

# Aquatic Adaptations

## Swimming with a disability Part 1

### **Introduction:**

The aim of this presentation is to open your mind to the wonderful power of observation to those with a special need in water; and how your existing knowledge will be used to your advantage.

We look at classes where children may

1. Integrate into scheduled classes
2. Participate in a special scheduled class.

### **Integration into scheduled classes**

Understanding **the disability** allows the teacher to meet the child's aquatic needs with accurate preparation and planning. The term 'disability' is huge, but can be split into two main categories – congenital and acquired. These two categories may each have physical and/or intellectual characteristics. **What is observed on land is not necessarily what will be observed in water.**

**Buoyancy and balance** are foundational skills for all students. The body must feel the sensation of floatation without aids in order for the brain to accurately respond, store and repeat the skill. I call this the 'less is more principal.' The water is a mirror.

**Observe, analyse and extend.** With totally free movement the teacher may observe reflexive actions and anxiety. Walking in water can say much about the child's vestibular sense and proprioceptive skills.

**Be confident in their ability.** The emotional need of the child is frequently the key turning point. This may be the first time the child has been able to participate in a physical activity as an equal.

**Be confident in your ability.** Their 'radar' can sense any doubt. To the experienced teacher this is nothing new.

### **The Adaptive Programme – for those with a physical need unable to be mainstreamed into a regular scheduled class.**

These classes are either run as a group situation, each child with a caregiver, or as a separate scheduled class of similar needs. E.g. a

teenage class for those with autism, where skills of basic fundamental swimming strokes may be learnt.

**Simple quick check** In the early stages of aquatic readiness, it is important to monitor if water can be cleared from the mouth to avoid swallowing or gagging. This is frequently required for cerebral palsy children. (A great skill when brushing their teeth!)

Teach orientation skills so it is an autonomous action transferred into skills such as recovery (standing up), surfacing, getting a breath or turning to back to the side. These simple foundational water safety skills give the child and teacher the confidence to extend the 'swimmer.'

### **Methodology**

Work the group as a whole. If additional assistance is required allow the swimmer to observe the others; re-introduce to the circuit after the skill has been practiced. Never underestimate the power of observation and visualization. This applies for both types of classes.

As with all students new environments and skills can be overwhelming. Allow space and time in a non threatening environment will give any child the opportunity to approach each activity at their own pace. This strategy creates an opportunity for an optimum learning environment.

Remember the 'less is more principle' and these children will advance in their skill development, confidence and social interaction. These are positive experiences for all involved.