

BABY LED SUBMERSION

Today's agenda for baby swimming

Françoise Freedman



The picture is not correct, it should be displayed.

WHAT IS IT?

WHY NOW?

HOW TO DO IT?

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

STA conference 12th September 2019

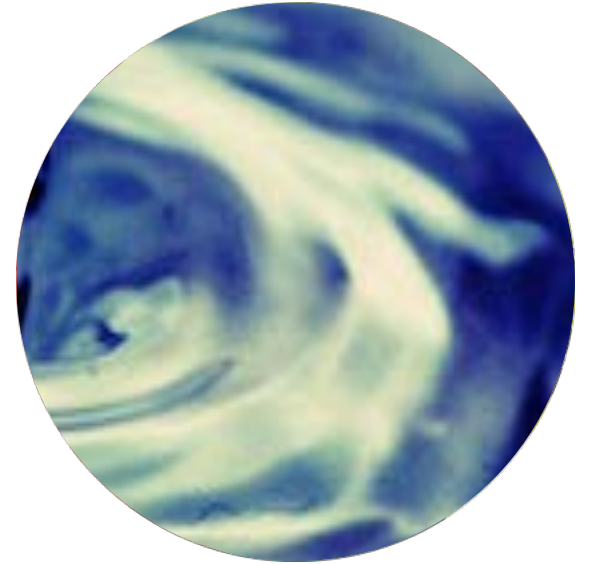
Why am I here today?



A life-long love of
water and babies



A long relationship
with the STA



A passion for excellence
and best practice



Today's Talk

From fantasy to Industry

4-6

A wake up call: re-thinking teaching

8-11

Elective and baby-led submersion

12-14

Babies are communicators!

15-16

How do Babies Learn and Grow?

17-30

Baby-led transitions to unaided swimming and diving

31-34

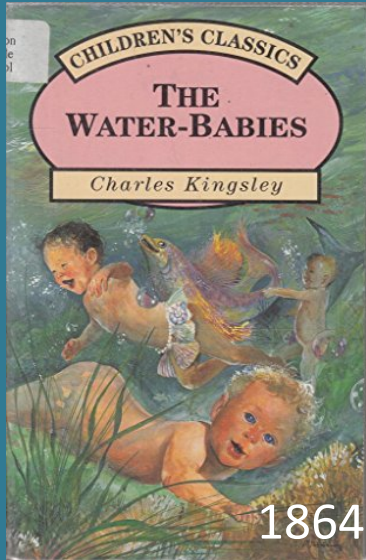
Extending closeness in water from birth on..

35-37

Baby-led submersions: a turning point!

38-39

The end of an illusion?



- Babies swimming under water: an Illusion fabricated by technological advances in underwater photography
- Compounded by newborn primitive reflexes in water, and the extraordinary claims of Igor Tjarkovsky in Russia (1970s)
- A world changing fairy tale: “Water Babies” by Charles Kingsley 1864 (film adaptation 1978).
- A worldwide imaginary: homo aquaticus, water birth, new frontiers of development for human babies



FROM
FANTASY
TO
INDUSTRY

1978

1988

1998

2008

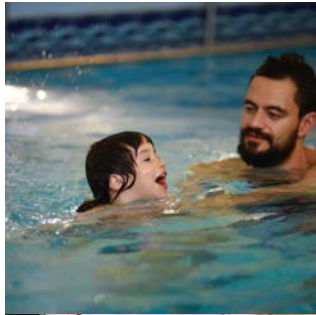
2018

Let's be real...

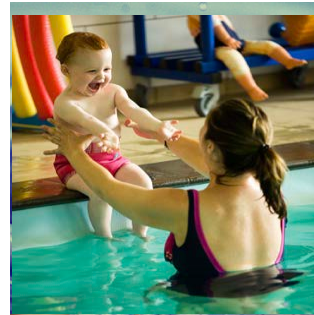


- Babies can exceptionally swim before they can walk, but this takes extraordinary dedication from a keen parent
- Most early little swimmers develop the coordination and balance required for self-propulsion in water in their third year. This requires submersion and surfacing to breathe skills.
- But do repetitive submersions in babies' first year confer a swimming or water safety advantage? This is not confirmed by evidence or experience.

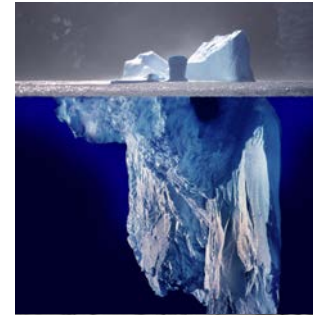
But let's not throw out the baby(submersion) with the bath water!



The illusion has brought millions of parents and babies to enjoy being in water together.



It has originated a worldwide new trend in parenting activities and a thriving industry that is here to stay...



It's time to look at what we are doing, why and how we are doing it, whether it's best practice or not.



As knowledge expands, our understanding of baby submersion demands new Teaching Methods

A wake up call in defense of babies !



- Still too much violence is done to babies in the name of “gentle” baby swimming.
- This has called for reactions: ‘We are not a baby diving school’ (Terje Saskett, *Swimming with Love*). FAEL (France).
- No to photoshoots (Puddle Ducks and other swim schools in the UK)
- Review of baby submersion standards (STA and Birthlight F Freedman& Shawn Tomlinson, 2017).

Beyond reducing submersions: let's re-think teaching

- Repetitive submersions rely on "conditioning" through "Habituation"
- When babies give up protesting they may look calm and happy but they are just resigned performers.
- The NO may resurface at some point, months or years later as 'water wobbles' or even pool phobia.
- Why should babies want to explore the underwater realm if we do not make it exciting for them?





THE ANSWER IS SIMPLE: THE CHILD DECIDES...

“For four years now, we have worked closely with Birthlight and the STA on the best and safest way to submerge children so that they feel empowered and never forced. The answer is simple; the child decides. This was a wonderful moment, to have all the respected baby and child swimming bodies aligned with the same thinking ”

Founder/Director, Calmababy

ALISON DUFF

IS THIS WHAT
IS PROPOSED?

NO



‘Elective submersion’? a misnomer..



- Nothing about early parenting is fully ‘baby elected
- Parents pay hard earned cash for baby swimming classes. They have expectations but hey are open to new understandings if we can link these changes with positive outcomes.
- BUT there are development-linked times when ‘elective submersion’ is warranted: when games are played when babies test parents’ boundaries When babies need reassurance that it’s OK to have a bad day.. Submersion becomes a great parenting exercise, a supreme negotiating art, lots of fun too.

So let’s follow the sinker a little deeper and go for an alternative concept: *‘baby-led submersion’*.

**'BABY-LED'
SUBMERSION**



**COMMUNICATION
TECHNIQUES**

NOT SUBMERSION **TO** BABIES

SUBMERSION
WITH
BABIES

Technique

ation

How can we make “baby-led submersion” practical in busy swim schools?

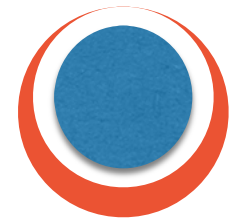
Babies are supreme communicators: can parents be shown to read their cues?

YES

In the same way that our movement techniques help babies integrate reflexes as they develop voluntary swimming movements, can our baby-led submersion techniques follow the integration of early mammalian diving responses?

YES

This has always been “Best Gentle Practice” but now we can promote it with science-based guidelines.





Babies are
supreme communicators

Can we read **THEIR** cues?

Readiness
Come on! Let's interact

Not ready
Not sure

Integration of experience
Sensory integration
Help! This is not working for me

Startle
Crying and grimacing
Screaming fit

This is what I like, it's perfect for me
right now
I love you, I love the world

Don't do this to me again (today)!
I can't trust you and the world is frightening



Moro Relfex

- Primitive alert system
- Cornerstone of life
 - Survival mode
- Adrenaline & cortisol
- Linked to all senses
- May affect emotional profile of the child if triggered often

A photograph of a baby sitting in a swimming pool, supported by a yellow inflatable ring. The baby is looking down at their hands in the water. The background shows the blue tiles of the pool. Overlaid on the image are two white circles with dashed borders, connected by a horizontal dashed line. The left circle contains the text 'HOW DO BABIES LEARN AND GROW?'. The right circle contains the text 'THROUGH FEELING SAFE AND CONNECTED'. At the bottom, there is a dark teal rounded rectangle containing a list of four items: 'Sensory integration', 'Holds', 'Confident Handling', and 'Secure Rhythms'.

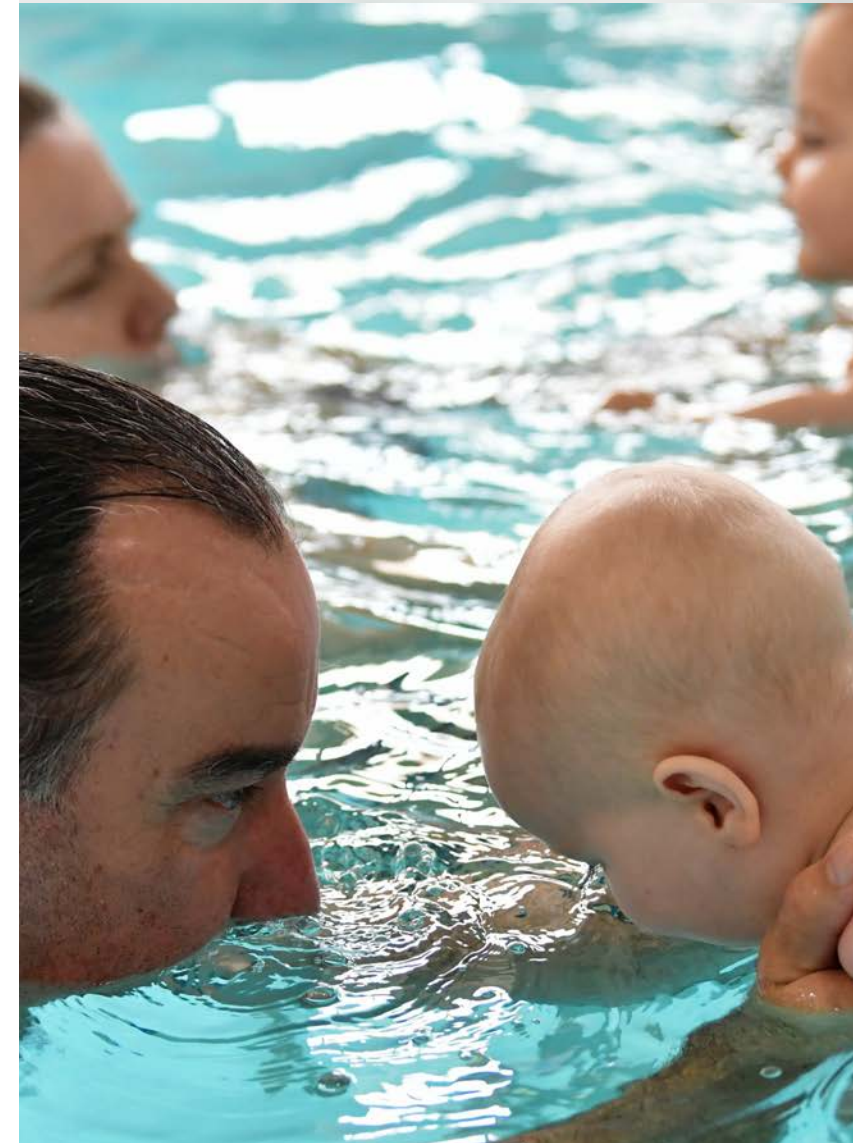
HOW DO
BABIES
LEARN AND
GROW?

THROUGH
FEELING
SAFE AND
CONNECTED

- Sensory integration
- Holds
- Confident Handling
- Secure Rhythms

Feeling safe and connected

- **Sensory integration** in the safety of the parents arms
- **Holds** designed technically to boost parents' confidence in holding their babies in the water, both physically and emotionally
- **Confident handling:** Babies handled confidently are more relaxed and calm for world exploration
- Movement away from home, back home: **secure rhythms**



From Mutual Delight between parent and baby through Joint Movement
comes the Trust to Let Go and Enjoy the new without fear



A photograph of a baby sitting in a swimming pool, supported by a yellow ring. The baby is looking down at their hands in the water. The background shows the blue tiles of the pool. Two white circles with dashed borders are connected by a horizontal dashed line. The left circle contains the text 'HOW DO BABIES LEARN AND GROW?'. The right circle contains the text 'BY OBSERVATION AND IMITATION'. A teal rounded rectangle at the bottom contains the text 'Modelling as dialogue. Babies are intrinsically made and posses the ability to copy if they feel engaged. Babies want to enjoy what we enjoy, including getting their faces wet'.

HOW DO
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BY
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Modelling as dialogue. Babies are intrinsically made and posses the ability to copy if they feel engaged. Babies want to enjoy what we enjoy, including getting their faces wet



Image: Shawn Tomlinson 2017

What if parents do not wish to put their faces in the water?

- Immersion to neck level: cheek to cheek with baby for ‘blowing bubbles’ and “water humming” creating a playful learning environment babies understand.
- Front rides (experiencing the movement of swimming on parent’s body)
- Baby on raft edge or on parent’s back for semi-accidental submersions rescued with “a hug and a smile” (not a catastrophe face).

**Jacob
and
Mum**



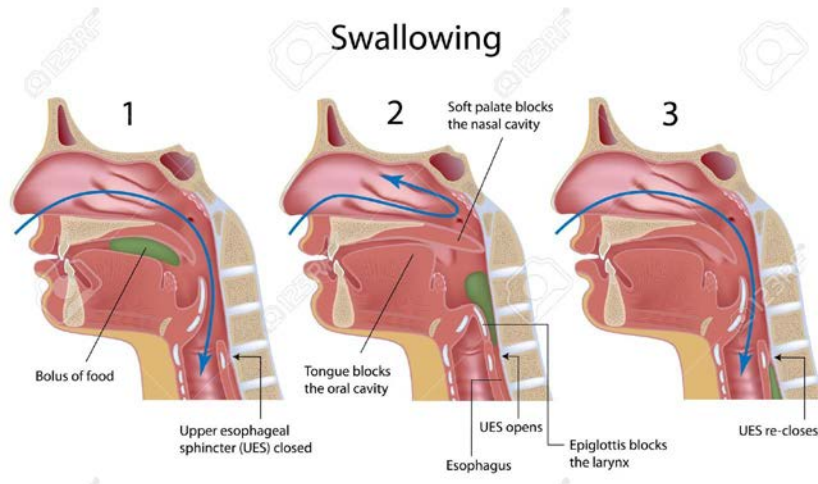


Image: Shawn Tomlinson 2017

Why blowing bubbles?

- Blowing onto babies' faces 0-6 months is only part of the story. Mouthing water is the exploration.
- A brief uptake of the Trigeminal Cardiac Reflex and the Diving Response combined
- This is how Yogi calm themselves too
- seamless transition from “gag reflex” to diving response in the second half of the first year with no need for external cues by teachers and parents

Frontiers of the neuro-physiology of human babies' diving response

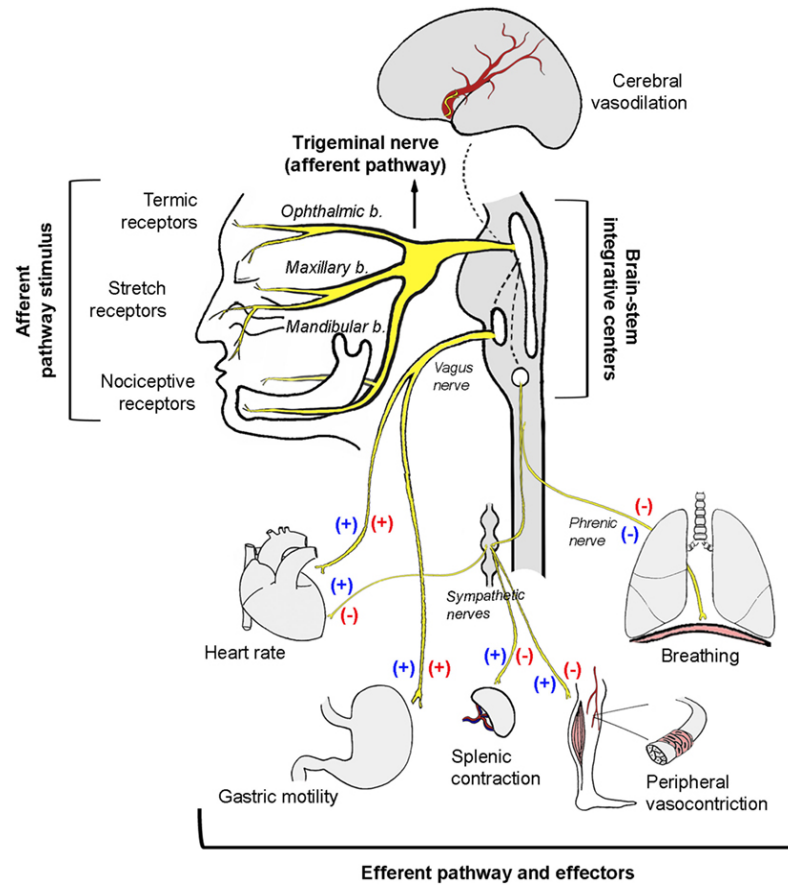


If babies are propelled under water, however gently, because of the water pressure, they take in water but cannot swallow it.

When they take a new breath as they are surfaced, their gulping, coughing, spluttering, spitting or even vomiting this water is distressing for them and for parents.

Remarkably this does not occur in accidental submersions during “baby rides” or when babies jump in by themselves.

Frontiers of the neuro-physiology of human babies' diving response



Many babies swallow water before they learn to spit it out in their second year. The risk of hyponatremia must be taken seriously.

Progressive baby-led submersion encourages a combined TCR and DR reflexes for babies to safely go under without taking excess water in their mouths. This needs to be further researched.

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HOW DO
BABIES
LEARN AND
GROW?

THROUGH
SMART
MOVES

- Importance of the Vestibular System in a 3D water environment
- Connection with learning and memory making
- Bobbing, swings, rotations and flips as preparations for “baby-led” submersions



Swimming with babies on board, Birthlight's hallmark inspired from Amazonian rainforest parents





FRONT RIDES IN A CLASS ENVIRONMENT

Interactive submersion play



Baby-led transitions to unaided swimming and diving

- Independent small moves initiated by infants reinforce their water body balance and breath control in synchrony.
- The skill of the teacher is in teaching the parent to see, understand and respect these small moves. Small dives may be a long exploration before taking off across the pool.
- Props such as half-noodles may help toddlers adjust their balance and breathing rhythms.



LEARNING FROM AMPHIBIOUS PRIMATE BABIES



genza333

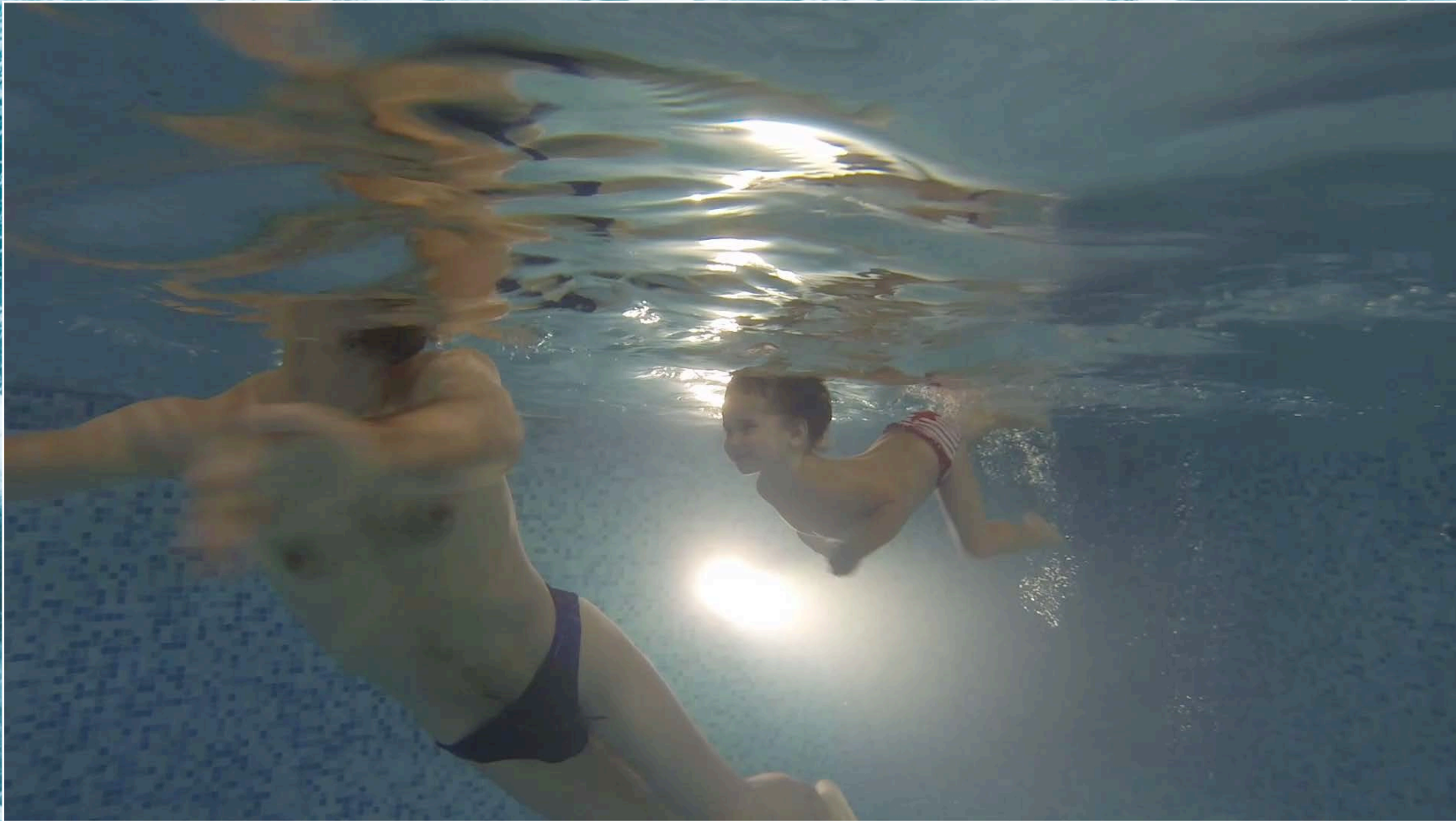


Birthlight pathways to independent swimming are based on baby-led submersion

- Balance
- Buoyancy
- Respect and trust babies' breathing rhythms
- Respect the Vertical
- Co-Submersion of parent with baby/toddler if possible!



Early unaided swimming is an outcome of nurture.
Stroke development follows.







Start baby-led submersion in the home bath with Aquatic Nurture for newborns

Water as a matrix, where we can connect with ourselves, relax, play, recreate, be with our babies in enriching dialogue.

We do not teach them how to swim, they teach us to wonder at how at ease and at one with the water if we let them show us the way.

A baby who feels safe wants to explore and play.

A baby who feels connected has self-confidence

A baby who feels safe trusts parents and teachers

Extended closeness is fine when it's mediated
by water, as in baby or toddler rides!
This is possible in mixed ability classes



Image: Alison Duff

Special
Swimming
and
Submersion

Birthlight Special Baby/Child Swimming



‘You’re so cool
at swimming,
little Emily
Dolphin’

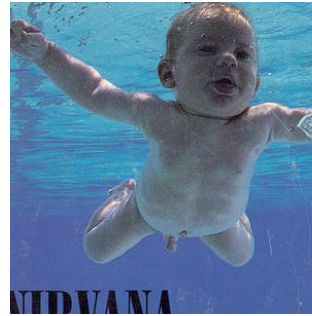
‘my favourite activity is diving underwater with Amanda’

Image: Amanda Gawthorpe

Baby-led submersion: a turning point in the teaching of “gentle” baby swimming



Baby-led submersion:
a turning point in the
teaching of “gentle”
baby swimming



We have been lured by
the beautiful photos
and wanted our babies
to emulate them



We believed that
conditioning our
babies early to
submerge, even if this
sometimes felt wrong
and painful in our
hearts, was good for
them in many ways.



We did not understand
well enough the part
that elective
submersions play in
the progression to
independent
swimming (water body
balance and breath
control)



Now is the time for a baby swimming industry that nurtures lives of babies and parents together, for greater water safety and best swimming foundations



birthlight

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To the Birthlight
Aquatic Tutor
Team and
particularly to
Alison Duff

To the Jakwash
and Cocama
people in the
Peruvian Upper
Amazon

Merci!
Gracias!
Thank you!

To the film
team at the
Birthlight-Bright
Family Centre,
Moscow.

And to my
dear family