Pedagogical resources
AQUATIC ACTIVITIES

THE TRANSITION FROM FAMILY AQUATIC EDUCATION TO CHILDREN'S AQUATIC EDUCATION

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Transitioning involves moving from familiar experiences towards new challenges and achievements. In the aquatic environment, the transition area gradually supports the move from participating with the family towards greater independence in the water, encouraging exploration, learning and the progressive development of autonomy.

Introduction

Water-based education takes place in a learning environment that integrates physical, emotional, social and methodological factors to promote safe, respectful and stimulating learning. Through interaction between the teacher, the child, the family and the environment, this setting promotes exploration, play, the construction of meaningful learning and the progressive development of autonomy, underpinned by the quality of relationships, respect for individual paces and the educational intent behind the activities.

The phase we refer to as "transition" is a stage in the support process we carry out as part of our early childhood aquatic stimulation programme. Those who began at a very early age, such as babies, have been developing this practice in the water for between two and three years. For those who joined a little later, the duration will be shorter, but they have nevertheless come a long way.

This stage is of fundamental importance for achieving autonomy and well-being in the water, which are the main objectives. It is worth noting that the achievement of the objectives set out in this final stage is due to the bond formed not only between the children and the teachers, but also between the teachers and the parents and other family members who have supported the process.

The idea of *transition* involves moving from the familiar to new experiences. As far as our water-based programme is concerned, it means moving from attending the swimming pool with one's own family (with all that this represents physically, emotionally and affectively) to being on one's own with another adult, whilst the family watches from a distance. For this to happen, we must go through or complete a series of milestones that build children's independence or their ability to participate individually.

According to Bowlby (1982), from the age of 24 months, children gain a better understanding that people have their own thoughts, emotions and goals. They are thus able to understand explanations, negotiate simple rules and actively participate in their relationship with adults. For this reason, children need to have adults who offer them emotional security, availability and sensitivity, thereby providing a secure base from which to explore, learn and develop their autonomy.

Working through sequences enables the educator to make more informed decisions about what to teach, when to teach it and under what conditions. This makes it easier to adjust the level of challenge, tailor tasks to the pupils and avoid interventions based on improvisation or the repetition of unrelated exercises.

The aquatic environment introduces a key variable: the learner's emotional response. The loss of familiar reference points, the need to control one's breathing, or the perception of risk can lead to a sense of insecurity if the activities are not properly tailored. In this context, the teaching sequence acts as a framework that helps to balance challenge with a sense of control, thereby encouraging engagement and continuity in learning. As the process progresses, the sequence facilitates the transition from more controlled situations to progressively more open ones, in which learners must interpret their surroundings, make decisions and adjust their behaviour. This progression is key to ensuring that learning can be transferred to real-life situations.

From this perspective, the teaching sequence is not a supplementary element, but a necessary condition for coherently organising teaching. Mastery of this sequence enables the instructor to transform the aquatic environment into a structured learning space, where the learner progresses safely, meaningfully and in line with their abilities. Consequently, the purpose of this resource is to provide a practical guide for the design and implementation of teaching sequences in aquatic education, aimed at facilitating the instructor's decision-making in real-life teaching contexts.

Organisation of the lessons

This programme takes place at a sports club. Classes are held once a week and last 45 minutes. Participants are grouped according to their **previous experience** in the water, as reported by their families, the teacher's assessment of their **stimulation needs**, and the stage of development each child has reached in terms of their ability to **interact within a group**. In the transition stage, we work with children aged between 24 and 36 months. Here, we aim to develop their aquatic skills, with a focus on the bond with their family. We therefore begin gradually to build confidence, security and independence.

Initial round: we greet one another with songs, parents, children and teachers.

Stages of the transition process

Running alongside the school year, the process leading up to graduation takes approximately one year. This process is variable and comprises three stages:

1. **Relative distance**. During the first few months, we continue with the familiar approach to activities and gradually begin to introduce more and more games in which parents stand in one part of the pool and children in another. In this context, we play games such as jumping to reach parents, tag and races, amongst others. Once these games have become a regular feature and are thoroughly enjoyed by the whole group, this signals that it is time to move on to the second stage.

The traffic lights game. The children move forward according to signals from a parent, accompanied by the teachers.

2. **First distance**. From the sixth month onwards, we move forward with the transition; parents accompany the children to the pool to meet the teachers and remain seated, observing the lesson. At the end of the lesson, they enter the water to play and sing during the farewell circle. The length or duration of this *first distance* will depend on the group's response. As the sessions progress, we suggest that parents join the children in the water for fewer and fewer sessions until the final session can take place.

Start of the lesson: we say hello to the water; parents sit outside the pool, whilst the children are in the water at the edge with their teachers.

We play "horses". The children cross the swimming pool towards their parents, guided by the teachers.

3. **Second distance**. We establish a second stage by suggesting that parents enter the pool area solely to accompany their children, leaving them in the care of the teachers in the water, before watching the activity from the stands and, once it has finished, returning to accompany them as they leave. At the end of the year, we hold a final session of this *transition stage*, during which we invite families to join in the activity in the water. This session serves as a graduation ceremony.

Independence and confidence: children in the pool, parents in the stands.

How to develop the proposal

The teaching sequence provides the framework for organising the teaching process. Our main aim is to create a supportive environment in which we can work alongside families to foster learning processes. We believe that the classroom should be a safe and trustworthy space. Therefore, qualities that facilitate detachment are particularly valuable: an emotionally regulated environment that ensures experiences which have the potential to lead to **meaningful learning** (Ausubel, 1983).

We create a **safe, trustworthy and regulated** space by maintaining routines or rituals over time. When we create opportunities for singing, circle time and shared play, we strengthen potential links between the nursery, the home and the family. We focus on **active participation** in the activities to foster autonomy, enabling adults to act as ***guiding lights***, understood as figures who are there to illuminate or guide from a distance in a strategic manner. For Magdalena Sanz (personal communication), the concept of the *guiding light* refers to the **respectful and safe s**upport provided by parents or teachers to babies and

children. Remote play is extended in duration to the extent that children demonstrate enjoyment, acceptance and trust. The child's experimentation and exploration reveal emotional states that foster learning, as well as indicating that their needs have at least been taken into account (Moreno-Murcia, 2026a, 2026b).

When we see that this process is unfolding harmoniously and steadily, we invite the adults to support their children from outside the water, acting as beacons guiding them from a distance. From that point onwards, the process is both flexible and dynamic, **taking into account each person's individual characteristics and needs**, all with a view to building this new sense of community. As this ritual evolves smoothly, we invite the adults to leave the pool completely and observe the session from a distance.

It is at this stage of childhood, which Bowlby (1982) refers to as *reciprocal relationships*, that children begin to understand their carers' intentions, whilst this understanding enables them to tolerate the proposed separation.

Throughout the process, support for parents is provided simultaneously, highlighting achievements and modelling positive attitudes, so that the underlying principles we bring to the space can be identified in the situations we experience there. In this way, through conceptualisation, we seek to foster an understanding of the aquatic education process among adults and their children.

Preparation to sing, greet and end the lesson.

Conclusions

Implementing an educational programme with such a young age group presents challenges in several respects. These include the creation, transformation or rebuilding of bonds; ranging from the most personal and internal bonds within each participant, whether parents or children, to those formed with peers, with teachers, and with the water or the pool environment. Here we present something we consider to be of vital importance and which we believe must always be present in the design of this type of programme: support for

autonomy. Being in and interacting with the water brings emotions into play in a particular way, and aquatic teachers need to have the ability to recognise, support and manage these emotions in the best possible way.

We consider it important to mention that this approach to the *transition* towards independence is, for the time being, designed and implemented exclusively for the pool area and the water itself. This excludes everything related to the time spent in the changing rooms, a stage in which parents are involved and for which, in our role as teachers, we recommend an approach that combines support with gradual distancing, encouraging the children's autonomy whilst acting as *guiding lights* for their actions.

References

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