

# HOW TO EVALUATE A WATER EXERCISE INSTRUCTOR

By Pauline Ivens, MS



Effectively teaching a group water exercise class is a challenge for every exercise instructor. Not only do we face a group of exercisers with multiple individual differences, we now have them immersed in water! As water exercise classes continue to grow, what do we expect from our instructors.

A safe and successful water exercise class depends on the instructor's ability to apply sound instructional principles and practices. The key word is 'teaching'. We are in the business of teaching movement education. All instructors want to contribute to the well-being of the participants. But to become an effective teacher takes a lot of extra work and dedication to provide a safe, effective, fun and well-structured class.

Lorna Francis, Ph.D., says "many people believe that teaching is intuitive and spontaneous. Without proper training, however, an intuitive and spontaneous approach to teaching often results in ineffective leadership." Teaching techniques have been well researched and what we need to understand is the impact that teaching has on learning behavior. Our participants come to class to learn. Our instructors need to be able to provide a learning environment, and deliver exercises in a way that will enable every participant to learn and reap the benefits of performing those exercises.

The teacher's actions should cause learning, which results in the intended outcome.

Many instructors do not appreciate the complexity of the process required to learn a new exercise or movement pattern.

## IN A MATTER OF SECONDS.....

- the participant perceives and reacts to the proper cues
- remembers similar situations and instructions on what to do

- determines proper strategy
- makes correct response
- through feedback, determines whether he or she performed the exercise correctly

Learning is a complex process, and we often take it for granted, especially when we teach adults. We expect our adult participants to come to class with prior movement experience. We help them understand the unique properties of water; we endeavor to keep them safe, but we do not always 'teach' the extra details that will truly enable a person to improve performance and reach personal goals. When I evaluate instructors one of the key details that I look for is: "Did this instructor just call out the exercises, or did he/she also explain HOW and WHY each exercise was offered." When I hear the HOW and the WHY then I know I am watching a teacher.

## WHAT DO WE OR SHOULD WE EXPECT FROM WATER EXERCISE INSTRUCTORS?

The list below is an excerpt from an Evaluation Form\* that I use to evaluate water exercise instructors. It will provide a good guideline for the skills and knowledge that are deemed to be important when you teach water exercise. If you are an instructor it will help you do a self-check to see if you are achieving these key components. If you are a director or manager it will help you understand what to look for in a water exercise instructor, both in the hiring process and the ongoing evaluations.

Within the fitness industry, water exercise is growing very rapidly. We need more water exercise instructors. The Aquatic Exercise Association is currently striving to achieve accreditation for the Aquatic Fitness Professional Certification. As an education specialist I am continuing to do my part to advocate for instructor training, and raising the standards of our movement education classes. I hope you will find this information helpful.



## A. LESSON DEVELOPMENT

### 1. WARM-UP (LIMBERING OF WHOLE BODY, VIGOROUS, LOCOMOTION, ROM)

- Easy limbering of all major joints
- Vigorous use of large muscles
- Range of motion for all major joints, with posture cues
- Avoids static and ballistic stretches
- Gradual increased rate of circulation
- 10-15% of class time recommended

### 2. CARDIO (INTENSITY, DURATION, VARIETY, BALANCED, MONITORING)

- Level of intensity is challenging but does not exceed ability level of class
- 40-60% of class time recommended
- Instructor avoids excessive repetition
- Impact levels varied for shallow water
- Participants are coached about levels of effort + benefits
- Intensity is regularly monitored
- Movement is continuous with advanced cues from instructor

### 3. MUSCULAR ENDURANCE (WELL BALANCED, USE OF RESOURCES)

- Variety of functional exercises used
- Correct posture and body placement is demonstrated and taught
- Instructor explains which muscles each exercise strengthens
- Adequate time allowed for strengthening to occur

- Avoidance of high risk exercises
- If equipment is used, instructor demonstrates clearly and explains benefits

### 4. FLEXIBILITY & RELAXATION (APPROPRIATE MUSCLE GROUPS, TENSION RELEASE, MAINTAIN WARMTH, BREATHING)

- Complimentary exercises are planned to stretch appropriate muscle groups
- Correct posture and body placement is demonstrated and taught



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- Avoidance of high risk stretches
- Participants are kept warm
- Physical and psychological relaxation are included
- 10-12% of total class time is recommended

## **B. SKILLS IN TEACHING**

### **1. SELECTION OF EXERCISES (WATER DEPTH, APPROPRIATE FLOW, VARIETY, WELL-ROUNDED, USE OF EQUIPMENT)**

- Exercises involve maximum use of muscle groups
- Exercises follow logical sequence and flow smoothly from one to the next
- Good variety demonstrated
- Exercises are appropriate for stated training effect
- Effective use of exercise and water depth
- Correct use of equipment in terms of body position technique and balance

### **2. EXPLANATION (VERBAL & NON-VERBAL CLARITY, AMOUNT, DESCRIPTORS)**

- Clear, concise instructions, avoiding confusing statements
- Expectations are clearly stated before and during class
- Instruction progresses from simple to complex

### **3. USE OF MUSIC (SELECTION, VOLUME QUALITY, ABILITY TO CO-ORDINATE EXERCISE TO MUSIC, ACOUSTICS)**

- Music is motivating and appropriate for mood and pace
- Selection is varied and suitable for clientele
- Exercise coordinated with rhythm and phrasing of music
- Instructor uses cues in music to help indicate changes in exercise
- Volume does not interfere with instructor and enjoyment
- Adjusted tempo for water exercise

### **4. SAFETY (PRECAUTIONS, MODIFICATIONS, CORRECT TECHNIQUE, EXERCISE SELECTION)**

- Avoid high risk exercises
- Limitations of the facility are considered
- Recommendations for pacing, breathing, body alignment are reinforced
- Excessive repetitions are avoided

- Correct exercise technique is both demonstrated and taught
- Exercise precautions are provided
- Provides alternative exercise modifications
- Entering and exiting pool is explained and done correctly
- Appropriate monitoring of exercise intensity is done

### **5. EDUCATION (PROVIDES POSITIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT, PROMOTES INDIVIDUAL AWARENESS OF NEEDS)**

- Able to suggest and demonstrate modifications
- Provides opportunity for feedback from participants
- Promotes cognitive learning
- Intensity check demonstrated and explained during cardio
- Shares knowledge in a positive, educational way

### **6. TEACHING TECHNIQUES (USE OF SPACE, DEMONSTRATIONS, NEW CHALLENGES, MANAGEMENT SKILLS, INNOVATIONS)**

- Demonstrates with explanations from the deck
- Instructor changes teaching position, and maintains eye contact
- Planning provides for changes of direction and movement, varied formations and maximum use of space available
- Exercises and instructions help to develop positive self image for all
- Novel ideas and equipment incorporated into program
- Instructor knows when to use water demonstrations to enhance learning
- Instructor manages the group and provides individual feedback

## **C. PROFESSIONAL QUALITIES**

### **1. PLANNING (CREATIVE, ORGANIZED, PREPARED, FLEXIBLE TO ADAPT)**

- Class is creative, interesting
- Explanations, demonstrations, formations and progressions are planned in advance
- Instructor has goals and objectives for this class
- Instructor is flexible to participants' response

### **2. LANGUAGE (VOICE, BODY LANGUAGE, SUITABILITY)**

- Voice is projected at an appropriate level for size of group and facility
- Microphone used
- Instructor adds feeling and expression to his/her teaching
- Tone of voice is friendly and encouraging
- Verbal cues compliment demonstrations
- Basic anatomical terminology is used
- Correct technique and body alignment is maintained
- Hand signals

### 3. MANNER (ENTHUSIASM, ENCOURAGING, MOTIVATING)

- Positive attitude and approach to class
- Polite and respectful to all participants
- Poised and confident with good sense of humor
- Maintains eye contact and constant observation of class

### 4. ATTITUDE (RESPONSIBLE, SINCERE, PROFESSIONAL)

- Instructor is available to spend extra time with individuals
- Instructor is punctual
- Indicates concern for safety and comfort of participants
- Demonstrates an enjoyment of teaching and appreciation of the value of fitness

- Appearance is neat, clean and suitable for activity **OSF**

*\*If you would like to receive a copy of the full Evaluation Form just email Pauline at Waterpolly@aol.com*

## REFERENCES

*Components of an Aerobics Class, Karen Clippinger-Robertson MSPE, Chapter 7 in Aerobics Instructor Manual, American Council on Exercise 1993.*

*Teaching an Aerobics Class, Lorna Francis, Ph.D., Chapter 8 in Aerobics Instructor Manual, American Council on Exercise 1993.*

*British Columbia Parks & Recreation Instructor Competency Evaluation.*

## BIOGRAPHY:

*Pauline Ivens MS, has taught movement education for 36 years. She is the owner of AQUA AEROBICS UNLIMITED, offering education and training to water exercise professionals. Pauline travels nationally teaching and training water exercise instructors, as well as writing and designing new materials for water exercise education. Pauline has a Master's Degree in Human Performance - Adapted Physical Education. She maintains certifications with AEA and ACE, and is a Training Specialist for the Aquatic Exercise Association. She is also a licensed NIA Teacher and Watsu® Practitioner. In 1997 Pauline was awarded AEA's Aquatic Fitness Professional Global Award for excellence in aquatic fitness leadership and education. Waterpolly@aol.com www.aquaaerobics.com*



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