

The Development of AQUATOTS Swim Program in the 10 Years Since Its Introduction at the WABC 1993

Presented by Nell White – South Africa
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NELL WHITE
PANEL PRESENTATION
(15 Minutes)

NELL WHITE (BIOGRAPHY)

Founder-director AQUATOTS® Swim Program, Swim South Africa national programme developer and 4 times speaker at the World Aquatic Babies Conference (WABC) during the decade 1993 - 2003, received an award at the recent WABC in Honolulu / Hawaii for her part in the development of baby swimming world-wide. She has been involved in teaching swimming to all ages since the late 1950s, tending towards ever younger children over the years. Since the birth of her first grand-child in 1985 she has focused exclusively on the under 30 month age-group. She is a pioneer in the child-centred approach to infant swimming in her country.

INTRODUCTION

NOT MISSED A WORLD AQUATIC BABIES CONFERENCE (WABC):
I have attended every WABC since, what was for many, the first WABC in 1993. It was in fact the 2nd WABC. The 1st took place in 1991 when a handful of infant swim professionals who had gathered in Japan decided to meet up again every alternate year and invite other like-minded professionals to join them. In so doing they brought about the WABC.

If it were not for the WABC, my contribution to the development of infant swimming would have been insignificant.

CREDIT VIRGINIA HUNT NEWMAN:

The WABC may have remained but an idea if it were not for that certain great lady of infant swimming by the name of Virginia Hunt Newman whose absence is sorely felt by many of us who pay tribute to her for being what we are in infant swimming today. No one could have left a greater legacy with respect to infant swimming than Virginia Hunt Newman. And nothing in the world would have kept her away from this conference if it had been in her power to be here.

CREDIT SHARRON CROWLEY:

That brings me to another very important person in my life, Sharron Crowley, who in her ever generous spirit of sharing introduced me to the international infant aquatic scene. Our paths had occasion to cross in 1990 and in the short while we impressed upon each other our philosophies and methodology. Sharron subsequently proposed to Virginia that I speak at the upcoming WABC as to how I get babies to flip onto their backs and float. Well, I got to speak at the conference but not about flipping and floating. I chose to speak about, 'The parent factor in determining the success of infant aquatics' instead. It was the topic of the research project on which I was busy at the time for my honours degree in developmental psychology. I realised that the young parents in the pool knew more about psychology than I did, so I decided to redo my 25 year old degree which did not extend much beyond Pavlov and his salivating dogs.

Insert: It was most satisfying to find that one of the presentations at this conference focused on the parent factor. Instructors are generally aware of the parent factor but they do not always see to it that parents understand that they are largely the ones who determine whether or not lessons are a success.

INVOLVEMENT:

My involvement in teaching young children to swim dates back to the late 1950s but in 1985, when my first grand-child was born, I decided that from then on I would specialize in the under 30 month age-group.

PIONEER:

I consider myself the pioneer of the child-centred, gentle, sing-song, parent-tot group approach to infant swimming in South Africa. When everyone around me was going the hard-line route to get babies waterborne, I was accused for 'pussy footing around'.

TITLE OF PRESENTATION FOR THE 7TH WABC CONFERENCE

THE DEVELOPMENT OF AQUATOTS SWIM PROGRAM IN THE 10 YEARS SINCE ITS INTRODUCTION AT THE WABC 1993

I have been asked to give you a brief outline as to how AQUATOTS developed since its introduction at the WABC 1993 and where I see it heading in the future.

GROWTH:

In 1993 AQUATOTS was in its phenomenal growth spurt. In 1990 it was transformed from a one-man show into a program that was to become:

- Internationally known
- Top-ranking in South Africa

- The bench mark for nationally accredited infant swim teaching

FACTS:

By 2003:

1. Training

- instructors numbered up to 200
- 62 registered swim instructors traded as AQUATOTS, and there were more than twice as many AQUATOTS outlets
- an average of between 3300 - 5000 infants per week depending on the time of year were taught in the AQUATOTS method

2. AUSTSWIM

The Australian Council for the Teaching of Swimming and Water Safety (Austswim) had acknowledged AQUATOTS for the contribution to the Austswim manual, 'Teaching infant and Pre-School Aquatics.'

3. Swimming South Africa (SSA) National Accreditation Course

SSA had adopted the toddler section of the AQUATOTS Swim Program Instructor Manual for the national accreditation course for toddler swim teaching.

4. AQUATOTS Guidelines

AQUATOTS guidelines were in use by Swimming South Africa for accrediting swim teaching methods conforming to these guidelines.

5. Franchise

AQUATOTS had become a franchise because the existing instructor infrastructure was making it impossible to regulate and control the standards. The new franchise structure guarantees the high standard for which AQUATOTS® became known.

THE REASON FOR AQUATOTS SUCCESS:

I believe that I got lucky with AQUATOTS. Success does not only depend on excellence. There are countless excellent methods and programmers that don't hit the headlines as AQUATOTS has done. The success of AQUATOTS had a lot to do with being in the right place at the right time.

ONLY ALTERNATIVE METHOD:

AQUATOTS Swim Program was the only alternative to the hard-line method current at the time. It was/is not only about a different technical approach, it is a holistic comprehensive program covering all aspects of infant swim teaching. It details procedures for all aspects of program functioning so as to prevent the development of negative situations that were/are commonly associated with infant swimming. (This was the topic of my presentation at the 1995 WABC in Melbourne/Australia)

TRAINING POTENTIAL:

AQUATOTS had/has the potential for training instructors because of its comprehensive structure. This was an important consideration at a time.

AAP CONFORMING:

Moreover, the program was structured according to the recommendations of the American Academy of Paediatrics issued at the time.

HEALTH & RACQUET CLUBS (H&RC):

These factors combined with the birth of H&RCs made AQUATOTS an ideal package for swim schools within the newly developed clubs springing up all over the country.

INSTANT EXPOSURE:

H&RCs provided instant nationwide exposure. I would say this is what really put AQUATOTS up front. Up until then it had been very much a one-man show. But it was successful and already had a reputation that had caught the eye of the media and ultimately the H&RC group.

AQUATOTS TODAY:

Today AQUATOTS is a franchise organization. The number of instructors trading as AQUATOTS has been whittled down. General instructor training in the AQUATOTS method is a thing of the past. Previously trained instructors will be obliged to trade under their own names unless they have joined the franchise. The franchise structure provides for ongoing support and training of franchisees. It serves to maintain the excellent standard of the program.

INFANT SWIMMING TODAY:

Aug 4, 2003

AMERICAN ACADEMY of PAEDIATRICIANS (AAP)

SAYS:

1. **'vigilance** is needed to prevent tragedies in water' but continues to avoid recommending swimming instruction for at high-risk young children.
2. 'aquatic programmes for infants and toddlers have **not shown to decrease the risk of drowning**'
3. 'parents are led to believe that infants are **safe from drowning** after participating in such programmes'

AAP CONCERN IS VALID:

In my presentation at the WABC In Buenos Aires (2001), I mentioned the need for a clearly defined infant aquatic terminology. Terms such as 'infancy' and 'swimming' need to be defined before we can expect to communicate accurately and have an auspicious body such as the AAP understand what we as infant aquatic educators are about. There is more to infant aquatic education than teaching swimming. Categories of infant aquatics number at least 5 (five):

1. Bonding
2. Orientation
3. Therapy
4. Water Safety
5. Swimming lessons

MISSION FOR THE FUTURE:

- To make AQUATOTS® the benchmark for infant swimming
- To establish a terminology for use by the WABC.
- To educate the generally uniformed public so that infant aquatic instructors are under pressure to clarify what they are offering.

- To encourage infant aquatic instructors to examine their philosophies so as to classify their programmes according to one of the above categories.

MORE ABOUT AQUATOTS®

Website: www.aquatots_swimprogram.com