



*I Swim at Mary Street*

The logic behind nursery classes.....

Why do we do what we do in nursery classes?

The importance of learning to swim at an early age cannot be disputed. With accidental drowning being the leading cause of death in under-5s, it makes good sense for all young Australians to develop water safety skills from a very early age.

Further, Australia is a nation whose national psyche is based on water activities, whether enjoying the water through personal recreation or through cheering on our elite swimmers in the pool. Participating in swimming has rewards too for health and fitness. But unlike other physical or intellectual pursuits undertaken by children in the years prior to schooling, formal swimming lessons can commence at a much earlier age than other activities. Water familiarisation activities can start soon after birth with baby's first bath and formal lessons start in many swim centres for babies as young as four months. No other baby-centred leisure activity commences at such an early age.

Everything we do in our nursery classes has a purpose. We structure our program to trigger:

- Physical
  - Gross motor skills such as stationery (floating), locomotion & object manipulation
  - Fine motor skills such as grasping & visual motion
- Cognitive
  - Oral Language, listening comprehension, reasoning, verbal ability, and cognitive efficiency (including emotional)

Teaching practices are one of the most crucial factors in children's success learning. We look not at the teacher but at the practices (program & structure). The table below profiles how the practices of the teacher may be fostering skills (adding capital) to the child.

Dimension	Element	
	Nursery & Preschool	Learn to Swim
1. Orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water familiarisation</li> <li>• Water survival skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Swim technique skills</li> </ul>
2. Physical Capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordination</li> <li>• Differentiated activities</li> <li>• Participation/flow</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Activity progression</li> <li>• Corrective evaluations</li> <li>• Integrated communication strategies</li> </ul>
3. Social capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social support</li> <li>• Child engagement</li> <li>• Parent/caregiver engagement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confidence building, emotional well being</li> <li>• Self-regulation</li> </ul>
4. Intellectual capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Literacy</li> <li>• Numeracy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Other curriculum areas</li> </ul>

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5. Language Capital	• Rich Language	• Instructional discourse
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Let us look a little more at how activities translate to skills:

- Hello song – aids in socialisation and communication
- Humpty Dumpty – waiting & entering on cue as well as safely entering by leaning forward
- Back Floats – assist in floating and balance in the water (gross motor skills) , aids in propulsion when we move the child through the water and help them kick their toes
- Rotation front to back – water safety and survival skill, aids in balance in the water
- Front Floats – balance in water and propulsion when moved through the water with supported toes kicking
- Spider crawl with exit – builds upper body strength aiding in support and exit skills, critical water safety and survival skills
- Running across mat & jumping – balance & focus, submersion and surfacing skills, and when coupled with a float or swim back to wall; critical water safety and survival skills
- Swimming through hoops – submersion and breath control skills as well as propulsion and floating skills
- Chasing toys- focus and propulsion skills whether coupled with a noodle or swim rings, grasping skills (fine motor skills)
- Head first entries jelly on plate – submersion awareness, breath control, taking instruction, familiarisation with surrounds & checking for safety
- Blowing bubbles on the surface – cognitive awareness through cause and effect even with children of 6 months

As previously stated children that commence swimming from a young age may experience numerous developmental advantages over those that don't. Independent research has used the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) milestones for comparison purposes. The CDC has identified the age at which children should be successfully achieving the milestone. This research has shown that swimming children have achieved some milestones three age bands earlier than the CDC target, at a rate of at least 50% in participants studied. These milestones and the benchmark of swimming children have been illustrated in the table below.

Milestone		0-6 months	7-12 months	13-18 months	19-24 months	25-36 months	37-48 months	49-60 months	61-72 months
Stands on tiptoe	Physical								
Climbs up and down furniture unassisted									
Walks up and down stairs holding on to support									
Climbs well									
Runs easily									
Stands on one leg for 10 seconds or longer									
Correctly names some colours	Cognitive								
Understands the concept of counting									
Begins to have a sense of time									
Recalls parts of a story									
Understands the concept of same/different									
<b>Can count 10 or more objects</b>									
Correctly names at least four colours									
Enthusiastic in the company of other children	Socio-emotional								
Demonstrates increasing independence									
Begins to show defiant behaviour									
<b>Imitates adults and playmates</b>									
<b>Spontaneously shows affection for familiar playmates</b>									
Separates easily from parents									
Interested in new experiences									
Cooperates with other children									
Plays mum and dad									
Says several single words	Linguistic								
Follows simple instructions									
Follows a two- or three- word command									
Identifies common objects and pictures									
Understands physical relationships (in, on under)									
Mastered some basic grammar									
<b>Speaks clearly enough for strangers to understand</b>									
Tells stories									
Uses future tense									

  

<b>Key</b>		Almost 50% of swimming children are already achieving this milestone.
		Age groups in which at least 50% of swimming children are achieving.
		CDC target for milestone to be achieved.

Table 10: CDC milestones for which swimming children achieved at a rate of 50% for two bands ahead of the nominated age group.

## Conclusions

There are the obvious benefits of participating in nursery and learn to swim classes at a young age such as water safety and survival skills, and with the aim to reduce the risk of drowning. However, there are many other physical, emotional and cognitive benefits that are often overlooked.

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Research shown that it appears that children who participate in swimming are achieving a range of milestones earlier than normal populations. It is reasonable to anticipate that swimming may enhance physical capital due to the physical focus of swimming, particularly in gross motor skills. Many of the skills, dispositions and knowledge that swimming children are displaying in child testing are those that one would expect from intense training in swimming – namely their physical capital. However, we also note that swimming children, as reported by their parents and through child tests, are also performing better than normal populations in other areas – their language and intellectual capital. In some areas, there are significant differences between the swimming cohort and the normal populations upon which the tests have been based.

Our observation of quality swim lessons suggest that swim lessons can offer considerable potential to add capital to young children. In early swimming lessons young learners are exposed to new experiences that extend their repertoire of skills, knowledges and dispositions

As the early years of life are so critical to later successes, there is now a strong emphasis on these early years of learning and the transition into schooling.

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