

ENTERING THE SWIMMING POOL

How do swim coaches help students become successful swimmers?

Jerry Liang

Ever wondered how to keep yourself afloat and move fast in the water? Have you had a friend who invited you to a pool party or a water park? Perhaps you wanted to join a swim team to compete with other people? You are not alone! Many young people are motivated to learn how to swim so they can safely have fun in the water and experience the long-term health benefits. However, at the same time, many don't know where to start, as they take time to build the courage to enter the water, and they have varying learning paces. In the Bay Area, there are many swim schools to help the new generations of young swimmers to help reach these goals, one of them being Flying Fish Swim School. Located in Mountain View, Flying Fish strives to help their students, regardless of ability, to improve their swimming technique through small and interactive group lessons to enable them to safely enjoy swimming in the water.



On a typical day of classes, manager and coach Jennifer Hatch arrives early to heat the facility, uncover the pool, and distribute attendance sheets to the swim coaches. The swim coaches then disperse into their own lanes in the swimming pool to prepare their lessons for the day. Soon, the students start arriving and cheerfully enter the pool room, ready for their swim lessons. During

the day, one can hear the familiar sounds of splashing and the students laughing, along with the encouragement and positive energy given by their instructors. At the end of each swim lesson, students are able to advance, whether it is taking their first ever steps in the swimming pool, or learning a new swim stroke, marking their progression in their swim journey.

MOTIVATION

Coach Edgar Mendoza, one of the swim instructors at Flying Fish Swim School, got into swimming so that he could learn to save himself in the water. He recounts his experience visiting a swimming pool when he was five years old: "I never really learned the basics in a regular pool until I jumped into a pool by accident." Because he fell into the swimming pool and didn't know how to swim, his father had to come and save him. From that moment on, he started to learn how to swim and move on to professional swimming. Coach Edgar's experience wasn't an isolated case either, as many people also want to learn how to stay safe in the water on their own so they can go swimming. Every year, drowning claims many lives, as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reveals that drowning is the second leading cause of unintentional death for ages 5-14 in the United States after car accidents. Along with that, over 55% of adults have never taken a swimming lesson at all, most of them being ethnic minority groups. In the effort to provide swim lessons to help people stay afloat, many swim schools out there, such as Flying Fish, help students through having teachers pay close attention to



Coach Jennifer watching over the swim classes

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the students, supporting their body positions, and using kickboards to assist with the learning process.

The motivation to swim also extends well beyond survival. Coach Jennifer notes her experience with the students’ parents saying how their kids want to enjoy the pool or go snorkeling when they go on vacation. She also points out how many see the competitive side of swimming where people want to swim fast and join a swim team. Kids want to learn how to swim so they can have fun with their friends in the water, compete with other people at swim meets, or even teach more people how to swim. For students to be able to achieve the wellness or competitive aspects of swimming, staff at Flying Fish help motivate their students by setting up benches on the side of the pool as “they get to show off to the parents, and the parents engaging in that is great.” Having the parents watch from the side will ease the students’ stress when having to be away from them when learning how to swim. In the process of learning a new skill, allowing their parents to watch from the side allows them to demonstrate what they have learned. The SwimSwam magazine notes that just by having these extrinsic rewards, such as students getting to impress their parents, it builds on their motivation to learn even further because it creates an opportunity for their progress to be recognized. Since many people face barriers to water-related activities, Flying Fish staff use their knowledge and expertise with swimming to not only teach the new

generations how to swim safely, but also provide recognition for the student’s progress so they can feel more motivated to master swimming.

PROCESS

To teach the new generation of swimmers of any ability, Flying Fish takes a special approach to their class structure, by having a wide variety of swim levels, each level consisting of many small-sized group lessons. Swim levels at Flying Fish range from “Bubble” for new swimmers, to “Advanced” where experienced swim students work on their swimming technique, speed, and stamina to prepare for Flying Fish’s Swim Team. Coach Jennifer explains that the main goal for beginners is that “we want to make them comfortable in the water. Once we’ve done that, then the next part is working on putting their face in and being comfortable facing the water, blowing bubbles, and going underwater.” After the students are adjusted to the water, they move on to learning how to swim in a streamline position, which is swimming with arms straight out, then kicking and using kickboards to assist them in swimming. Eventually, the students learn how to do basic freestyle—where you lie flat, flutter kick, and alternate your arms in a windmill-like motion while side breathing—and backstroke swimming with the help of the swim coach advising on ways to correct their technique.



Students practicing their swimming technique



Coach Edgar standing in front of the whiteboard

Because swimming skills can be challenging to learn and develop for both beginner and advanced levels, swim instructors take many approaches to encourage their students who occasionally get tired.



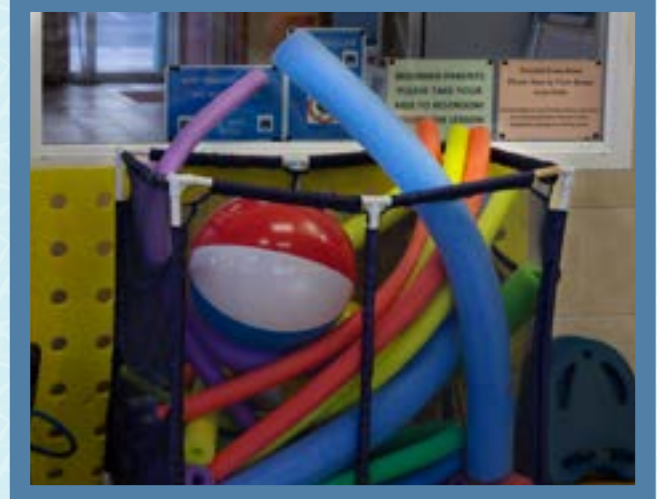
Coach Edgar connects with his students by talking about his personal experiences where he has also felt tired as a swimmer, and that it is perfectly normal to feel exhausted. He also points out that it’s important to relate to the students, as he mentions “When they go in the water, you say, let’s do submarines. So basically use terminology that sounds fun for them.” When instructors connect with students, it gives them a safe environment to express themselves, take a break, and interact comfortably with the swim instructors without having to feel too much pressure. Since learning and practicing the different swimming techniques can be exhausting sometimes, swim

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instructors reward their students with play time, where students get to play with pool noodles, beach balls, and rings, ultimately adding more fun while also having an effective swim lesson.

Considering the fact that there are adults or people with disabilities who never learned or were never able to swim, Flying Fish also strives to accommodate diverse age and ability groups in their swim classes. Coach Jennifer brings up a point that there are adults out there who never learned to swim either because they were never exposed to a swimming pool, or they had a traumatic experience in the

water. According to the BMC Public Health, a 2020 study has found that 19% of those who had a negative experience in the water were because of swim lessons, because swim instructors didn’t address their students’ fear in the water. In the effort to better support students with varying abilities, Coach Jennifer worked at a therapeutic swimming center, where she helped children and adults with developmental and physical disabilities one-on-one to learn how to swim. She became a lifeguard and a swim coordinator to work with all ages and abilities because she really enjoyed helping and seeing her students grow. With almost 30 years of experience in aquatics, when she joined Flying Fish Swim School, she decided to continue her effort to help the disabled by offering them a trial class to see what teaching methods and teaching environments were better for them, whether it was a group or individual lesson. At Flying Fish, she has taught disabled swimmers, such as those with cerebral palsy who didn’t have much control of their bodies, or those with non-verbal autism, who couldn’t communicate. She used special teaching methods such as using flotation devices, having them swim using one arm, and using pool noodles to float, which ended up helping them get better at swimming. Some of the ideal equipment to use in teaching disabled swimmers includes specialized floats, fins, and paddles to help aid with mobility limitations. An article from Medical News Today emphasizes how swimming is an ideal sport for the disabled, as the water acts as a cushion on the muscles compared to high-impact sports on land. Accommodating swimmers of any age and ability through this low-impact sport by giving them the proper equipment and environment, it allows them to progress in swimming, which will help them achieve physical and mental benefits.



Basket of pool noodles



Coach Edgar teaching a student backstroke swimming

BENEFITS

When most people go swimming, they aim for the physical benefits that can come with it. Coach Edgar points out that swimming is one of the sports that benefits many parts of your body, such as your legs from kicking, your arms from pulling the water, and your chest from floating yourself and performing the swim strokes. He points out that this is different from soccer, where you mainly use your legs, and basketball, you don't exercise much of your back, but a common misconception for swimming is that people think that it doesn't help as much as other sports. Swimming is like a form of resistance training as every arm stroke and kick will contribute to building body strength due to having to work against the drag of the water. Unlike the impact-heavy land sports, swimming is where the water goes soft on your body, while you still have to move your joints frequently to swim through the drag caused by the water. Coach Jennifer points out, "I've had people who were wanting to get into being lifeguards who are athletes outside of the water, and you get them to swim a three hundred, and they get exhausted after a hundred as they were thinking that swimming for long distances would be easy." While building endurance through land and water sports is different, swimming gives more people access to a full-body workout.

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Swimming also allows younger people, especially students, to achieve mental health benefits. High expectations, such as getting good test scores or getting a good job, cause them to feel burned out. The Swimming World Magazine points

out that when swimming, you have to keep track of your breathing patterns, your technique, and your proximity to other swimmers, which

means that you can focus on something aside from your worries outside of the pool.

As a result of this, it leads to you being more aware of your surroundings and taking a break

from your daily tasks. To extend the mental health benefits further, being able to swim means you can go swimming in natural waters. The cold water from swimming in nature can help treat depression, as the shock from cold water can act as a helpful stress on the body. Upon mastering swimming, it means that swimming in the wild waters is an option that can allow people to better connect with nature. Of course, being able to enjoy water parks, going to pool parties, or joining swimming competitions can also positively affect your well being. Through these activities, you get the chance to socialize with others, support one another, and simply just enjoy the environment around you to take a break from your daily tasks.



CONCLUSION

Since their founding, Flying Fish consistently strives to engage with new swimmers through technique-focused small group lessons. Thanks to the encouragement from the swim coaches, students can finally break the barriers to swimming. Looking forward to the future, Flying Fish continues to increase the overall number of students, and swim coaches to boost the students' confidence and ability to swim, which means they encourage you to learn how to swim. By joining the swimming community, you can help yourself, and others achieve the benefits of swimming, whether you are a swim student or a coach.

Coach Edgar and Coach Jennifer say that some advice they would give to future swimmers and swim coaches is that if swimming is your passion, then definitely follow it, enjoy the learning process, and pass on the energy and encouragement to the students. Coach Edgar says one of the most exciting parts of seeing the students' progress is when "you've been spending like two months teaching a kid how to do proper breaststroke and they finally get it. It's just



Coach Jennifer working at the front desk

really rewarding." Even though swimming can be a tough sport to learn at first due to not being comfortable being submerged in water, swim coaches will ultimately guide you through every step of the way to let you progress, be more confident, and have fun in the process. In the end, swimming

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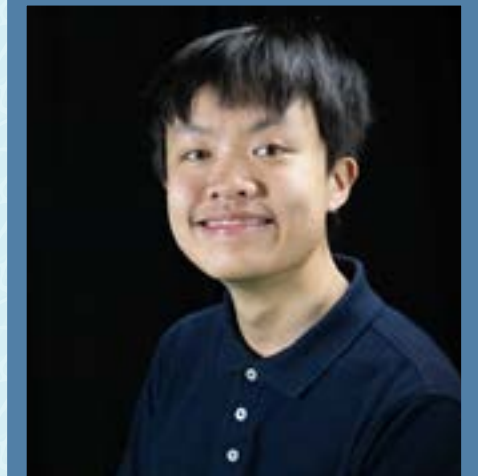
will not only improve your mobility skills, but also allow you to take a break from the expectations placed on you from today's demanding society. Together, let's help each other, regardless of our ability, to support each other through swimming so we can have fun and pass down our skills to future swimmers.



Flying Fish Swim School shop

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jerry Liang is a Junior at Mountain View High School and a Design student at Freestyle Academy. He lives in Mountain View with his parents and his younger brother. At school, he participates in the mental health and the magazine clubs to raise awareness about social issues and make the school a better place. Outside of school, he enjoys drawing, photo editing, coding, and swimming.



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