

Instructor strategies to support older adults' physical literacy in community dance classes

Jenna Magrath, Cari Din, Vanessa Paglione, Sarah J. Kenny, Meghan H. McDonough

Purpose: To examine a dance instructors' strategies and behaviors when teaching community dance to older adults, aiming to understanding how these strategies support participants' physical literacy. This study specifically looked at online classes.

Methods: Ethnographic fieldnotes of five pre-recorded dance classes were taken, then analyzed in light of physical literacy theory.

Results:

Repetition and rewind

Repetition was seen to foster confidence and build physical competence. Complexity can then be added to movements with arm movements, directional changes, and rhythm.

Modify and make it your own

Providing opportunities for a variety of movements in a non-prescriptive way empowers dancers and encourages autonomy. Offering modifications also allows participants to personalize their dancing.

Providing choice and supporting autonomy

A goal of the instructor was to honour the diverse physical abilities, goals, and skill levels of individuals in the class. Participants can benefit from frequent reminders to listen to their bodies and make movement choices that are best for them.

Ensuring participants' safety

Feelings of safety are created through instructor acceptance and offering modifications. Verbal cues, brief explanations, and demonstrations help to ensure participants perform movements safely.

Key takeaways:

When instructors take a participant-centred approach, participants are empowered to make decisions and choices about their own dancing and movements.

Dancing offers a novel opportunity to support older adults' physical literacy due to its fun, social, and creative nature.

Developing physical competence

Physical competency and dance skills can be built by including a variety of different stylized arm and leg movements, as well as weight transfers. Endurance can be built through a 15–20-minute warm-up where strength-focussed movements are included.

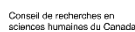
Fostering participant confidence

Confidence is fostered through reassurance, encouragement, and personalized feedback to support motivation, and feelings of success. Offering choices allows individuals to decide their challenge level depending on their confidence.

Creative expression

The dance instructor consistently offered opportunities where participants were encouraged to embody their creativity, which can support connecting to one's confidence. The instructor intentionally included multiple opportunities where participants were encouraged to express themselves.

This research was supported by:



For more information or for inquiries, please contact
Dr. Sarah Kenny: kennys@ucalgary.ca

Open access article can be found at:
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14647893.2022.2115994>