Introduction

- All children have the potential to thrive in the aquatic environment.
- By learning basic swim and water safety skills, children are introduced to a lifelong activity (i.e., the future) that they can participate in with friends and family.
- Including alternative therapies, such as aquatic programs, in children’s treatment plans, provides one strategy for fostering the ‘F-words’ within children’s health care.

Purpose

- The purpose of this study was to explore the influence of a structured swim program on the lives of children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) and communication delays.

Methods

- All participants had various roles and degrees of involvement in the study.
- Each child participated in a 1-hour, structured swim class, once a week for 10-weeks.
- A certified swim instructor was responsible for teaching each session.
- Parents, teachers, and volunteers agreed that all children benefited from participating in the program.
- Given the distinct properties of the water, it is believed that swimming not only fosters physical activity (i.e., function and fitness) but also provides social (i.e., family and friends) and emotional benefits (i.e., fun) for disabled children across the lifespan (i.e., future).

Findings

Function

“The kids seemed so happy to swim. They enjoyed showing off their skills, which gave a sense of pride and they were happy to enjoy the different activities in the company of their peers and now friends. They also formed with us their swim buddies – full of trust and gratitude.” ~ Volunteer

Family

“He is swimming once a week, he loves it and then we can do public swim, family swim. And he is always happy about swimming, he can’t wait for swimming. We have had a lot of fun with him going swimming now that he is done these lessons.” ~ Parent

Fitness

“I think that was a combination of being in the water and then the physical activity because so many of these kids, I mean kids at this age are so strongly visual kinesthetic learners right, and the pool offers that need for that kinesthetic movement, in a way like you can’t offer it anywhere else.” ~ Teacher

Fun

“He is very excited about swimming. I know that in the mornings it is easier to get him out the door to school because it’s swimming day. He’s like “I get to go swimming today!” Because I see how natural [he] is in the water when he feels comfortable. He just loves being in there, he is a little fish.” ~ Parent

Friends

“It was a great experience. The visible results of the children improving socially and physically over the ten weeks was incredible and it was great to form a bond with children and be able to share and live through their experiences in the water.” ~ Volunteer

Future

“I think swimming is a really excellent way for children that can be sedentary to get physical activity...The pool offers a lifelong form of physical activity that they can do...And that’s pretty powerful to be able to provide them with a physical activity that they can pursue into adulthood.” ~ Teacher

The Ripple Effect: Implications