



# Swimming and water safety

## A School Teacher's Perspective.

The number of drowning deaths in Australia is regarded by governing bodies as far too many, hence it is proposed that teachers within primary schools be utilised more efficiently in the education process.

### Introduction

Data gathered indicates that Australian drowning fatalities for not only children, but people of all ages are at a plateau, if not slightly increasing. It is alarming that figures are not decreasing despite the many well developed swimming and water safety education programs available. From the perspective of a school teacher it is proposed that implementation of swimming and water safety into the school curriculum, will enable all children to become aware, and successfully decrease drowning fatalities in the short and long term.

School teachers' have acquired pedagogical knowledge and experience. It is argued that by supplementing their pedagogical strengths with swimming content and water safety knowledge, teacher confidence will result and the likelihood of deep curriculum implementation in schools will dramatically increase.

One strategy offering opportunities to gain swimming and water safety discipline knowledge and subsequently qualifications, are Australian Swimming Coaches and Teachers Association - Swim Australia Teacher (SAT) and Austswim – teacher of swimming and water safety.

### Swimming and water safety: the plateau

The Royal Life Saving Society Australia (RLSSA) National Drowning Report indicates that 314 people drowned in Australian waterways between 1 July 2009 and 30 June 2010, and 315 people drowned between 1 July 2010 and 30 June 2011. The 2011 report includes fatalities from the Queensland, New South Wales and Victorian floods which could be regarded as an anomaly and therefore will not be referred to for the purpose of this article. The 2010 report had for the second year in a row increased; 4% since the previous year and 12% on the five year average. 56 drowning deaths were children aged 0-17 years. 33 of these fatalities were under 5 years of age, increasing 7% on the 5 year average of 31.

A considerable amount of work has been attributed to educating the public about swimming and water safety awareness in a commitment to reducing drowning fatalities. It is acknowledged that the best time to prepare children for safe aquatic participation and provide the skills and knowledge needed to have a lifelong safe association with water is during childhood.

Hence, primary schools and in particular primary school teachers play a vital role in providing access to all children.

### Swimming and water safety resources

Successful water safety programs implemented within Australian communities which are available to primary school teachers include:

- Laurie Lawrence's Kids Alive Do The Five
- Royal Life Saving's Society Australia (RLSSA) Keep Watch program
- Surf Life Saving Australia (SLSA) Surf's Up





# NO DIVING

**Dr. Timothy Lynch, Monash University, Faculty of Education**

Surf Life Saving Australia (SLSA)  
Telstra Beach to Bush

Programs associated with courses and qualifications for teaching Swimming and water safety also available for primary school teacher professional development include:

Australian Swimming Coaches and Teachers Association (ASCTA) Swim Australia™ Teacher

Royal Life Saving's Society Australia (RLSSA) Swim and Survive

Austswim training of teachers of swimming and water safety

RLSSA Keep Watch programme has been operating for over 15 years and was designed for the water safety of children in the earlier years. The program's aim is to prevent drowning deaths of children under 5 years of age in all aquatic locations. The locations with specific hazards include the Keep Watch @ Public Pools, Keep Watch @ the Farm and Keep Watch @ Bath Time.

Over the past seven years the number of drowning deaths for children under 5 years has decreased only slightly.

Laurie Lawrence's Kids Alive Do The Five water safety program began in 1988 to reduce preschool drowning. 'Drowning is the greatest cause of accidental death in the under five age group in Australia. Every year, one child drowns each week.' The five program points comprise an easy to remember jingle, for when children under five are around water: Fence the pool, Shut the gate, Teach your kids to swim - it's great, Supervise - watch your mate and Learn how to resuscitate.

Surf Life Saving Australia (SLSA) has two school educational programs; Telstra Beach to Bush was the largest educational initiative ever undertaken by Surf Life Saving after research indicated that half the people rescued at the beach lived more than 50 kilometres from the beach.

The resource 'Surf's Up' was released in 2007 containing a range of cross-curricular activities for teachers to implement in the classroom.

The RLSSA Swim and Survive program was launched in 1982. The demand for the program was such that there were one million awards achieved in the first two years.

To date it is estimated that nearly 10 million Australians have participated in the Royal Life Saving Society's Swim and Survive Program and 'during this time there has been a 75% reduction in drowning in the 5-14 year age group', the program's targeted age group.

Swim Australia (Australian Swimming Coaches and Teachers Association) was 'launched in 1997 by the Federal Minister for Sport and Recreation to assist develop the Learn to Swim program in Australia to its full potential. ASCTA is a not for profit, membership based organisation that strives to achieve the World's best swimming and water safety Teachers and highest performing swimming Coaches'.

ASCTA is Australia's peak professional swimming body and courses are recognised by the International Federation of Swim Teachers Association (IFTSTA). Swim Australia's aim is for all Australians learning to swim and gaining water safety knowledge through safe, enjoyable and quality swimming lessons.



ASCTA is an Australian Registered Training Organisation (RTO) offering 35 units of competency, delivered in all states and territories. Swim Australia Teacher courses include:

- Swim Australia Teacher (SAT) directed at 4-12 years,
- Swim Australia Teacher of Babies and Toddlers (SAT B & T) directed at 0-4 years,
- Swim Australia Teacher of Competitive Swimming (SAT CS) directed at 7-12 years,
- Swim Australia Teacher Adolescents and Adults (SAT AA) directed at 14 and above,
- Swim Australia Teacher Learners with Disability (SAT LWD)
- Swim Australia Teacher Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (SAT CALD).

Austswim shares that it has a close philosophical and working relationship with Swim Australia, RLSSA and SLSA.

Austswim programmes for teaching swimming and water safety can be aligned with the units of competency in the corresponding Swim Australia Teacher courses. Austswim is also an Australian Registered Training Organisation (RTO), offering 18 units of competency but not all are delivered within Australian states and territories. Austswim courses include:

- Austswim Teacher of Swimming and water safety
- Austswim Teacher of Infant and Preschool Aquatics
- Austswim Teacher of Aquatics for People with a Disability
- Austswim Teacher Towards Competitive Strokes
- Austswim Teacher of Adults

## **Synergy: optimising Primary School Teacher involvement**

While all programmes appear to have been successful in contributing to the promotion of water safety and swimming development the RLSSA 2010 National Drowning Report and a research study by Peden, Franklin and Larsen (2009) suggests that there is still more education required. In the 2010 report RLSSA identify actions to address their concern that water safety education may be decreasing. Actions include:

- Improving pool fencing legislation and ensuring pool fences are checked regularly.
- Ensuring appropriate levels of funding for comprehensive integrated public awareness and education programs such as the Royal Life Saving Keep Watch program.
- Ensuring quality instructors in resuscitation and swimming and water safety programs.
- Educating those who have contact with parents and carers of young children.
- Continuing and increasing research into the causes and prevention of drowning.

It can be argued that if the individual school teacher participated in research into the causes and prevention of drowning, then they could possibly contribute to all five actions. Hence, school teachers are a valuable human resource who can assist in water safety public awareness and swimming promotion. It is proposed that teachers implementing swimming and water safety with conviction into school curriculum can enable all students to become aware, subsequently decreasing drowning fatalities.

Furthermore, in Australia children have traditionally received their swimming and water safety education during primary school. Within Australian education curriculum, swimming and water safety is closely aligned with the Health and Physical Education key learning area which consists of three strands; Health, Personal Development and Physical Activities.

Teachers have pedagogy expertise; qualifications, knowledge and experience, as it can be assumed that they achieve the National Professional Standards of Teachers (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2011) through four years initial teacher education and professional experience. However, while some teachers will have swimming and water safety qualifications, knowledge and experience, research suggests that many do not. Hence, it is recommended that by teachers participating in swimming and water safety courses (gaining qualifications) that they will be more knowledgeable and confident to implement water safety education into the curriculum. Also, it will offer an opportunity for teachers to realise the pertinent role they play in this process.

One strategy for enabling teachers to gain qualifications in swimming and water safety is the Get Active Queensland Accreditation Program (GAQAP) ASCTA Swimming Teaching and Water Safety Course. GAQAP provides teachers, school sport volunteers, tertiary and senior secondary school students throughout Queensland with free training that can ultimately lead to recognised accreditation in coaching, officiating and sports first aid.

Another long term strategy is to incorporate swimming qualifications into initial teacher education. During the study conducted by Peden, Franklin and Larsen, several respondents stated that qualified graduates holding water safety qualifications would be highly regarded.

Victoria Institute of Teachers (VIT) teacher registration require that PE (HPE) graduates from initial teacher education programs in the primary school have a current first aid certificate and current teacher of swimming and water safety qualification which includes ASCTA Swim Australia or Austswim. There is no reason why this requirement be limited to HPE teachers in Victoria. Hence, it could be extended and opportunities promoted to all primary classroom teachers in Victoria and other states and territories.

## **Conclusion**

Proposing the benefits of teachers being educated in swimming and water safety courses involves more than an authoritarian decision to do so. It involves the beginning of the curriculum change process necessary for curriculum reform within Australian primary schools to penetrate swimming and water safety education to a level not yet achieved.

There are programs and policies within the Queensland education system and Victorian Institute of Teachers registration that have begun this necessary complex process. This needs to continue in a sensitive and understanding manner. Furthermore, it needs to spread to every jurisdiction and system so that all Australian children have access to water safety education.