

# “Put Your Hands Down”

Guy Edson

Inevitably, when I am explaining then next swim set to age group swimmers the hands start going up before I have finished giving the instruction! I think to myself, “What is this? I haven’t even given you the whole story yet?”

Since I am an old guy, I can tell you I never saw that happened 30 years ago. This is a phenomenon I have noticed that is becoming progressively more common over the last 15 years.

Most people say that kids are different today. If you use your favorite internet search engine and look for “are children different today” you’re going to find a ton of opinions and a tiny bit of authoritative research. Most authoritative articles say that today’s kids actually DO think differently and that they learn differently than their parents... and very differently from people of my generation.

You might find articles that discuss “inductive discovery versus deductive discovery” and “inductive teaching versus deductive teaching.” One article says that children’s brains are physically different including one area of the brain that is more developed these days and enhances inductive discovery – the ability to figure things out through interactive exchange. Inductive teaching would allow and encourage hands to go up. Deductive teaching, sometimes referred to as “old school” teaching, would discourage interaction and be more of the “be quiet and listen” type of teaching.

I started feeling guilty for being so “old school” and I had a fleeting thought that I should allow the hands to go up and accommodate the questions. (But then I had this halting thought that it would now take me 5 minutes to explain a set and if I have 6 sets a day then that is... 30 minutes of explaining?)

Wait a minute! This is apples and oranges. Explaining a set is not “learning” a new skill or a new concept. It is a set of INSTRUCTIONS for something they already know how to do. I am talking about the about the basic ability to listen to instructions and “get it.” One “gets it” by listening to the whole instruction within the context of the situation and then applying their brain. And even when one doesn’t hear every detail one is left to figure it out. And so I say, “hands down, listen, and think.”

Is this harsh? Is it bad coaching technique? I'd rather think it's presenting the swimmers an opportunity to gain the life skill of learning to pay attention to instructions and then carrying them out.