspect. It is necessary to allow sufficient time for exploration and to avoid constant changes of task that hinder adaptation. Alternating more active moments with calmer ones helps to maintain an appropriate pace for the session. Safety must be integrated into the methodological framework itself. Defining spaces, establishing clear rules and maintaining constant supervision are necessary conditions for learning to take place without risk.

In practice, these principles take the form of ongoing decisions: adjusting a task, modifying an instruction, introducing or removing support, or reorganising the group. The quality of the intervention depends not so much on the proposed activity as on the teacher's ability to interpret what is happening and act accordingly. Ultimately, methodological principles enable the didactic sequence to move beyond a theoretical design and become a tailored, flexible intervention focused on the students' actual learning.

Stages of the didactic sequence in water safety education

The didactic sequence organises learning as a meaningful process, but it is through its phases that this organisation becomes operational. These phases should not be seen as rigid steps, but rather as guidelines that steer the teaching process and enable the teacher to make informed decisions.

From a practical perspective, the phases help to answer a key question: what should be done at each stage to ensure that learning progresses. Their value lies in the fact that they allow the teaching process to be structured without losing the ability to adapt. In learner-centred pedagogical approaches, and particularly in comprehensive teaching approaches, these phases play a significant role by facilitating progression from more controlled situations towards others in which learners must act with greater autonomy (Figure 2).

1. Clear purpose. Every lesson sequence begins with the definition of a clear objective. This objective guide subsequent decisions and gives meaning to the tasks. In aquatic education, objectives must be functional, that is, linked to what the pupils need to be able to do in the water. For example, it is not just a matter of "learning to float", but of being able to stay afloat in a specific situation with control and composure. From a teaching perspective, it is important to focus on a single learning objective and avoid piling on too many goals. This ensures clarity in the teaching approach and enables students to understand what is expected of them.

2. Relevant diagnosis. Before intervening, it is necessary to understand the student's actual situation. In the aquatic environment, this assessment covers both motor and emotional aspects. Observing how they enter the water, how they breathe, whether they appear tense or relaxed, or whether they seek constant support provides key information for tailoring the

approach. This assessment does not require formal tests, but rather exploratory situations that allow us to see how the student behaves. In comprehensive approaches, this stage is integrated into the activity itself, avoiding the separation of assessment and practice.

3. Pedagogical structure of the session. Organising the session into an opening, main body and closing provides stability to the process. This structure promotes predictability, reduces uncertainty and enables learners to engage with the task. The opening focuses on welcoming the group, reviewing the rules and getting everyone ready for the activity. The main body concentrates on the core tasks, which should be progressive and appropriately tailored. The conclusion allows for the integration of what has taken place, reduces arousal and fosters awareness of learning. Maintaining this structure consistently is particularly helpful in the early stages of learning, where a sense of security is a necessary condition.

4. Progressive activities. Activities provide the context in which learning takes place, but their value depends on the purpose behind them. It is not enough for an activity to be engaging; it must serve a clear purpose. It is important to distinguish between an activity and a task. An activity structures the situation (for example, a game), whilst a task specifies what is to be learnt within that situation. A single activity can include different levels of tasks, allowing the difficulty to be adjusted without changing the context. This approach facilitates adaptation to different levels within the same group. In comprehensive approaches, play is used as a means of creating situations in which pupils must act, decide and adapt, not as an end in itself.

5. Integrated evaluation. Assessment forms part of the entire process; it does not take place solely at the end. Its purpose is to gather information in order to adjust the teaching approach. In aquatic education, assessment should focus on functional indicators: whether the learner is becoming more independent, whether they are better able to regulate their breathing, or whether they are acting with greater confidence. This allows learning to be assessed beyond mere technical execution. From a teaching perspective, assessment involves observing, interpreting and deciding. The information gathered is used to modify tasks, adjust support or redefine the purpose if necessary.

These phases do not operate independently but are continuously interconnected. The objective guides the assessment, the assessment determines the tasks, the tasks generate information for evaluation, and the evaluation allows the process to be readjusted. In practice, the teacher constantly moves between these phases, making decisions based on what is happening in the water. This capacity for adjustment is what makes the didactic sequence a useful tool.

Within this framework, some approaches, such as the Comprehensive Aquatic Method (Moreno-Murcia, 2016), find in the didactic sequence a suitable structure for organising learning, as it allows for the integration of action, understanding and decision-making in the aquatic environment without limiting its application to a single model.

Figure 2. Stages of the didactic sequence in water safety education.

Proposed didactic sequence for aquatic education

Having defined the pedagogical principles, the organisational structure and the phases of the didactic sequence, a practical example is presented below to illustrate how these elements are put into practice during the intervention. This proposal is not intended to offer a rigid model, but rather to serve as a reference to guide the teacher's decision-making. Its value lies in demonstrating how the purpose, assessment, task design and evaluation are integrated within a single framework. The example focuses on the development of back float, understood as a functional ability linked to autonomy, respiratory regulation and confidence in the aquatic environment.

Table 1. Example of a didactic sequence in water safety education.

Stage	Practical implementation	Observable indicators	Teaching decisions	Common adjustments
1. Purpose	To maintain independent back float for at least 5 seconds, with controlled breathing and a calm demeanour.	The child remains afloat unaided, with regular breathing and a relaxed body.	Define a single, clear and understandable objective.	Reduce the time required or make the position easier if the child appears tense.
2. Diagnosis	Games in shallow water to observe entry into the water, breathing and emotional response.	Avoids submerging, stiffness, constant search for support.	Adjust depth, equipment and task level.	Introduce supports or greater assistance if there is insecurity.
3. Structure of the session	Introduction (welcome and rules), main activity (progressive tasks), conclusion (relaxation and reflection).	Active participation, continuity throughout the session.	Maintain a stable structure.	Adjust the duration of each phase according to the group's progress.
4. Activities	"Starfish": floating with aids, partial support and unassisted. Variations with small changes to the environment.	Greater autonomy, less dependence on equipment.	Adjust instructions and conditions without changing the core activity.	Step back in the task if a blockage arises.
5. Evaluation	Observation of floating, breathing and emotional management with individual feedback.	Progress in autonomy and initiative.	Use assessment to adjust the intervention.	Reformulate the objective if there is no progress.

This example shows that the effectiveness of a didactic sequence does not depend on the activity itself, but on the coherence between its elements. The same activity may or may not lead to learning, depending on how the purpose is defined, how the task is adapted, or how the pupils' responses are interpreted.

From a learner-centred approach, this type of approach promotes more meaningful learning, in which learners not only carry out actions but also learn to act purposefully in the aquatic environment. In this context, comprehensive approaches find in the didactic sequence a suitable structure for organising teaching, as it allows for the integration of action, understanding and decision-making.

The relationship between pedagogical principles and common errors in the didactic sequence

For a didactic sequence to be truly useful in practice, it is not enough simply to understand its principles; one must also recognise the most common mistakes that hinder its implementation. In aquatic education, many difficulties are not due to a lack of resources or activities, but to decisions that disrupt the coherence of the process. Identifying these mistakes enables the teacher to review their approach and refine their practice more effectively. It is not a question of establishing rigid rules, but of providing guidelines to help interpret what happens in the water and make more appropriate decisions.

One of the most frequent mistakes is to view the sequence as a series of unconnected sessions. When each lesson is treated as a stand-alone unit, pupils do not perceive continuity and learning loses its meaning. The sequence should function as a journey in which each session builds on the previous one.

Another common mistake is to focus progression solely on technical difficulty. Increasing complexity without considering the students' sense of control can lead to insecurity and a mental block. Progression must be tailored not only to what the student can do, but also to how they experience the situation.

It is also common to propose activities that are engaging from a recreational perspective, but which lack a clear objective. In such cases, the pupils participate, but learning does not always take place. Every activity must serve a specific purpose.

The lack of an initial assessment is another critical issue. Implementing activities without knowing the pupils' actual level makes it difficult to adapt the process. Observing how pupils behave in the water is essential for designing the intervention.

Regarding the organisation of the session, constantly changing the structure creates uncertainty. Although tasks should vary, maintaining a stable structure helps to create a safe environment.

Another significant mistake is confusing activity with learning. Play alone does not guarantee learning; it is necessary to define what is intended to be achieved within that activity.

In terms of assessment, limiting it to the end of the process and focusing solely on technical results reduces its usefulness. Assessment must form part of the process and serve to adjust the intervention.

Interpreting setbacks as a failure on the part of the pupils can lead to inappropriate decisions. In the aquatic environment, learning is not always linear, and moments of difficulty are part of the process.

Table 2. Relationship between pedagogical principles and common errors in the didactic sequence.

Guideline (what to do)	Mistake (what to avoid)
Maintain continuity in the sequence	Plan isolated sessions
Adjust the challenge to the child's sense of control	Increase difficulty without emotional adjustment
Define a clear purpose	Propose activities without a clear objective
Conduct a preliminary assessment	Set tasks without knowing the group
Maintain a stable structure	Constantly change the organisation
Distinguish between activity and task	Confuse play with learning
Use play as a means	Use play as an end
Integrate assessment into the process	Assess only at the end
Understand progression as flexible	Interpret error as failure
Continuously adjust the intervention	Limit oneself to carrying out activities

Conclusion

The didactic sequence is a fundamental tool for organising aquatic education in a coherent, progressive and meaningful way. It is not merely a matter of arranging activities, but of structuring a process in which the purpose, content, tasks and assessment are integrated to promote learning.

Its main value lies in the fact that it allows for continuity in the process, enables the level of challenge to be adjusted and prevents fragmented teaching. Through sequencing, the teacher can adapt instruction to the characteristics of the pupils, addressing both the motor and emotional dimensions.

This approach allows learning to go beyond technical execution, incorporating an understanding of the environment, decision-making and the ability to act with confidence. In this way, aquatic education contributes not only to the development of skills, but also to the formation of individuals capable of functioning independently in the water.

The teacher's role is key in this process. Designing a didactic sequence involves making decisions prior to the lesson, interpreting them during the lesson, and adjusting them in response to what happens. It is this ability to observe and adapt that ensures learning

progresses under the right conditions.

In this context, learner-centred pedagogical approaches find in the didactic sequence a suitable structure for organising instruction, as it allows for the integration of action, understanding and decision-making in the aquatic environment. However, the usefulness of the didactic sequence does not depend on a specific model, but on its consistent application in practice.

In short, designing and implementing didactic sequences is not a one-off methodological choice, but a professional skill essential for any aquatic educator. The effectiveness of learning depends on their correct application, as do safety, confidence and the relationship that learners establish with the aquatic environment.

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