

The Halliwick Concept: Developing the Teaching of Swimming to Disabled People

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The information contained in this article has been selected by Patrick Hastings, Chair of Halliwick AST – UK (Halliwick Association of Swimming Therapy), from material previously published by Halliwick AST and the International Halliwick Association (IHA).

Summary

This is an introduction to the Halliwick Concept for empowering adults and children, including those with disabilities, to participate in water activities. The article gives the structure and the background of the Concept.

Introduction

The Halliwick Concept is an approach to teaching all people, in particular focussing on those with physical and/or learning difficulties, to participate in water activities, to move independently in water, and to swim. It is based on a belief in the benefits that can be derived from activities in water and sets out the fundamentals necessary for their learning. These benefits include physical, personal, recreational, social and therapeutic aspects. The Concept has influenced hydrotherapy techniques and has been developed into specific therapeutic exercises.

The Ten-Point Programme

The Ten-Point Programme provides the basis for practical work by bringing together the fundamentals of the Halliwick Concept in an easy to follow and logical structure. Through the Ten Points we can see a process of development through *mental adjustment*, *balance control* and *movement* which leads to personal independence in the water. These three concepts are the essential components of motor learning. Brief definitions of these concepts follow:

Mental adjustment: This includes the swimmer being able to respond flexibly to different environments, situations or tasks. The learner will need to acquire the



ability to be able to respond automatically, independently and appropriately to a variety of situations in the water.

Balance Control: This means being able to maintain or change position in the water in a controlled way. In a new environment or situation control is often difficult for the beginner, and there may be excessive movements. The swimmer needs to learn a fine degree of balance control to prevent unwanted movements and achieve efficient postural control.

Movement: This is the ability to create the desired movements to perform an activity with efficiency and skill through mental organisation and physical control.

The Ten Points are:

1. **Mental Adjustment** – being able to respond appropriately to a different environment, situation or task. The learning of breath control is an important aspect of this work.
2. **Disengagement** – an ongoing process throughout the learning by which the swimmer becomes physically and mentally independent.
3. **Transversal Rotation Control (formerly Vertical Rotation)** – the ability to control any rotation made about a fronto-transversal axis.
4. **Sagittal Rotation Control** – the ability to control any rotation made about a sagitto-transversal (anterior/posterior) axis.
5. **Longitudinal Rotation Control (formerly Lateral Rotation)** – the ability to control any rotation made about a sagitto-frontal (longitudinal) axis.



6. Combined Rotation Control – the ability to control any combination of rotations.

7. Upthrust – trusting the water will support you. Sometimes called ‘mental inversion’ (because the swimmer must invert their thinking and realise they will float and not sink).

8. Balance in stillness – floating still and relaxed in the water. This is dependent on both mental and physical balance control. When balanced, other activities can be performed more easily.

9. Turbulent Gliding – a floating swimmer is moved through the water by an instructor without any physical contact between them. The swimmer has to control unwanted rotations but makes no propulsive movements.

10. Simple Progression and Basic Swimming Stroke – the development from simple propulsive movements made by the swimmer to a stroke which may be individual to each swimmer.

A holistic approach

The Halliwick Concept is a holistic approach, bringing together knowledge about:

- water
- the body
- disability equity issues
- motivation
- challenge
- teaching and learning
- activities and games
- groups
- swimming strokes

Halliwick’s history

In 1949, Southgate Seals Swimming Club in London promoted a swimming gala for a local charity, The Halliwick School for Crippled Girls. Six of their girls were invited to attend. James (Mac) McMillan, as club coach, organised the gala. While discussing the gala on the way home, Mac asked his wife Phyl, how the girls enjoyed it. She replied,

The look on their faces told me that two were bored stiff – ‘What’s it got to do with me and my life?’ and the other faces said plainly ‘If only we could get in there and do that!’

Mac was quiet for a long while and then he said, *Why not?*

Mac and Phyl did a lot of thinking and talking during the next week. Why shouldn’t the girls have a sport? Wasn’t water an ideal playground? So Mac talked to the school staff who considered and then approved the scheme, although everyone else thought they were quite mad!

And so the first club open to disabled people, Halliwick Penguins SC, was founded in 1950. This was an entirely voluntary group. Parents, relatives and friends of the swimmers were trained as instructors and helpers. It was agreed that they would start with twelve girls. Each had a differing disability. After a wonderful time (for them) splashing around and a promise (from Phyl and Mac) that they could come again next week, Mac said,

*We now have to get a working method of teaching, and a method that will be able to be applied to **all disabilities**, with two aims in mind – **ability and normality**.*

In time they accepted people with various kinds of physical, mental, learning and sensory impairments.

At that time, Mac was catching up on his engineering studies and he quickly realised that the principles of water – hydrodynamics and hydrostatics – and the knowledge given to us by all the scientists such as Archimedes, Bernoulli, Pascal, etc, were the basis needed for interrelating bodies of varying shapes and sizes with water – with control, skill and safety in that element. So gradually the teaching plan developed, based on the *ability* in the water, which rarely relates



to the *disability* on land, embracing the swimmers' need for safe and happy progress in the water.

And so the *Halliwick Method* (now known as the 'Halliwick Concept') was devised by James McMillan, based on the 'Ten-Point Programme'. The Halliwick School, which gave the Halliwick Penguins SC and the Halliwick Concept its name, finally closed in 1992.

The years 1950–51, saw important developments. Girls were leaving the school and returning to their homes in all parts of the UK and so it became necessary to inaugurate a national body so that similar clubs could be formed throughout the country. Therefore the Association of Swimming Therapy was founded in May 1952 – which changed its name in 1996 by incorporating 'Halliwick' and becoming Halliwick AST.

For some time the work continued in recreational swimming clubs, some thirteen in the London area, followed by clubs in Cheshire, the Midlands, Devon and the South Wales Valleys. As people working in the professional field realised that the Halliwick Concept could be used therapeutically, Halliwick Groups were formed in kindergartens, special schools, training establishments for people with a learning disability, and hospitals.

Halliwick spread throughout Britain. In 1974, after speaking at a symposium at the Thermal Hospital Rehabilitation Centre in Bad Ragaz, Switzerland, Mac was ultimately offered a post at the hospital – which he accepted. Mac moved to Switzerland and from there lectured in many countries including Switzerland, the Netherlands, Denmark, and Brazil. When Mac died in 1994 he was preparing to launch the International Halliwick Association (IHA). His aim for this was to extend the Halliwick Concept even further. The IHA was formed in 1994.



Contact

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