

[front page](#)

[news](#)

[back issues](#)

[comment](#)

[letters](#)

[advertise](#)

[subscribe](#)

[about us](#)

[contact us](#)

[back page](#)

## The Paralympic effect in the pool

**Andrea Andrews has been delighted by the impact of our Olympic summer on students who are learning to swim.**

Driving to work at the swimming pool early yesterday morning I passed more cyclists than I have ever done before, all with safety helmets (known as Cracknells in our house after erstwhile rower James) and appropriate gear.

It is fantastic to see the inspirational effects of the Olympics in this way. For my adult students learning to swim, however, it has been the Paralympics that have had the greatest impact. What they saw as the athletes charged up and down the Aquatic Centre pool was in their eyes an invigorating rewriting of the rules of swimming. It showed them that, counter to their own gut belief, virtually every human body can travel safely through water and that fully prescribed stroke patterns are not the whole picture.

As an experiment I asked those who can lie calmly in the water to invent a completely new and comfortable stroke. The results were very interesting as each one showed everybody else what they had developed. Discussions rang out about changes in efficiency, feel and grace as they all experimented further. Parts of their conversations would not have been out of place in an advanced coaching session. These were beginners who have always wanted to have some ownership over what they do in the water finally having a taste of it. What's more, there was laughter and delight at what they had done.

I am not saying we need to tear up the catalogue of stroke patterns to release these people from its stranglehold grip but I am saying we need to help them put it on the right shelf in the library full of learning. There is already a lot of learning inside and they need time to find it with teachers who understand that enjoying the journey is really far more important than rapidly reaching the outcome. After all, the outcome sneaks up on those who are enjoying themselves as opposed to those who are fighting their way towards it. I always love going to teach swimming but at the moment it is even more enjoyable because of the thoughts triggered by our awesome summer Games.

**“These were beginners who have always wanted to have some ownership over what they do in the water finally having a taste of it.”**

**Andrea Andrews is an instructor with A2Z Swim**

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