



The Advocate
Fall 2021

Adapted Dance Fitness with Heather and Laura

Participants in the general population have reaped the benefits of dance fitness for decades [1], but what about children with disabilities? Dance fitness is a trendy mode of exercise intended to target cardiovascular health and endurance in a fun and engaging way [2]. Yet, many students with disabilities are often not afforded the option to participate safely and successfully in group exercise classes, with dance fitness being no exception [3,4]. With a limited number of dance programs, targeted towards only a specific disability or age group [5] there is a need for dance programs, including dance fitness programs, that introduce children to dance in the community.

As an adapted physical education specialist, Heather Katz saw the joy her students exuded when they engaged in dance and wanted to provide them the experience of taking a dance fitness class outside of skills. That's when she approached the Denton, Texas Parks and Recreation Center, who agreed to host a weekly adapted dance fitness class. Fast forward four years later, and Heather was a doctoral student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She left her well-established class behind to pursue research. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, Heather took this as an opportunity to re-connect with her students from Texas and provide a virtual dance class over Zoom. With her lab-mate, Laura Prieto, they began expanding and modifying on the class format Heather began in Texas. In addition, Laura and Heather connected with several disability organizations they had worked with in the past to share the class across the United States. From these initial actions, *Adapted Dance Fitness with Heather & Laura* was created!

Adapted dance fitness with Heather and Laura is a 45-minute virtual dance class open to all ages and abilities and has now been meeting for over a year. Each class includes with anywhere from 5 to 15 participants in a session including children to older adults. Students join from across the United States, with regular attendees from Texas, New York, Hawaii, and Massachusetts. Laura and Heather incorporate an array of teaching strategies intended to meet the needs of as many people as possible. Each dance routine is broken down prior to performing the entire dance with music, using task analysis to display movement components. Each dance has opportunities for whole body movements with progressions to different tempos and options to focus on only one part of the body or movement. Heather teaches the entire class from a standing position, while Laura remains seated providing modifications of the movements. In between each song, the instructors check in with the students, monitoring their reactions and perceived exertion. Each class also includes a dance game that promotes creativity and allows the students to create their own dances. Moreover, students take ownership in the class by selecting the weekly theme and selecting their own moves to use in creative movement games.



Communication is heavily emphasized, with unstructured conversation taking place prior to class, and question/answer session to close out the session. Each of the aspects contribute to a dance fitness class that students look forward to attending each week!

Laura and Heather hope to expand the class to reach dancers across the globe. The beauty of virtual instruction is the chance for anyone to join us from anywhere! If you know of anyone wishing to join our virtual dance fitness community, please direct them to our Facebook Page: Adapted Dance Fitness with Heather and Laura. We can also be reached via email at adapteddancefitness@gmail.com. Our class takes place on Zoom every Tuesday at 7 PM CST. We hope to see you there!

1. Banning PA. The physical fitness benefits exhibited in a four-month aerobic dance fitness program. 1985.
2. Barranco-Ruiz Y, Paz-Viteri S, Villa-González E. Dance fitness classes improve the health-related quality of life in sedentary women. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. 2020;17(11):3771.
3. Fernando N. Barriers to participation in physical activity for children and adolescents with Down Syndrome: A systematic literature review. 2019.
4. Rimmer JH, Riley B, Wang E, et al. Physical Activity Participation Among Persons with Disabilities: Barriers and Facilitators. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*. 2004;26(5):419-425.
5. Prieto LA, Haegele JA, Columna L. Dance Programs for School-Age Individuals With Disabilities: A Systematic Review. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly*. 2020;37(3):349-376.