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**METHODOLOGICAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL INSTRUCTIONS CONCERNING
TEACHING INFANT SWIMMING**

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Infant swim classes have been organized for many years, especially in highly developed countries such as: England, Australia, France, the Netherlands, Japan, Germany, Russia, Sweden and the USA.

In Poland, such activities are conducted in a form of organized lessons in Gdansk, Gdynia, Krakow, Lublin, Lodz, Poznan, Opole, Warszawa and Wroclaw to name a few.

In case of infant swimming using the term „swimming” contrary to term „bathing” is fully justified. As far as infant swimming is concerned one has to notice that infants do not move intentionally in a sense of independent mobility in water environment but their achievements, activity and physical effort are the proof of actual attempt at reaching a specific goal.

Scientific research carried out in numerous countries showed an amazingly beneficial impact of organized water activities on the physical development of those infants who participated in them [Arendt, 2001; Cherek, 1998].

In the majority of cases swimming stimulates not just motor but also sensomotor development supplying new experiences and training mental perception of participating babies [Arendt, 2001].

Babies attending regular swim classes are said to have few problems in developing their movements coordination at the same time becoming more immune to infections. Those children begin to crawl and walk earlier, develop better both mentally and functionally and generally tend to have much hardier organism [Arendt, 2001; Zeiss, 1994].

Infants participating in swim classes are much more open and tolerant towards their environment, they initiate contacts within group faster and are more resistant and less sensitive about their failures, they stay more active and are generally more intelligent than their non-swimming peers [Arendt, 2001; Bauermeister, 1984; Bresges, 1984].

The supporters of baby physical activities in water are of an opinion that swimming is of salutary nature for babies with diagnosed retarded development being the result of all kinds of defects. [Cherek, 1998,; Innemoser, 2001; Zeiss, 1994].

Therefore physical effort of small babies in water environment according to the opinion of numerous pediatricians, psychologists and qualified swimming specialists holds an unusually advantageous impact on their complex development [Bennett, 1997; Bory, 1993; Czernik, 1986; Firsow, 1980; Dybińska, 1997; Dybińska, Gedll-Pieprzyca, 1997; Kostowa, 1987; Krawczyk, Czekalska 1994, 1995; McKay, McKay, 2005; Newman, 2004; Makarienko, 1988; Pietrusik, 2001, 2004, 2005; Zeiss, 1994].

In the available domestic specialist literature methodological studies concerning conducting lessons in water for babies at that stage are rather scarce. Among them there is the manual written by Dybińska [2000], where the author made an attempt at structuring and systematizing the whole lot of exercises used when conducting lessons in water for toddlers as well as methodological studies by Krawczyk, Czekalska [1995] and Pietrusik [2000, 2004, 2005].

The aim of such study is to present selected aspects of author's original programme concerning conducting water activities for toddlers

The basic goal of teaching swimming to infants should be making them familiar and comfortable with water targeting at the preparation for mastering core movement skills in water, as well as establishing abilities necessary for independent movement in water environment and acquiring competences preventing them from drowning.

One has to remember that water environment, where teaching takes place, especially for small babies, is totally different from his natural environment. Baby's contact with water environment and undertaking there activities imposed by the instructor or a parent is a multitasking situation. A baby during water activities has to obey the instructor, stay above the water surface using adequately coordinated movements of its upper and lower limbs, try to raise its head out of the water in order to breath in, and hold it's breath when going into water, do all kinds of basic jumps in order to lose fear, as well as reach the specific target. Such situations are not handled by babies as a complex whole but as a series of individual episodes. Undeniably, baby's effort during those activities is extremely big because the so far not undertaken tasks frequently exceed baby's abilities. Unquestionably, influential here is also the fact that a baby during water activities is being forced by both the instructor and the parent while the undertaken tasks are of complex nature resulting from the implementation of a variety of didactic tools.

During water classes the baby's body, its visual, hearing and tactile receptors are exposed to water and the whole environment, being influences by new, most often unknown

and unusual stimuli which bring about unpleasant feelings and fear of strange environment. As the adaptation period unfolds the same feelings and experiences become fully accepted.

Adaptation to water environment also aims at eliminating the barriers impeding initiating a proper didactic relationship between the instructor and a baby as well as strengthening baby's resistance to both thermal and mechanical stimuli [Arendt, 2001; Dybińska, 1997; Dybińska, Gedll-Pieprzyca, 1997; Pietrusik, 2000, 2004].

Activities with infants should take place at indoor swimming pool, which meets both sanitary and hygiene requirements as well as possesses water area of 90 to 120 cm in depth. Water temperature should range between 32 and 34 degrees Celsius and it should be chlorinated with 0.2 to 0.5mg/cm³ [Innemoser, 2001, Kosiba, Michalik, 1992; Pietrusik, 2000, 2004].

Due to the fact that infants feel a strong need for emotional bond with parents lessons teaching adaptation to water take place with parents active participation [Suchodolski, 1976; Żebrowska, 1982]. Babies feel safe; they eagerly play with parents and duplicate their movements. Truly significant element differentiating conducting water activities for infants from those designed for older babies is the fact that in case of infants all exercises have to be done by both the children as well as their parents. In order to achieve optimal teaching results caregivers /parents/ should be obliged to unquestionably follow teacher's instructions. During lessons parents should be constantly informed about the ways of holding a baby when both carrying out exercise and assisting their babies. Such form of conducting lessons does not stress babies and gradually makes them feel comfortable while thinking about independent realization of the subsequent tasks. Parents during water activities should at any cost show how much fun they are deriving from playing in the pool. Parent's patience and calmness as well as constant acceptance and encouragement are also of vital importance.

The role of teachers conducting didactic water activities should embrace methodological instructions during lessons, appropriate selection of exercises and other fun activities, correction, as well as implementation of various teaching methods /through playing, games and follow-the-leader play or creative expression etc.

Water classes should be conducted mainly though playing and tasks using colorful tools or peaceful music or singing.

Basic form of didactic and educational work as far as infants' initial adaptation to water environment is concerned is a lesson. It is a fundamental organizational unit of instructor's work with babies and their parents during which the instructor realizes set goals and tasks stemming from the teaching programme.

Properly conducted swim lessons require good knowledge of the object of our activities that is babies who have entrusted to our protection and influence. That knowledge should concern both somatic and psychomotor aspects of babies' development along with the familiarity with the changes happening under the influence of the specific exercises respecting the level of development as well as motor abilities of small babies.

Swim lesson regardless of its main goals should consist of various exercises, games and plays so as to comprehensively influence the organisms of its small participants. One has to remember that the exercises following one another should be variable in nature that is dynamic exercises should alternate with static and breathing ones and they should also observe the rule of not using directly one after the other exercises of big or very big physical intensity.

Among the most effective, intentional and adequate means /exercises/ used in the adaptation of infants to water environment there are:

1. Exercises of rocking baby on the surface of water;
2. Exercises of moving baby in various directions;
3. Exercises of sliding in various positions;
4. Exercises of taking a baby under the surface of water and diving;
5. Exercises encouraging a baby to move its lower limbs;
6. Exercises encouraging a baby to move its upper limbs;
7. Duplicating and mimicking exercise;
8. Exercises of independent movement in water environment
9. Exercise guaranteeing active chill out breaks.
10. Basic jumps

A good aid for the preparation and actual conducting of a class might be so called lesson plan which indicates chronological order of individual tasks making the lesson more efficient and rational.

Training practice uses three-stage lesson plans split into introductory, fundamental and final parts. Each of them consisting of adequate exercises.

The duration of infant swim lesson should stay within the range of 30 up to 45 minutes depending on the conditions, age and babies' health, participants' hardiness, lesson intensiveness, babies' physical fitness, psychological predispositions and level of advancement.

Part I – introductory should last about 5 to 10 minutes. Its aim is to prepare both babies and their parents for the realization of didactic tasks. Each class starts with the

gathering and greeting as well as checking the group's attendance after which participating parents are given basic methodological advices concerning the goals of the lesson. Introductory part should be conducted briefly and smoothly.

Part II – fundamental should last between 30 and 35 minutes. Long-term observations and author's own experiences in conducting lessons with infants suggest splitting the fundamental part into two sections that is one on the ground (Part A) and the other in the water (Part B).

In section A exercises on the ground are mastered. Both their internal and external structure has to prepare the organism for work and they need to resemble didactic tasks which the babies will be exposed to while in water. Ground exercises from this section of the lesson plan should be gradually prolonged and focused on training shoulders, arms, trunk and lower limbs.

In section B one has to aim at the previously intended lesson goal. Activities in water start with revising and mastering those earlier acquired skills, the instructor makes small alternations in those skills trying to familiarize babies with water environment and then moves onto teaching a new ability. Section B should be rather intensive, (to avoid chilling in water) yet keeping active chill out breaks during which the teacher may instruct parents participating in the process. Correcting mistakes should not disrupt the rhythm of the lesson. Hints should be brief and to the point. Towards the end of the lesson in water one should introduce less intensive exercises with a large number of breathing exercises. Their duration depends on the length of the lesson as well as the level of participant's fatigue. The aim of those chilling exercises is to put babies' cardiovascular and respiratory systems at complete rest.

Part III - final lasts from 3 up to 5 minutes and consists of organizational tasks including going out of water, having a shower, covering with a towel and going to dress.

The lesson plan presented above should not be treated as a fixed canon but only a tip for independent work. Lesson plan should simultaneously general enough so as not to limit the freedom of its content selection as well as organization and specific enough so as to secure the lesson from breaking the fundamental laws of physiology and rules of didactics.

From the very beginning of conducting swim lessons a few vital recommendations need to be implemented. They are as follows:

1. Babies should train assisted by their fully engaged parents or minders, in the initial stage without any supporting tools.
2. All lessons should abound with a great amount of fun, accompanied by singing;

3. During the lessons a large number of colorful toys and various didactic tools should be used;
4. Exercises should be carried out in a dynamic fashion and often changed so as to avoid the monotony of the activities;
5. Lessons should offer a few breaks in order to allow for some free and spontaneous play between parents and their babies;
6. Fearful babies should be approached by teachers using individualization rule.

Undertaking tasks related to the organization and actual conducting of the lessons with babies aged between 3 and 12 months at first needs to specify the goal and programme of the training /20 lessons/ as well as basic didactic requirements.

The programme should anticipate babies to acquire some fundamental abilities of behaving and moving in water with a direct involvement of one of their parents, as well as master basic swimming skills. During the implementation of the programme, babies initial adaptation to water should be evaluated, while monitoring and recording water exercises and babies reaction to water environment stimuli and not forgetting about estimating the pace and level of acquisition of basic abilities concerning infants behavior and movement in water.

The author's experiences gathered in relation to infant swim lessons constituted the basis of working out an original teaching programme, the conscious realization of which, allows infants to acquire the following competences:

1. Independent lying supine;
2. Independent lying prone with passive support;
3. Independent dunking /diving/;
4. Independent slipping into water combined with diving;
5. Acquiring the ability to lay prone or supine using basic movements of lower and upper limb.

A test guarantees control and motivates both parents and their babies to further exercises, especially in case of noticeable progress.

It needs to be mentioned here that any failure of swim test should not be treated as didactic failure. It might occur that mastering comfortable functioning in water environment, calm reactions to all kinds of stimuli coming from that environment as well as acquiring basic swimming competences will be a sufficient psychomotor achievement for those babies.

Amazingly significant element itself here is physical activity in water environment of those babies especially when realized in cooperation with parents in a form of versatile and spontaneous games.

During lessons with infants observing fundamental safety precautions is of crucial importance. They might be summarized as follows:

1. An absolute supervision of babies whenever in the vicinity of water has to be guaranteed;
2. Prior to the beginning of each lesson one has to check the health state of all babies who are about to participate;
3. Lessons in water should be preceded by a warm-up on the ground
4. In the part which goal is to adapt babies to water exercises practiced during the previous lesson should be revised;
5. In case of observing in a baby signs of pain or fatigue further participation in the lesson should be abandoned;
6. In case of visible signs of fear when doing new exercises one should return to those mastered during the previous lessons so as to reestablish baby's self-confidence and trust;
7. Swim lesson should not go beyond 30 or 35 minutes;
8. In case of applying exercises which involve diving one should start with one immersion gradually increasing the number with each subsequent lesson /up to 10 immersions maximum/
9. Prior to each lesson water temperature should be checked and it should not go below 32 degrees Celsius.
10. During the realization of the programme evaluation of training process should be kept via monitoring and assessing the pace and the level at which the participating babies acquire the fundamental competences concerning behaving and basic movements in water.

Selected organizational and methodological aspects concerning the usage of water environment in physical activity of infants which have been presented above are one of the proposals promoting the stimulation of small babies' psychomotor development and constitute the fundamentals of teaching swimming skills in the future.

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