

THE BEGINNING OF SWIMMING TEACHING METHODOLOGY BEFORE 1939

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Abstract:

The endeavors to teach swimming were made already in ancient times. The first manual was concerning swimming was written by M. Wynmann and was published in 1538. However, the significant accomplishments in this field date back to the end of the 18th century. It was when the first swimming schools were established in various European cities. The swimming precursors in Europe were J. Guts-Muths, general E. von Pfuel and major d' Argy, The propagated teaching swimming in the army, introduced so-called 'dry-swimming' as well as, they encouraged using various supportive means – such system was called continental. Alongside with the development of new swimming styles, new teaching methods were sought for. One of such methods proved to be natural method – created in United States. Moreover, in Europe, more specifically in Vienna, K. Wissner published the swimming manual in 1929 (teaching swimming with the usage of natural method). In Poland, the followers of the natural method were A. Zaleski and T. Semadeni who presented this method in *Pływanie*, the manual published in 1928 (they also described the usage of continental method of teaching swimming).

For a very long time the value of ability to swim was appreciated. Such ability was mostly made use of for practical and health purposes¹. In Greece swimming was so popular that it was included in the program of peasant spectacles².

In ancient times various swimming styles were known; crawl, breaststroke, sidestroke, backstroke and others³.

In ancient Egypt children of pharaohs and wealthy clerks who owned swimming pools were taught how to swim. Swimming was viewed as a hygiene treatment, the pleasure accessible to wealthy people, less known amongst lower social class.

Furthermore, swimming was known also to people of Asia Minor, Mesopotamia. Assyrians were helping themselves in swimming with the usage of ram's bladders and skins. In Greece, the best swimmers were those who lived on the coast – pearls and shells seekers⁴.

In Athens parents were told to teach their children swimming and reading. Also in Rome swimming was included in the program of obligatory education for youth. Augustus the emperor taught his grandchildren swimming. After the practice, Roman youth were diving in

¹ A. Michalek: *Pływanie*, Główna Księgarnia Wojskowa. Warszawa 1938, s. 9-10.

² „Stadjon”, 1926 nr 9.

³ „Stadjon”, 1926 nr 9; „Stadjon”, 1926 nr 14.

⁴ A. Michalek: *Pływanie...*, s. 16-20; D. Bogajewski, R. Raszko, M. Witkowski, W. Wróbel: *Pływanie*.AWF Warszawa 1975, s. 5-6.

the Tiber in order to clean the sweat, dust and to ease their bodies after difficult military practice⁵.

When it comes to Rome, swimming was mostly viewed as practical skill used in military training. The military education of Roman youth included wrestling, horse riding, fencing and swimming. Swimming teachers made use of cork belts, blisters and bulrush bundles. Numerous public baths were built. It was where the swimming teaching, contests and water shows were organized. The Roman and Greek beliefs encouraged swimming ability because 'drowned person' could not be buried⁶. Ancient Romans usually disregarded people who lacked education and could not manage their lives – 'Nec Litteras didicit nec natare...' (neither can they read, nor swim)⁷.

Alongside with the development of Christianity, the new educational rules were established. During the Middle Ages swimming was perceived as sinful and pagan. The best known maxim was – *do not move because you sin, you'd better pray*⁸. The Renaissance that took place at the turn of 15th and 16th century did not have any effect on swimming development. For a long time the scholastic theses reigned (e.g. warm bath arouses sin). It was long before punishment and fight against swimming ceased. Any contact with water was stigmatized because it was treated as misdemeanor against morality. The opinion of M. Wynmann (the professor Ingolstadt University) was somewhat unique. He published the manual for teaching swimming. The book presented individual opinion and did not trigger a breakthrough in deadly fear of water⁹.

Probably the oldest method of teaching swimming that seemingly gave the best effects was throwing the student into deep water and leaving them alone. It sometimes happened that self-preservation instinct was so strong that the student actually learned how to swim¹⁰. At first, the student was able to float above water owing to inert moves which in turn transformed into actual swimming moves. According to this knowledge, the swimmers were taught how to float and then swim. However, this system was not perfect. It could be proven by the fact that the vast majority of people who incidentally fell into water and did not get any help simply drowned. Those who somehow managed to float above water surface performed so chaotic moves that getting rid of them in teaching process was impossible¹¹.

In 1538, the professor of Ingolstadt University M. Wynmann published the swimming manual in Latin *Colymbetes, sive de artematandi dialogus et festivus, et iucundus lectu* (Swimmer – about teaching swimming, the dialogue cheerful and pleasurable in reading). The offer tried to revive the art of swimming that was so valued in ancient times. It was the dialogue between a student and swimming teacher who gave practical advices concerning learning how to swim. The book presented various swimming strokes; breaststroke, backstroke, standing in water, diving, water lifesaving and water jumps. Sidestroke, backstroke and crawl were perceived by an author as show tricks, only for public amusement. The most basic style was breaststroke which for a long time remained the most important for people of central Europe. The swimming education made use of blisters and corks. Also very

⁵ „Stadjon”, 1926 nr 9

⁶ „Stadjon”, 1926, nr 9; A. Michalek: *Pływanie...*, s. 16-20.

⁷ K. Pietkiewicz: *Nauka Pływania. Podręcznik metodyczny dla nauczycieli, uczniów i samouków*. „Nasza Księgarnia”. Warszawa-Wilno 1938, s. 7.

⁸ B. Wydląka: *Nauka pływania*. Nakładem Związku Polskich Gimnastycznych Towarzystw Sokolich. Lwów 1910, s. 6.

⁹ A. Michalek: *Pływanie...*, s. 16-20; W. Olszewski: *Uczymy się pływać*. „Sport i Turystyka”. Warszawa 1974, s. 8.

¹⁰ T. Semadeni, A. Zaleski: *Pływanie*. Wydawnictwo Zakładu Narodowego im. Ossolińskich, Lwów, Warszawa, Kraków 1928, s. 142.

¹¹ Tamże.

important was, when training in pairs, holding each other. So-called dry swimming was got rid of¹². In 1587 yet another book concerning swimming was published (*O sztuce pływania*) by English author E. Digby (it was the first English book about swimming)¹³.

However, the significant achievements in development of swimming education date back at the end of 18th century. It was when the first swimming schools were established in various European cities. They were established by the bath houses in Paris in 1776, on the Rhine near Wannheim in 1777, in Vienna on the Danube in 1781 and in Wroclaw in 1793¹⁴.

The swimming precursors in Europe were J. Guts-Muths, general E. von Pfuel and major d' Argy,

In 1794 the swimming manual written by O. de Bernardi (*The full course of swimming education based on new experiences concerning the specific weight of the body*). In the book the author talks about increasing buoyancy by breathing the air into lungs. He does not propagate means that support body while teaching swimming due to his belief that body's displacement allows to float above water surface without any additional movement. His thesis was based upon his own experiences.

At the end of 18th century, J. Guts-Muths, the propagator of swimming published *small swimming manual* in 1798. It was designed for self-taught people. The book made an endeavor to scientifically justify the technique of swimming movements. It also described the methods of teaching breaststroke, backstroke, diving and water jumps. The method of swimming education presented in the book based on many items that support body in water. J. Guts-Muths called swimming the main part of education and brought swimming closer to the schools.

In 19th century, strong German Empire threatened the peace in Europe. Expanded Prussian, Austrian, French and Russian armies craved for strong and efficient soldiers. Former individual and occasional endeavors to teach swimming were insufficient in preparing strong military units for swimming across. New methods were sought for, methods that would allow in quick and efficient way teach swimming to huge amount of soldiers. In the first part of the 19th century, numerous swimming schools were established (mostly connected to the army)¹⁵.

The general E. von Pfuel was the organizer of swimming training in the army. He started the teaching in the first, newly opened military swimming pool in Prague. As the officer in Austrian army, the general introduced obligatory swimming education for soldiers. Subsequently, he cooperated with German army. He published the book (*o Pływanii*) in which he presented the methodology. He divided the breaststroke into three rates, then into four in order to combine them into the entirety. He introduced so called dry swimming. The water and inland exercises were carried out on the signal of the trainer. He also made use of various supportive measures.

In France the same method was propagated by major d' Argy. He also began his swimming education in the army and practiced breaststroke¹⁶.

In Germany in 1811 ministerial regulation was published. It viewed swimming as universal exercise that deserved to be propagated.

In France in 1823 the instruction concerning swimming education in French army was published. The methodology of dry swimming was elaborated. Therefore, the special stands

¹² A. Michalek, *Pływanie...*, s. 21; W. Ferens, R. Wroczyński: *Rozwój kultury fizycznej w okresie Odrodzenia i Oświecenia*. Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich. Wrocław –Warszawa- Kraków 1964, s. 425.

¹³ K. Grzesik (red.): *Iskier przewodnik sportowy*. Iskry. Warszawa 1976, s. 508.

¹⁴ D. Bogajewski, R. Raszko, M. Witkowski, W. Wróbel :*Pływanie...*, s. 7.

¹⁵ B. Czabański: *Nauczanie techniki pływania*. AWF Wrocław. Wrocław 1974, s. 8.

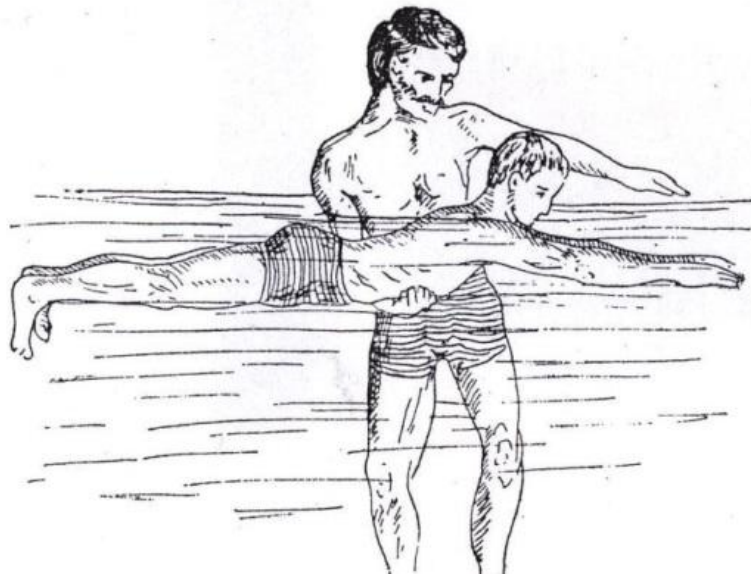
¹⁶ . Michalek: *Pływanie...*, s. 22; W. Olszewski: *Uczymy się pływać*. „Sport i Turystyka. Warszawa 1974, s. 8; S. Zaborniak, I. Tabaczek-Bejster, O. Jędrzejczak: *The studies and the outline of the beginning of swimming in Poland* (w:) “Scientific Review of Physical Culture”, 2014 volume 4, issue 2, p. 101.

were created that facilitated practicing proper coordination. The two methods were combined into one and created German-French school of swimming education which were used in Austria, Norway, Russia and Sweden¹⁷.

Such swimming method was called continental, artificial, and majora d' Argy and general E. von Pfüel's system (it was perceived as good way of swimming education where there were no indoor pools).

Using this method, the process of teaching swimming was divided into four parts:

- teaching movement inland
 - teaching swimming in water
 - teaching swimming in different strokes
 - applied swimming
- Teaching movement inland included hands and legs exercises. It could take place in standing position, lying or being suspended. Body position did not influence movement alterations. This method was created based on frog movements. As it was already mentioned, the movements were exercised on the signal of the trainer.
- Swimming in water could take place not until the trainees mastered inland movements and their breaths were regular. Teaching swimming in water took place according to two ways; the first one was after fasten the trainee with the belt. The second one involved the teacher who was in the water and was holding the student.



Holding the student by his teacher while using the continental method.

B. Wydląka: *Nauka pływania*. Nakładem Związku Polskich Gimnastycznych Towarzystw Sokolich. Lwów 1910, s. 24.

The second way was perceived as better because of the teacher presence that built sense of safety in the student. When the days were cold, the teacher encouraged students to step into the water with his own example. At first the teacher familiarized the student with water displacement, then student bounced from the shore or swimming pool wall and swam motionless (using breaststroke and backstroke). After student mastered this ability the actual swimming education started which was repeating the movements learned when inland (breaststroke). The shoulder movements were viewed as only helping ones i.e. in controlling

¹⁷ A. Zaleski, T. Semadeni, *Pływanie*. Wydawnictwo Zakładu Narodowego im. Ossolińskich, Lwów, Warszawa, Kraków 1928, s. 1-2; A. Michalek, *Pływanie...*, s. 21- 22.

the direction, facilitating breathing the air in, floating above water surface and most importantly, fast grabbing objects.

- Teaching swimming in different strokes included:

- backstroke. It was perceived as easier than the breaststroke, the main role was played by leg movement, hands could lie along the body. If one wanted to swim faster, they should add hands.

- sidestroke; it is one of the oldest swimming strokes, the difference between sidestroke and breaststroke is that in the first the body lies on the breast and in the second alternately; on the right and on the left side. One can enumerate four ways of sidestroke: Polish, Ukrainian, 'mill' and English way. This four ways differ. All of them were used in fast swimming the distance in order to rescue someone or to grab some objects.

- upright position of swimming (mince swimming). Learning this way of swimming was necessary for every good swimmer. It was the way to get some rest after very fast or long swimming. It was also made use of while rescuing the drowning person and to transfer the objects above the head of the swimmer (lest they should get wet). This way was characterized by upright position in water. It could be done by changing position from breaststroke.

Such position enables the swimmer to swim in three ways: with the usage of hands and legs simultaneously, with the usage of hands and separated leg work or only with the usage of legs. To learn such swimming the water have to be deeper than in learning other strokes. Legs should be spread, while one leg is kicking downwards, the other one is shrinking.

- lying on the back in water.

It was supposed to be a way to rest after the long distance swimming. In teaching this method, the student should breathe slowly in order to keep the most of the air in lungs. The back should be pushed forward to keep it above water, the head should be immersed above ear level bending it backwards. Such method could be diversified by holding hands behind head, shoulders crossed on the breast, hands on the head, hands along the body (it was the most difficult way)¹⁸.

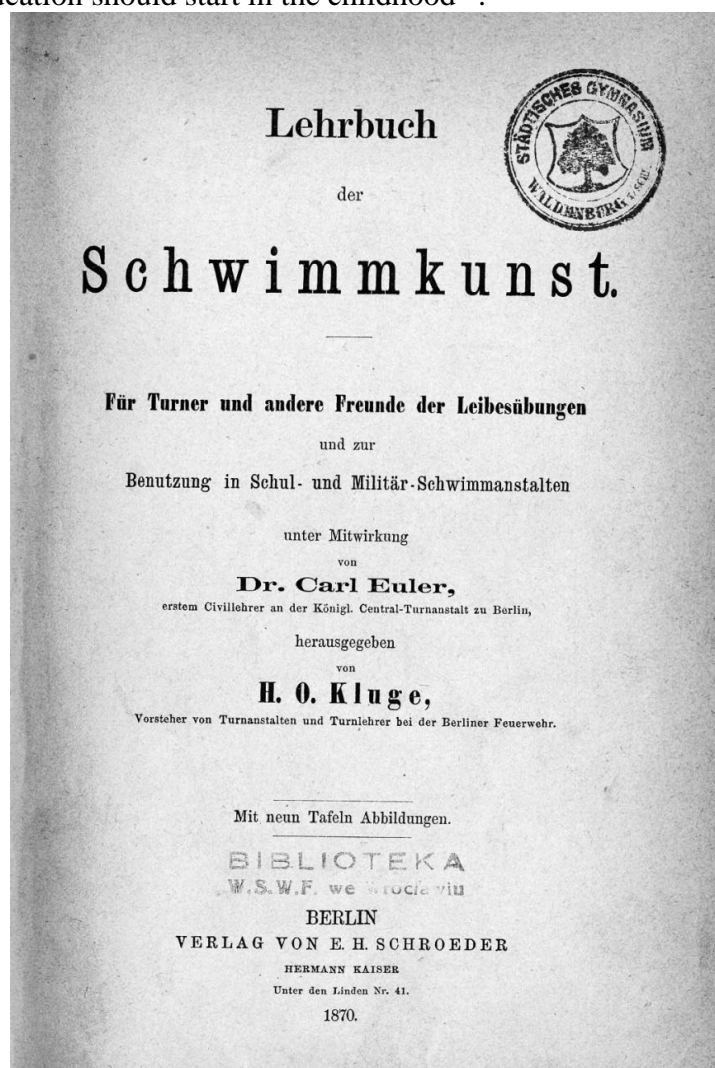
In 1870 in Berlin C. Euler and H. Kluge published the swimming manual titled *Schwimmkunst* (art of swimming). According to the method presented in the book inland movements should be taught first (breaststroke and backstroke), then in water being fastened with the belt and subsequently without the belt¹⁹. This method was called continental.

In 'Przewodnik Gimnastyczny Sokół' of November 11th, 1882 one could find the quote of professor C. Euler about swimming in which the author refers to swimming history from the beginning of the 19th century. The main reason for building swimming schools was large number of drowning. In the 1830s when the gymnastics declined, swimming development started. The winter and summer swimming pools were built. The value of baths was appreciated for the sake of cleanliness, health and improving the muscular system and lungs. The author puts an emphasis on the fact that swimming concerning health, practical and ethic issues is very important as an physical exercise. He also claims that swimming is hardly spread. The author presented his own swimming method being as follows: four trainers were teaching practice and while the students were in water, one teacher was in the boat. Before students were able to practice in deep water they were supposed to master their shallow water swimming. So-called winter swimming was presented. The students were practicing swimming movements in the gym, in standing and lying position, and then the water moves practice started. The students were fastened with ropes. The teaching program included also

¹⁸ B. Wydląka: *Nauka pływania...* s. 29-37.

¹⁹ C. Euler, H. Kluge: *Schwimmkunst*. Verlag von E.H. Schroeder. Berlin 1870.

water jumps (in order to get rid of the water fear) and diving. Professor E. Euler suggested that swimming education should start in the childhood²⁰.



The first page of *Schwimmkunst* published in 1870. Akademia Wychowania Fizycznego we Wrocławiu.

²⁰ „Przewodnik Gimnastyczny Sokół” 1882 nr 11, s. 92-94.



Narodowe Archiwum Cyfrowe, sygn. 1-S-2678

Swimming education in 20 year interwar period.

Narodowe Archiwum Cyfrowe. NAC sygn. 1-S-2678.

Alongside with the development of new swimming stroke such as crawl and trudgen new methods of teaching were sought for.

In the USA, in some states swimming started being included into obligatory educational program. The basis of swimming development was large amount of indoor swimming pools. Such development in North America was not only supported by investments but also the methods of teaching. The classes took place in groups. In schools, swimming education started with crawl and subsequently, students were taught other strokes. From the very first lesson, students were alone in water, nobody was holding them. All the movements were performed in shallow water and on teacher's signal. The lessons started with learning how to breathe. The students were standing in water that reached their breast and they were taught breath necessary in crawl. Then, they were breathing out while lying on the water surface (holding the railing). After mastering breath, they were taught diving (keeping head under water for few seconds), leg and arm movements. The next stage was coordinating breathing with arm movements and then coordination of all elements. Students were learning jumps – from kneeling and standing position. Other strokes were taught similarly. The school educational program included water lifesaving which was put the emphasis on. An interesting fact is that students from Columbia University did not get promotion for the 3rd semester unless they were able to swim 100 feet²¹.

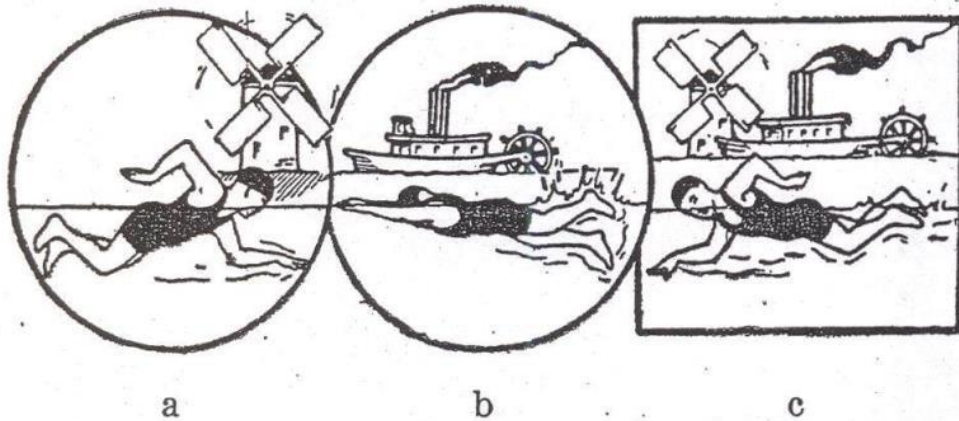
As it was already mentioned, in United States the natural swimming method was made use of. The most popular were its two varieties: Brink's method for teaching children and youth and Handley's method for teaching adults. In the USA teaching swimming was performed only with the usage of crawl (in Europe, mostly it was frog-style)²².

Brink's method was based on child's imagination 'Do you know how does the turtle swim? You can easily follow, put your hands forward, keep your beard against your chest and lie on water facedown. In this way you will float on the surface'. The lesson was supported by visual aids such as illustrated photographs. This method was about accustom children to water, practice breathing and lying on water and then the movements of arms and legs were introduced²³.

²¹ „Sport Wodny”, 1930 nr 8.

²² „Sport Wodny”, 1928 nr 4; „Sport Wodny”, 1928 nr 11.

²³ „Sport Wodny”, 1928 nr 11.



The sketches were supposed to facilitate learning crawl stroke according to Brink's method.
„Sport Wodny” 1928 nr 11

While teaching adults with Handley's method very similar things were taken into consideration, namely getting accustomed with water through games, learning the pressure, water displacement and learning how to lie on water (on breast and on the back). Such exercises were treated as an introduction to all swimming strokes. After mastering them, the actual stroke teaching took place²⁴.

It started being obvious that natural method is the means to teach swimming to masses. One could enumerate few natural approaches to teach swimming, the most popular (in Poland and Central Europe) was K. Wiessner's method.

At schools in Hamburg swimming education started in 1898. At first only boys were taught. Swimming education for girls was introduced in 1905. After World War I swimming was introduced to every school as obligatory part of the education (only doctors could relieve the students from such obligation). Teaching swimming started among 6 year and even 5 year old children. In 1920 the percentage of students who were able to swim due to school education was 66% among boys and 57% among girls. Moreover, in 1930 the percentage was 85. Such growth was connected to changing swimming methods and getting more accustomed to water. In connection with this growth, school authorities gave special certification to students who could swim (1924). Different type of certificate was devoted to those who were able to swim for 30 minutes (1928), and to those who could save the drowning people (1929)²⁵.

Swimming education was obligatory also in Japan. The best swimmers could take part in camps that were organized several times a year, where qualified trainers taught modern sport swimming. The Ministry of Education in Germany introduced swimming to public schools as an obligatory subject. It was imperative that every student that graduate should know how to swim (the notes from swimming and water lifesaving were included in the school reports). Sweden also introduced obligatory swimming education. Students who could not swim did not graduate. High schools were awarded by *Sweden swimming and water lifesaving society*²⁶ if the percentage of swimming students was 100%. Swimming was a priority in English, Austrian and Danish education²⁷.

²⁴ „Sport Wodny”, 1928 nr 5.

²⁵ „Sport Wodny”, 1930 nr 14.

²⁶ W Szwecji w 1898 roku powstało Svenska Sim och Livrädnings Sällskapet (Szwedzkie Towarzystwo Pływania i Ratowania). Powstało ono na wzór działającego w Anglii The Royal Life Saving Society Szwedzkie towarzystwo było organizacją prężnie działającą na terenie całego kraju. Działalność tego towarzystwa polegała na dążeniu do objęcia nauką pływania jak największej liczby osób chciano też aby każda pływająca osoba była przeszkolona z dziedziny ratownictwa. Towarzystwo to rozpowszechniało pływanie również w szkołach. Dzięki towarzystwu i

In Vienna in 1929 K. Wiessner published a book titled *Natürlicher schwimmunterricht*. The book was composed of three parts, namely historic, hygienic and technical. The third part presented natural method of teaching swimming developed by K. Wiessner. The author was against any geometrical movements while teaching swimming. The education was performed in three groups divided with regard to age of students; the first group 6-9 years, the second 9-12 and the third 12-15. For children up to 9 years old, teachers performed the exercises as a form of games. During the next stages the game approach was limited but not eliminated. The swimming lesson lasted from 20 to 60 minutes²⁸.

Between 1926-1930 in Soviet Union modern swimming teaching methods were introduced. The most important was Szumin school in Leningrad where so-called thorough method was used. Students were taught two or three methods simultaneously – beginning with crawl²⁹.

It is worth mentioning that teachers of Young Men's Christian Association – YMCA contributed to swimming methods development. They elaborated the book in which they described particular swimming teaching methods³⁰.

SWIMMING EDUCATION IN POLAND

At the end of 18th century in Poland, swimming was included in the program of knight's school established by prince Czartoryski. In 1805 in Krzemieniec T. Czacki established Wolynsk high school. The detailed schooling program and regulations concerning swimming education were elaborated. Swimming was also included in the program of Warsaw officer cadet school³¹.

In the Kingdom of Poland (1815-1832) the military swimming school was established in Warsaw³². Cadet corps in Kalisz also had their own swimming school where teaching swimming was obligatory from 1828³³.

Swimming schools were also established in Cracow in 1839 and Poznan in 1843³⁴. During the second part of 19th century first private swimming schools were built in Kalisz, Lublin and Warsaw. The schools made use of continental method including objects that could fasten the students³⁵.

At the end of 19th century the general interest aroused concerning swimming as 'health exercise'. Swimming was taught among rowing associations ('Sokół' gymnastic association played an important part). In 1910 B. Wydlak ('Sokół' teacher in Cracow) published the book *Learning how to swim*. The author presented continental method of teaching swimming³⁶.

The natural approach to teach swimming was present also in Poland. The followers of this American method were A. Zaleski and T. Semadeni who described the method (Handley's system) in *Pływanie* published in 1928³⁷.

subwencją państwową powstały w Szwecji liczne, szkolne pływalnie (odkryte i kryte). Umożliwiało to naukę pływania przez cały rok. Dzieci nie mogły ukończyć szkoły powszechnej nie umiejąc pływać.

²⁷ K. Pietkiewicz: *Nauka Pływania...*, s. 13.

²⁸ „Sport Wodny”, 1928 nr 4; K. Wiessner: *Natürlicher schwimmunterricht. Natürlicher Schwimmunterricht*. Wien und Leipzig 1929; „Sport Wodny”, 1931 nr 7; ²⁸ R. Karpiński: *Pływanie*. Katowice 2001, s. 4-5.

²⁹ B. Czabański: *Nauczanie techniki pływania...* s. 10.

³⁰ A. Michalek, *Pływanie...*, s. 25.

³¹ I. Tabaczek-Bejster: *Organizacje zajmujące się ratownictwem na ziemiach polskich (do 1969 r.)*. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego. Rzeszów 2010, s. 42.

³² R. Karpiński: *Pływanie...*, s. 15.

³³ <http://www.info.kalisz.pl/historia/bractwo.htm> 09.06.2014

³⁴ W. Lipoński: *Humanistyczna encyklopedia sportu*. „Sport i Turystyka” Warszawa 1987, s. 260.

³⁵ R. Karpiński: *Pływanie...*, s. 15.

³⁶ B. Wydląka: *Nauka pływania...* s. 19-35.

³⁷ A. Zaleski, T. Semadeni, *Pływanie...*, s. 143-150.

In 'Sport wodny' (1931/4) there was an article about introduction of natural method of teaching swimming in Poland elaborated by K. Wiessner. Such method was the most popular in central Europe. The National Office of physical education and Polish Swimming Association invited one of the creators of natural method (K. Wiessner) to Warsaw who was supposed to train swimming teachers (due to the lack of swimming instructors). This method was very modern and up to date. Until that time, teaching swimming was performed with the usage of corks, ropes and poles. Every movement was dismantled into geometrical parts and was performed on signal. The new method was characterized by ease, naturalness and getting rid of water fear. Teaching swimming was equal to playing games.

Former teaching methods were identical for children and adults. Natural approach varied concerning the age of students. Education for children was performed through games and was altered when alongside with age. Yet another advantage was the length of the course. According to the creators, several lessons would be sufficient to master particular swimming stroke. Moreover, the education took place in groups which was cheaper and less time demanding. Swimming lesson was similar to gymnastics. It had its own program consisting of warm up and relaxing exercises (they were performed in order to accustom student to water), more difficult ones demanding good coordination and effort. At the end of the lesson exercises were again easy and relaxing. The compliment of every lesson was diving and water jumps. The natural method was used in teaching every swimming stroke³⁸.

In 1932 swimming was included into educational program in every school (the classes were either obligatory or not depending on school resources)³⁹. In 1934 A. Kalinowski published a book titled *Naturalna metoda nauki pływania* (natural method of teaching swimming). Another swimming manuals were published in 1938, that were *Nauka pływania. Podręcznik metodyczny dla nauczycieli, uczniów i samouków* by K. Pietkiewicz and *Pływanie. Podręcznik metodyczny dla nauczycieli wychowania fizycznego oraz instruktorów pływania* by A. Michalek.

³⁸ „Sport Wodny”, 1931 nr 4.

³⁹ R. Karpiński: *Pływanie...*, s. 16.