

BY BOB HUBBARD

*Structure is sometimes viewed as a negative word in the learn-to-swim environment, but it shouldn't. Creating a program that is weighted toward a structured lesson plan with adaptability can meet the needs of the students, instructors and parents.*

learn-to-swim

Striking the balance between too much structure and not enough play in a learn-to-swim lesson format can be difficult.

The challenge is to be creative enough within your lesson plan to maintain the students' interests while not succumbing to the children's efforts or desires to make the lesson time all play. Being aware of the physical abilities of your young swimmers dictates that recovery and fun activities be included in every class.

Children learn in a variety of ways. We see the auditory, visual and kinesthetic learners mixed in every class.

Research indicates that in any given class, the instructor must be prepared to teach students with a variety of different learning styles.

Educating your instructors to teach in all three formats simultaneously can be a challenge. The instructor should be able to speak clearly with enthusiasm, provide

visual demonstrations of the skill to be attempted and assist the swimmer with appropriate physical demonstration and assistance.

These skills can be difficult for the quiet or non-demonstrative swim teacher to use initially, but they can be acquired by placing an emphasis on their importance for the students' benefit.

#### KEY COMPONENTS

Structure is sometimes viewed as a negative word in the learn-to-swim environment. Some individuals will advocate a system in which the child is given time in an unstructured environment to play and learn new skills in the water. Others operate in a semi-totalitarian regime in which the instructor has a lesson plan and the child needs to adapt to it.

Striking a balance that is weighted toward a structured lesson plan with adaptability can meet the needs of the students, instructors and parents. The goal is three-fold:

- The students should be in a teaching

environment in which they will feel comfortable, yet challenged;

- The parents should see and understand measured progress;
- The teachers should not wear themselves out mentally trying to re-invent their curriculum in every half-hour lesson just to meet the personality needs of their students.

Education is a key component in this effort. Taking the time to educate parents concerning your lesson structure and what they might expect at a given age and level of skill will help alleviate any misconceptions concerning their child's progress.

Regular progress reports are also a key component in this effort. Posting your programs' skill levels and qualifications for promotion can be a great educational aid.

Training instructors to develop multiple lesson plans for each skill level provides them with the teaching skills to work with the students' different learning styles.

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# -Swim



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*learn-to-swim*

cept after you have explained it thoroughly, you need to find a different way to describe it. Children cannot change their learning pattern. The instructor must adapt. Offering varied instructions to achieve a desired task is a key tool for your instructors to develop.

Recovery time must be built into the lesson plan of the learn-to-swim environment. Instructors need to be educated about the physical capabilities of their students and make sure they are not pushing them too far.

## **EDUCATING THE PARENTS**

Parents need to understand that a 3-year-old or 4-year-old in a learn-to-swim class needs some recovery time on the

steps or an island. The occasional clock-watching parent may challenge your system to ensure that her child is receiving the maximum swim time for the fees charged.

Educating the parents in advance that the classes are structured with the appropriate educational, emotional and physical abilities of their child in mind will help in their understanding of the program. Reinforcing these expectations with the instructors and encouraging them to meet all of the components of your structure will help improve and develop their own teaching skills.

If you have structure in your lesson plans, you will be able to relax and know the instructors are meeting the needs of

the students, parents and your program.

Finally, the instructors should strive to end each lesson on a positive and fun note. This will encourage the children's efforts and leave them with pleasant memories of their experience in the water.

They will, hopefully, return for their next lesson prepared to have fun and be challenged and rewarded for their hard effort. Parents, then, will see a smiling child exit the water, and the instructor will be receiving "high-5s" from excited students who enjoyed their time together. ♦

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