



ACE-SUPPORTED RESEARCH: Evaluating the Effectiveness of the ACE RRAMP Approach™

→ What You Need to Know:

The ACE RRAMP Approach™ is a motivational strategy designed to improve group fitness environments. This article examines new ACE-supported research that evaluated the effectiveness of this approach in improving exercise adherence, participant satisfaction and physiological outcomes in group settings.

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The ACE RRAMP Approach—an acronym for respect, recognition, alignment, mistakes and participant—is a practical approach that can be used by group fitness instructors to create a caring and task-involving environment that builds intrinsic motivation and inspires participants to return again and again.

Sabrena Jo, PhD, Senior Director of Science and Education at ACE, created the ACE RRAMP Approach as an extension of her dissertation research in an effort to provide group fitness instructors with a practical tool they can use to optimize the group experience and maximize adherence and motivation. If you are not familiar with the ACE RRAMP Approach or what is involved in developing a caring and task-involving climate, be sure to read [Introducing the ACE RRAMP Approach: A Practical Resource for Group Fitness Instructors](#).

When done well, the ACE RRAMP Approach can help instructors establish an inclusive environment where every participant feels like a contributing and valuable part of the group, regardless of their skill or fitness level, what they look like or their background.

ACE called on Lance Dalleck, PhD, and Laura Marie Pelino, MSc, of the High Altitude Exercise Physiology Program at Western Colorado University to evaluate the effectiveness of the ACE RRAMP Approach in terms of both exercise adherence and physiological changes experienced over the course of a series of classes.

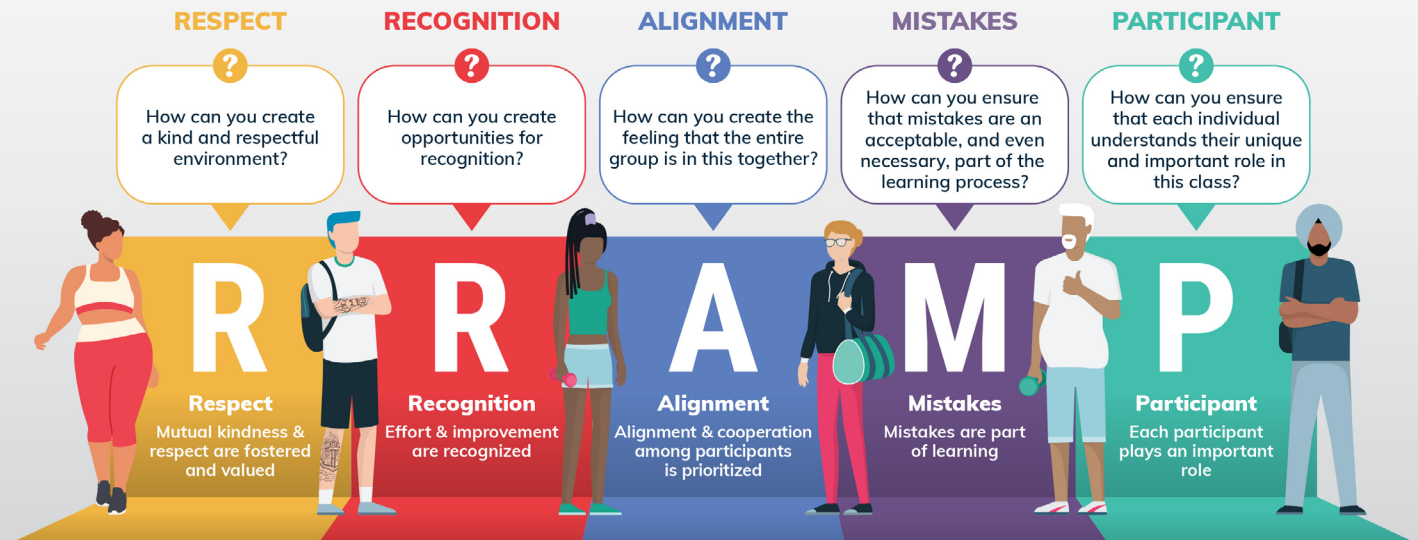
The Study

The researchers recruited 20 participants to take part in this study. All were between 18 and 63 years old, at low risk for heart disease and willing to participate in a 50-minute group fitness class three times per week for six weeks. Participants were excluded if they were at high risk for cardiovascular disease and/or pregnant or planning to become pregnant.

After completing initial anthropometric measures (i.e., body mass, height, blood pressure and body-fat percentage) and a maximal oxygen consumption (VO₂max) test, participants were randomly placed into two groups: (1) an intervention group (i.e., the RRAMP group) made up of 11 participants and (2) a control group made up of nine participants. All 20 participants

Create an environment that empowers everyone to succeed with the ACE RRAMP Approach™

The **ACE RRAMP Approach™** empowers participants to improve their health, fitness and overall quality of life by creating a climate that fosters success. The five elements of the ACE RRAMP Approach are:



Follow these **4 steps** to begin implementing the **ACE RRAMP Approach™** in your group fitness space

1. Develop a deep understanding of the ACE RRAMP Approach™ as a whole, then each of the elements individually.
2. Commit to integrating one element at a time, starting by layering them in before and during class.
3. Set goals to use all five elements in one section of class—the warm-up, conditioning segment or cool-down.
4. Try to weave the entire approach throughout the class, then focus on expanding, evaluating and improving your use of the ACE RRAMP Approach™ with each class you teach.

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completed a six-week group exercise program consisting of aerobics, Zumba and indoor cycling classes on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, respectively.

While both groups completed the same exercise program, with identical modalities and intensities throughout, only the RRAMP group had an instructor who implemented the ACE RRAMP Approach during the classes. For the control group, the instructors used traditional fitness instructor actions and verbiage.

Participants also completed three different questionnaires multiple times over the course of the study—perceived motivational climate in exercise (PMCEQ), commitment to exercise and caring climate scale. After week 6 was completed, they also returned to the lab to complete post-program testing that was identical to the baseline measurements taken before week 1.

ACE RRAMP Approach Implementation

The research team met with Dr. Jo a handful of times to ensure the ACE RRAMP Approach was being implemented correctly.

“One of the core strengths of the RRAMP Approach is that it’s practical and designed for real-world group fitness environments,” explains Dr. Jo. “These elements aren’t extra ‘add-ons.’ Rather, they’re woven into the natural flow of class structure before, during and after the workout. For example, ‘Respect’ might look like greeting each participant by name at the door, while ‘Recognition’ could mean acknowledging someone’s effort, not their performance, during a challenging segment.”

When Dr. Jo collaborated with the research team, they all agreed that it was important to make sure that RRAMP could confidently be delivered without the instructor feeling burdened by a checklist.

“We broke it down into manageable pieces like anchoring each element to a specific phase of the class (pre-class welcome, cueing during class, post-class reflection), so it became a rhythm, not a script. I also provided detailed cueing strategies and real-life examples from my own group instruction experience, so the framework felt empowering, not overwhelming. Instead of memorizing a protocol, they were building connection through intention,” Jo explains. “Lastly, the elements of RRAMP were introduced over the course of several weeks, not in one session, so that there was time to get comfortable with each element by focusing on one at a time and by building the framework as the study progressed.”

Here is a rundown of how the group instructors implemented each element of the ACE RRAMP Approach during the intervention group classes:

R(Respect)

Beginning of class: Greeted participants at the door; expressed sincere appreciation for every participant choosing to attend class as well as showing up to help better themselves, their classmates and the relationship with the instructor

Middle of class: Asked the question of the day; used individual names and direct eye contact when talking to a participant

End of class: Stood at the door to say goodbye and thank participants for attending class

R(Recognition)

Beginning of class: Took time before warm-ups to encourage

participants to set an individual intentional goal for the day (they had the option to share with the class or to keep to themselves)

Middle of class: Recognized individual improvements of participants; encouraged participants to reflect on their own improvements throughout the fitness classes

End of class: Set aside time during cool-down stretches for individual self-reflection of what they were proud to accomplish that day and one thing they wanted to work on in the next class; individually recognized and congratulated a participant if they noticed the participant working hard on a specific task or even for showing up and putting forth their best effort

A(Alignment)

Beginning of class: Emphasized the idea that every individual is on their own fitness journey, but all participants took time out of their day to attend the class together; highlighted that everyone in the class comes from different backgrounds; encouraged participants to learn from each other; encouraged participants to not compare themselves to each other, but instead learn from each other and grow from what another participant offers

Middle of class: The exercises in the fitness classes were specifically chosen so every participant had the freedom to choose their own weights or change their own resistance at any time during the indoor cycling class; exercises consisted of cooperative games/interactions among everyone in the class, such as partner squatting or group high fives; used verbiage such as “we” instead of “I/you”

End of class: Provided a recommendation for simple actions

Table 1. Physical and Physiological Measures at Baseline and Post-program for the RRAMP and Control Groups

Variable	Baseline		I am not sure	
	RRAMP (n=11)	Control (n=9)	RRAMP (n=11)	Control (n=9)
Age	41.7±13.4*	29.1±9.1	-----	-----
Body Mass (kg)	75.3±10.4	69.8±20	74.1±9.9†	70.9±18.2
Height (cm)	170.5±8.6	166.5±4.9	-----	-----
Systolic BP (mmHg)	113.1±8.7	114.7±7.2	113.9±9	118.1±6.5
Diastolic BP (mmHg)	72.5±7.8	72.5±7.8	75.1±6.8	73.7±6.3
Body fat (%)	30.9±7.6	25.4±8.1	31±6.6	26.7±7.6
VO2max (mL/kg/min)	32.6±8.9	36.2±7.5	32.2±6.1	35.8±7.2
Adherence			79.7%*	56.2%

*, p<0.05 = Between group difference, †, p<0.05 = Within group difference

Note: BP = Blood pressure

to take outside of class time to help encourage a healthy lifestyle (e.g., drink double the amount of water they drank before class or stand up every hour until the end of their workday)

M(Mistakes)

Beginning of class: Prefaced classes by acknowledging mistakes as a steppingstone to growth instead of a degrading response and that mistakes are a necessary step in learning new skills

Middle of class: Encouraged participants to accept mistakes as a part of the fitness journey; planned exercise sessions with every participant's success in mind as a way to set every participant up for success; repeated specific movements/ exercises to allow more practice opportunities on specific skills

End of class: Gave participants time to reflect and set a goal for one thing they wanted to focus on in the next exercise class to encourage learning from what they experienced that day

P(Participant)

Beginning of class: Started class with a reminder of why they came to class each day to highlight the purpose of attending the exercise class; offered individual acknowledgement and appreciation for their attendance in class; highlighted the uniqueness that every participant brings to the class

Middle of class: Acknowledged individual effort and progress; offered progressions and/or modifications as options, resources or choices the participants could use on their own when they found it necessary; explained the purpose of each exercise

End of class: Offered genuine appreciation for the participants, along with a reminder that every class would not be the same without the attendance of every individual; recognized when a participant modified an exercise to fit their specific needs

Dr. Dalleck highlights the fact that the instructors for the group fitness classes were student researchers, meaning that while they were trained instructors, they weren't seasoned vets who might be utilizing elements of the ACE RRAMP Approach as a natural part of their teaching style. "Having the student researchers leading the classes," explains Dr. Dalleck, "made it less likely that they would have any gained experience in introducing some elements of RRAMP inadvertently beyond what we were trying to do with the study."

The Results

The baseline and post-program data for all participants are presented in Table 1. Note that there was a statistically significant decrease in body mass in the RRAMP group. Perhaps more importantly, considering the focus on creating a motivational class environment that encourages participation and adherence, the difference in class attendance rates was also statistically significant, at 79.7% for the RRAMP group and 56.2% for the control group. Dr. Dalleck notes that the control group's attendance rate mirrors the 50 to 60% range typically seen in the literature, meaning that the jump to nearly 80% is very significant.

The Questionnaires

The following three questionnaires were used to measure how participants perceived the environment and the group fitness experience. For more information about each of these questionnaires, links are provided below.

[Perceived Motivational Climate in Exercise Questionnaire.](#)

The proportion of RRAMP participants who exhibited a positive change in the perceived motivational climate was significantly greater than that seen in the control group. Across the six-week intervention, 90.2% of participants in the RRAMP group displayed either a maintenance or improvement in how motivational they perceived the class climate to be, compared to only 56.5% of the control group.

[Commitment to Exercise.](#) As with the previous questionnaire, a statistically significant difference existed between the groups in terms of their commitment to exercise, with 81.8% of participants in the RRAMP group showing either maintenance or improvement over the course of the study, compared to only 47.2% of the control group.

[Caring Climate.](#) No significant difference was found with this questionnaire, which evaluated whether participants found the group fitness class to be a caring climate, with 86.7% of the RRAMP group and 84.6% of the control group showing either a maintenance or improvement over the course of the study.

The Bottom Line

While the weight-loss results are important, the goal of the ACE RRAMP Approach is to create a caring and task-involving climate that empowers participants and positively impacts adherence, which is why the class attendance numbers and the results of those questionnaires are so impressive.

“The results are incredibly validating, not just from a scientific standpoint, but from a human one,” says Dr. Jo. “Seeing that the RRAMP group had a significantly higher adherence rate (nearly 80% compared to just 56% in the control group) and reported better motivation and commitment tells us something vital: when people feel seen, supported and like they matter in a group fitness setting, they come back.”

What the questionnaires reveal is how participants perceived the group exercise experience in terms of how caring and motivational the environment felt.

“When we foster a space where effort is valued over

comparison, where mistakes are never punished, and where every participant has a role in the group’s dynamic, we’re no longer just delivering exercise,” explains Dr. Jo. “Instead, we’re creating belonging, which fuels behavior change far more effectively than just telling people to work harder or how to perform an exercise correctly. This study shows that RRAMP enhances adherence and motivation, which are notoriously difficult to sustain. That’s why this approach is so exciting: it equips group fitness professionals with a replicable, scalable way to cultivate environments that inspire long-term commitment to physical activity.” ▲