

A WALK ON THE WETSIDE: TEACHING 'FLOTATION'

A closer look at exploring and discovering 'buoyancy' using tried and tested practices to develop and improve flotation and rotation skills.

PART TWO

1. 'Falling stars'

Works best if depth of water is at *least* 'chest height'



It makes a difference if the swimmer is not having to 'drop' far before they get to the surface. *Also, in chest height water and above, there is displacement.[1].*

"Let's start with our wide extended 'star' shape and starting one step away, take a breath and hold it, put our faces down in the water and 'fall' gently forwards towards the wall."

Firstly to the wall or the steps. (Progression: increase the number of steps and so the distance from the wall)

Remind them of Recover-to-stand:

Knees up- Head Up -Stand up "

Challenge: *"When both hands touch the wall, allow elbows to bend and push back; sweep both arms downwards using hands to press down hard - tuck knees under to bring them forward, lift head and when upright, straighten both legs to plant feet on the bottom to stand again."*

Try experimenting with **different shapes**.... or **alphabet letters** (A, I, Y, T) (watch your head if arms are not extended to the front!!)



This is featured on one of the cards in the innovative resource : [Small Steps to Successful Swimming](#)

You can find more ideas to support planning, using the card [HERE](#)

2. Wide and Narrow ('Falling Trees')

After wide oak trees falling gently to the wall, try tall and narrow trees; talk about streamlined shapes ('pencil' or 'rocket'). Again, increase the distance from the wall when ready. This is often the first time you can talk about using a leg kick - to extend the distance and hold the shape. See below.



3. TRY ..falling gently **away from** the wall or steps on the front.

Experiment again first with wide shapes (arms extended wide) and narrow shapes (arms pressed close to both sides of the head – covering both ears)



Most children learn to then push off from side or the bottom of the pool without being prompted.

Those who do, are usually open to other ideas about how they can improve the effect; those who don't only need a nod in that direction before they have a go too and

discover it works.

I am always amazed at how many children as young as 4 and 5 years old – if standing with their back close to the wall – will instinctively discover for themselves that they can kick back and push off the wall, with one or both feet.

It's quite hard to hold the pencil or rocket shape float, at first. It's a question of balance and control; tipping and rolling around the centre line is common. When this happens, swimmers may 'throw' out an arm or kick out one or both legs to try and recover their balance and stabilise their body position. (See notes)

The analogy of the novice [learning to ride a bicycle](#) on a level surface is a good one; not yet able to hold a straight line; stop pedalling and they will slowly come to a standstill and then...????? I rest my case – on the soft verge, I hope.

This is a great way for pupils to improve their floatation skills. They often 'get it' some time before they can demonstrate and hold or maintain static float positions for any length of time .

Push glide and kick is about DYNAMIC BALANCE ; balance "on the move".

4. Push Glide and Kick face down on the front

Lots of beginners will instinctively add a kicking action to a push and glide; usually it is an alternating kick. It's almost as if moving our legs is a natural response to being "on the move".

Out of the water and moving upright, we habitually use our legs in all too familiar ways. When horizontal on the surface of the water, (still not a natural orientation for beginners) moving our legs is almost certainly about trying to balance an unsteady and uncertain body position.

For many pupils it will also be about responding naturally to that sinking feeling at their centre of gravity - set off by those 'heavy' legs.[2]

Kicking your legs while gliding is almost certainly also a natural response to the sensation of slowing down and losing momentum after the initial push from the wall or the bottom of the pool.

For teachers this opens a spontaneous and naturally occurring window of opportunity for practicing and understanding kicking techniques with arms extended to the front. They shouldn't need to hold a float [3]

The alternating movement originates and is best initiated from the hips or 'seat.

Legs are 'long' with little bend at the knees; we're looking for *"loose floppy ankles, pointy toes and a small splash"*.



If a simultaneous kicking action is preferred, encourage a 'small 'and vigorous action, kicking back with heels and 'hooked toes' or flat feet (Breaststroke) or a dolphin type kick.

5. Reprise the 'bottom on the bottom' or 'seat drop practice'. (Part One).

"Be sure to take a big, big breath, sink down and ...after sitting on the bottom, tuck up tight - hug knees and tuck chin to chest - and see if you can float up to the surface like a ball/balloon/bubble."

This shape (tucked) is described in most traditional textbooks as the 'mushroom'.

It should feature in our practices with beginners and this for me is one way.

By making it part of a **dynamic** sequence I try to avoid it as a **static** practice.

Incidentally, I tend to call it a 'tuck float' (as opposed to a wide or a narrow float shape)



For reasons that escape me other than that maybe it is what we have always done, many of those textbooks present the mushroom float as the introductory practice for the three 'classic' float shapes ('mushroom', 'star' and 'pencil') for beginners..[4]

Anyone who has tried- or indeed watched closely as someone else tried, from a standing position, to raise their legs and tuck up tight, like a ball, chin to chest- will know that it can be an unsettling experience as the body tries to stabilise and come to rest. [5]

Extension: (Literally) From the tuck shape at the surface extend arms and legs to make the 'pencil' ('narrow') and the 'star' ('wide') shape.

Progressions:

6. A short sequence. Take a big breath and hold it. Start with a wide ('star') shape, count 1,2,3. Without standing up curl up tight into a tuck shape ('ball' or 'mushroom'), count 1,2,3 and then stretch out to a narrow ('Pencil' or 'rocket') shape

7. Star and pencil floats on the back*

8. Push Glide and Kick face down on the back.*

9. Push and Glide on front and flip or 'log' roll to the front*

10. Push and Glide on the back and flip or 'log' roll to the back*

* These and other practices are featured in the innovative resource: [Small Steps to Successful Swimming](#)

Notes:

[1] Remember, the buoyant force on a submerged object is equal to the weight of the liquid displaced by the object. See Archimedes' Eureka moment. (Footnote in Part One) Try <https://www.science-sparks.com/what-is-the-archimedes-principle/>

[2] see [Float like a butterfly sink like a brick](#)

[3] See [those tombstone shaped slabs...](#)link

[4] Not the case in a useful text with lots of great visuals: "**Developing Effective Practice for Swimming Teachers**" by **Ray Lau and Ellie Purvis (2016)** Available here, last time I looked www.ypdbooks.com/sport/1913-developing-effective-practice-for-swimming-teachers-YPD02642.html

[5] I know – who remembers Key Stage 3 Physics? – but even if you don't, what we are seeing with the rocking forward and backwards and occasionally a twist or tip sideways, which is characteristic of early attempts at the mushroom float, is all about the opposing forces of gravity and buoyancy battling it out in our floating body to achieve equilibrium or stability.see [2]