

To Get In or Not To Get In?: That Is the Question

By Connie Warasila

Getting in the water with your class can help you connect with and motivate your students. Teaching in the water during class is, also, a great way to save wear and tear on your body and overheating from deck teaching, in addition to other benefits. Water fitness leaders have a decision to make every time they teach a class: Will I get in the water today during my class? Many factors will influence your decision. Factors include everything from your students' knowledge of the choreography, attendance of new students, temperature, and your ability to communicate, to management of group dynamics, ease of getting out of the water, equipment and sound system location, and managing the opening and closing of class. Exploring these various factors will assist your decision-making process.

Factor #1 - Are ALL of your students familiar with the moves?

All of your students need to feel confident with the names of the moves you are using, terminology and physical gestures that you use to verbally and visually cue, and general information about your pool. Confident students will be comfortable with their leader getting in the water with them. Watch your students for signs of confusion and uncertainty. For example, observe your students' facial expressions, movement intensity, and direction of their eyes. If you notice any signs of apprehension, hesitation, or uncertainty, consider returning to the deck quickly to clarify movement instructions.

Factor #2 - Has everyone been to this release of WATERinMOTION?

Introducing a new release with new music and moves requires deck instruction for clarity. The first couple of weeks after launching a new release calls for more time teaching from the deck until your students build up confidence with the new material. Also, if a student who has not experienced your class before comes to class, plan on spending most of your time on deck to assist this student in learning the moves and building their confidence.

Factor #3 - Am I able to communicate with everyone effectively, with a blend of verbal, visual, and kinesthetic cues? Teaching from in the pool has its disadvantages. Your students are unable to see your lower body. Plus, your students may have a difficult time seeing your face and upper body now that you will be at their height and not up on deck. Your presence in the water will diminish as your class numbers grow. You will need to increase your speaking volume, rely heavily on arm and facial signals, and move around the pool to improve access to all of your students.

Factor #4 - Am I able to maintain control of the class? Unfortunately, some students will lose their focus to perceive your cues when you get in the water. Whether they can't see you, hear you, or completely rely on visual cues, your being in the pool may negatively impact their

movement performance and focus. If a high percentage of the students reduce movement intensity or begin talking when you join them in the pool, then you need to consider returning to the deck, or maybe sit on the side of the pool with more of your lower body visible. Remember, the quality and accuracy of your students' movements is directly affected by how well you are communicating.

Factor #5 - Am I able to get out quickly in case I need to communicate from the deck, get equipment, adjust music, etc.? Just like the old saying, "what goes up, must come down," once you get in the pool you need to have an effective and professional plan for getting out in front of your class. The stairs or ladder may not be readily available for you to use to get out of the pool, so are you skilled enough and strong enough to pull yourself out of the pool and back up on deck without flailing, kicking, and rolling around? Make sure you have a plan for returning to the deck gracefully and professionally.

Factor #6 – Did I wear the appropriate attire for getting in the pool? While I suggest always preparing for class as though you will be getting in, you may decide that getting in might not be appropriate that day for one of the reasons outlined in this article. Even still, always wear clothing and shoes that can get wet in the pool yet remain professional when wet. Wearing traditional land clothing and shoes sends a message to your pool participants that you predetermined that you would not be participating in the water with them during class. To some students, separating yourself from the possibility of getting in the water seems to devalue water fitness, sends a message that you don't like water fitness, and may damage any trust you've created with students.

Factor #7 – Am I using a microphone that can get wet? If you rely on a microphone to amplify your verbal cuing, make sure it is waterproof if you want to get in the pool. If not, you will have to choose to stay on the deck or take off the microphone to get in the pool, but then your voice will not be amplified.

I, also, try to be on deck for the beginning and the end of class, Tracks 1 & 10. Your students, more often than not, will remember the beginning of class and the end of class. These influential times of class need to be planned and executed with great care. Maximize the impact of these moments by teaching from the deck, allowing you full access to each student to welcome them, help them prepare for class, and reinforce their accomplishments at the of class.

Using these guidelines will help you decide when, and for how long, to be in the water with your class. Experiment with different tracks in the water and watch for your students' reactions. If they get excited and move with appropriate intensity, enjoy the workout with them in the pool. If they lose focus and/or intensity, make sure to return to the deck to reignite their commitment to movement.

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