

Mopping the Deck

Relating with Your Aquatic Students from the Deck

By Michele The Trainer

If you teach from deck, do your students ask, “Do you ever get into the pool?”

If you teach from the pool, do you find that your students cannot hear you and they get frustrated by not being able to see your legs?

Do you ever feel that no matter what you do, or where you are, someone cannot hear you, see you, follow you, hear the music, etc?

Relating, or connecting, is like building a relationship. To build a relationship you have to learn how to best communicate with a person. In today’s world we can see this – some are phone folks, some email folks and some fax folks. It is very important to learn HOW to communicate with someone if we expect to get a response. For example, I cannot email a phone person and expect a response. Often I can call that same person, and they will pick up the phone immediately. Initiating and responding to communication is the give and take we need to establish a relationship foundation.

A group is a group. Please don’t tell the group, but a group is not personal training. In group exercise it can take a very long time to learn the personalities and health histories of each person, especially if we have a large group. For example, it can take us a long time to learn if a certain participant is hearing impaired. I can chat away over perfect acoustics all day long but if they can’t hear me, then I’m unfortunately talking to myself.

Your class is all about the students, not all about you or me. If they perceive it’s all about you, well that’s another article entirely! (Read in Chapter 9 of the AEA Aquatic Fitness Professional Manual about “leading” the workout.)

With a group, why not start with names? I try my best to remember the names of my students. It makes them feel special and successful, and it also makes them want to return. The other day I said to a second time student, “Good Morning Debbie!” and she said, “Wow you remember my name”. Now as I learn more about her, I can relate with her better. I can also introduce her to a few

other students and this creates team spirit. Groups that become spirited teams also foster accountability because they give each other a tough love hard time if someone does not show up for class. Accountability is good for achieving fitness results.

Also remember that people have different ways of learning. If you go to the University of Google and input “ways of learning” you will find various classifications for learning styles. I have chosen the following categories for discussion in this article and will focus on the first three, as I believe these to be the most important for group exercise:

1. Verbal – the person has to make it their own, or put it into their own language; often seen taking notes, or paraphrasing into their own words in order to learn it
2. Visual – the person needs to see it
3. Aural – the person needs to hear it
4. Tactile – the person needs to touch it (for example, you want your auto mechanic to be tactile...i.e. “hands-on”)
5. Kinesthetic – the person needs to manipulate it or change it (closely related to tactile)

EDITOR’S NOTE: There are a variety of learning style classifications; the categories discussed in this article are different than the learning styles discussed in Chapter 14 of the AEA Aquatic Fitness Professional Manual.

Three Ways of Learning, Relating & Communicating

• Verbal Learners

Verbal learners might have to reiterate your cues. Let them speak!! This is interesting in group exercise because, unlike school, we do not generally have Q & A type interactions. For this type of learner you can encourage them to repeat your verbal cues with you. With this type of learner, if this helps them “get it” then you are on your way to building that connection! Also this may cut down on random chatter and provide you with a more focused and energetic response from the group.

• Visual Learners

Of course it’s best for visual learners to watch you demonstrate the moves. Thus, it would be best to demonstrate from deck so that they can imitate and emulate your arm movement and leg movement. This does not mean, however, that you have to be in the same spot on deck for your entire 60-minute class. *Work the room! In and around the pool, it is often easier for participants to see you on deck, than to hear you from the deck or water.*

I also use a lot of visual props when demonstrating, even signs when necessary. For example, to exaggerate one move or a sequence, sometimes I will create a laminated sign and walk the deck with it, much like the round numbers in a boxing match. Teaching from a chair is another good example of visual demonstration and is especially effective in demonstrating level 3 movements.

Chapter 9 of the AEA Aquatic Fitness Professional Manual states in the section on Disadvantages of Teaching from the Pool Deck, “Your students may be in prolonged neck extension looking up at you on deck.” I’m less than 5 feet tall. I remember taking a course with AEA Training Specialist, Angela Davies; she is supermodel tall. Angela explained that she would often squat or kneel down onto the deck to improve eye contact with her students. This prevented a participant from straining his/her neck by trying to look up and focus on her for a 60-minute class. I thought that was brilliant and though I’m vertically challenged, I will often sit or lie on the deck to connect, as if I am in the water too. I call this “sea level”. You make eye-to-eye contact for the visual and it also helps the aural learners as they can often hear you better at “sea level”. Often I feel as if I am mopping the deck with my hair, but in most cases it’s worth the sea of smiles!



• **Aural Learners**

Aural learners obviously need to hear us to relate to us. I love water and I love music but we all know that hearing your music over pool acoustics is tricky. I remember subbing at an indoor Olympic pool with my microphone and my boom box. The high roof over that big pool carried the music and my voice until it evaporated into nothing! I could not hear my own voice or the music, so for certain the students could not hear me!

Remember we also have to protect ourselves from voice and vocal chord injury. **Please see Chapter 11 section “Vocal Use and Abuse” of the AEA Aquatic Fitness Professional Manual to review. The Manual recommends, “Experiment with different teaching locations around the pool before starting your class. Due to construction or layout, it maybe less noisy in one area than another, or your voice may carry more clearly from some locations.” Also the Manual has an excellent section, “The Art of Cueing” in Chapter 9, which discusses Verbal/Audible Cueing, Visual Cueing and Tactile Cueing.**

With a small group we can often solve the acoustical problem by being in the pool with the participants, at “ear level”, but keep in mind that the visual learner cannot see your legs. For me, I would consider this only with my veteran students familiar with my cues and popular moves.

Most people exhibit a combination of learning styles. If we endeavor to be conscious of these three methods of learning, and we incorporate the proper cueing to accommodate and connect with each style, the result will be...*drum roll please*...that we will also accommodate the other two types of learners (Tactile and Kinesthetic)! You can often integrate these styles with your verbal or visual cueing. For example, consider the tactile learner. When teaching a biceps curl, you can verbally cue, “You should feel this here” while visually pointing to your own biceps muscle. Hopefully they will see it, do it and feel their bicep contract or burn, thereby, learning it on their terms. Also by moving their arm, they are manipulating their own body and this will help the kinesthetic learner to better understand. Remember we are not in the business of offering touch or tactile cueing. **As stated in Chapter 9 of the AEA Aquatic Fitness Professional Manual, “An instructor or**

personal trainer should always ask permission to touch so clients are not offended or startled.” Mindful cueing for these types of learners is best.

Please don't expect to be able to identify each type of learner, because again, most people ultimately utilize a combination of styles. The point is to try to integrate a blend of verbal, visual and aural cues as this will offer the best chance of relating with all class participants, no matter where on deck we choose to teach.

If you choose to leave the deck for the comforts of the water while teaching group exercise, consider the benefits and the risks involved. I tend to do this towards the end of the day, or the end of a class. Students seem to love this and if I choose well-known moves then everyone can feel successful. I avoid in-pool teaching with following situations:

- No lifeguard. If there is no lifeguard, it is best to teach from deck for safety of the students.
- New students. New students will become frustrated if they cannot see what you are doing or learn what is expected of them.
- International students. If you do not speak the same language as your students, then

you have no choice but to utilize the best of your visual cueing! They will appreciate your exaggerated demonstrations and sign language!

AEA Standards and Guidelines for Deck Instruction state, “AEA recognizes deck instruction as the preferred method of leading aquatic fitness in most situations”

During your next aquatic class, make a conscious effort to relate with your participants on the next level – you will be pleasantly surprised at the outcome! **►**

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