

MAY 2022

Canadian Disability Participation Project



The CDPP is an alliance of university, public, private, and government sector partners working together to enhance community participation among Canadians with physical disabilities. The research team for this project has expertise in physical activity promotion for persons with disabilities and coaching athletes with a disability and able-bodied athletes.

Working with Athletes with a Disability: Through a Coach's Lens

Benefits of Sport Participation

Sport participation offers many benefits for persons with disabilities, such as maintaining physical fitness, managing chronic conditions, improving mental health, and providing opportunities for social development, independence, and empowerment.^{1,2,3} However, rates of sport participation remain low among persons with disabilities in comparison to able-bodied individuals.⁴ Understanding the features of the sport environment that influence the quality of athletes' experiences is crucial.

A Coach's Role

Coaches play a vital role in influencing the quality of all athletes' sport experiences, including athletes with a disability (AWAD).⁵ Previous research suggests that interpersonal, intrapersonal, and organizational factors influence the experiences of coaches of athletes with a disability (CAWAD), recognizing that coaches' knowledge, thoughts, beliefs, and behaviours can have implications for the quality of athletes' sport experiences.⁶ However, studies have yet to examine coaches' experiences in diverse sport contexts, as well as the potential processes that may underpin the behaviours they employ in their interactions with their athletes.

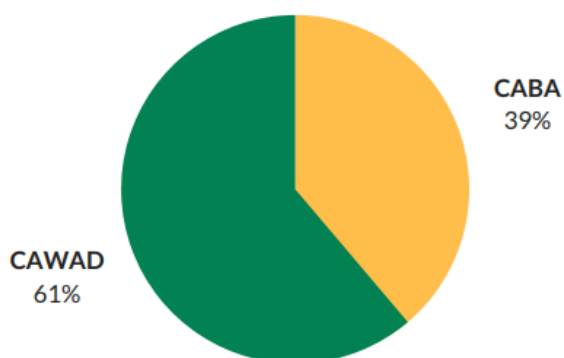
To bridge this gap, CDPP researchers and Parasport Ontario members surveyed Ontario coaches' perceptions of working with AWAD to:

- a) Explore and typify the demographic characteristics of coaches (with and without experience working with athletes with disabilities),
- b) Examine coaches' perceptions of their capability, opportunity, and motivation to work with AWAD,
- c) Investigate issues related to learning and development pathways, thoughts and beliefs, and behaviours among coaches currently working with AWAD.



Accordingly, the information in this bulletin is derived from the 2018 report, "An Investigation of Coaches' and Classifiers' Perceptions of Working with Athletes with a Disability," prepared by Mara Habash, MSc Candidate, and Jennifer Turnnidge, PhD.

255 Ontarian coaches (either former or current) were recruited from a variety of sports (i.e., individual and team) and contexts (i.e., recreational and competitive). Of the 255 participants, 99 were coaches of able-bodied athletes (CABA) and 156 were CAWAD.⁷



All participants completed measures that assessed their demographics; sport background; and perceptions of their capability, opportunity, and motivation to work with AWAD, informed by the COM-B Model (Capability, Opportunity, Motivation, Behaviour; see Figure 1).⁸ Current or former CAWAD completed additional measures assessing coach motivation and coach learning and development, informed by Nelson's learning pathways.⁹ Using open-ended questions, all groups were also provided with an opportunity to offer feedback/comments at the end of the survey.⁷

Coach Demographics

The demographic questionnaire assessed several variables regarding coaches' personal and sport-related characteristics, including gender, age, athletic and coaching experience, and hours per week spent coaching.⁷

Researchers analyzed results from the demographic survey, and determined that the majority of coaches were male (57.7%), especially for CABA (71.7%).⁷ Among CAWAD, there was a more equal gender distribution (50.6% male; 48.7% female).⁷

Most of the coaches surveyed were between the ages of 45 and 64 (29%) and resided in central Ontario (43%).⁷ Approximately 5% of CABA and nearly 10% of CAWAD reported having a disability themselves, such as having a prosthetic, being visually impaired, having a hearing impairment, or being an amputee.⁷ Numerous coaches also reported having a friend or family member with a disability (41.4%).⁷

An overwhelming majority of the coaches were former or current athletes (92.2%) from a wide array of individual and team sports.⁷ Coaches primarily held part-time volunteer positions, coaching one sport (73.5% CABA and 70.32% CAWAD).⁷ Over half of CAWAD reported having less than 7 years of experience working with AWAD.⁷

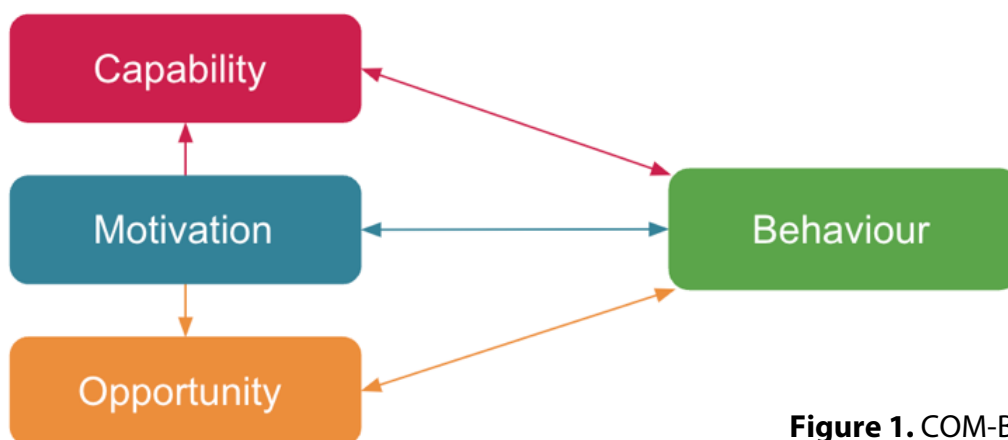


Figure 1. COM-B Model

Coaches' Thoughts, Beliefs, and Behaviours

Capability, Opportunity, and Motivation to Coach

Overall, coaches reported similar ratings of perceived capability, opportunity, and motivation to work with AWAD.⁷ However, CAWAD reported significantly higher perceived capability, opportunity, and motivation compared to CABA.⁷ Interestingly, CABA reported the greatest perceived barriers to coaching AWAD included

- a) Insufficient training
- b) Guidelines
- c) Equipment and facilities

Overall, CABA reported low levels of intentions to coach AWAD within the next two years.⁷



Coaching Efficacy

CAWAD reported higher levels of perceived efficacy to perform evidence-informed effective coaching behaviours.⁷ Both CABA and CAWAD reported the highest level of confidence to model pro-social behaviour and values (e.g., honesty and respect) and the lowest level of confidence to prepare AWAD for competitions.⁷

Coach Motivation (CAWAD Only)

In terms of motivation, CAWAD scored highest on intrinsic motivation, appearing to be primarily motivated by self-determined forces (i.e., coaching AWAD because it is interesting and enjoyable, not for external rewards).⁷ CAWAD did not report being motivated by friends and family who have disabilities.⁷

Coaches' Knowledge: Learning and Development Pathways

In general, coaches reported that informal knowledge pathways were the most important for learning (i.e., interacting with other coaches and learning by doing).⁷ When asked to identify their perceptions of the most important sources of knowledge of coach development, 67 CAWAD reported formal sources of knowledge (i.e., sport-specific NCCP courses) as the ideal source of coaching knowledge, and 63 CAWAD reported informal pathways (i.e., mentoring and interacting with other coaches) to be the ideal source of coach development knowledge.⁷





Perceived Challenges for Coaches of Able-Bodied Athletes (CABA)

Capability

In general, perceived challenges for CABA regarding capability focused on concerns of:

- a) Making appropriate technical and tactical adaptations
- b) Integrating both able-bodied athletes and AWAD into the same sport program
- c) Promoting positive developmental outcomes, such as confidence

Coaches also discussed aspects of their capabilities in relation to developing interpersonal relationships, including using appropriate communication techniques and language, adopting individualized and person-centred approaches, and building supportive peer, parent, and community relationships.⁷ They also discussed potential challenges in relation to developing disability-specific knowledge.⁷

Opportunity

CABA reported challenges regarding physical opportunity, including

- a) Equipment
- b) Facilities
- c) Time
- d) Funding

Coaches also reported some issues regarding social opportunities and norms, including potential stereotypes regarding working with AWAD and collective norms across different stakeholders (e.g., athletes, coaches, parents, sport organizations). Coaches believed that addressing these elements would enable them to better facilitate positive sport experiences for AWAD.⁷

Motivation

CABA reported the lowest perceived challenges related to motivation.⁷ Motivational challenges were centered around reflective (i.e., reflective processes involved in making plans) and automatic motivation (i.e., automatic processes or impulses) for promoting positive sport experiences for AWAD and motivations experienced by coaches when coaching, respectively.⁷

Perceived Challenges for Coaches of Athletes with a Disability (CAWAD)

Capability

CAWAD reported similar capability challenges to those reported by CABA.⁷ Interestingly, CAWAD placed a significant emphasis on difficulties they experienced in promoting positive outcomes, including athlete attitudes, motivation, and continued engagement.⁷ They also highlighted a more diverse range of capability-related issues, including having the necessary knowledge and skills to recruit athletes and appropriately prepare them for competitions.⁷

Opportunity

CAWAD also reported similar opportunity challenges to those reported by CABA.⁷ Additionally, numerous CAWAD reported issues regarding social norms in relation to attitudes and stereotypes of AWAD, and how these may be detrimental to the quality of athletes' sport experiences.⁷

Motivation

Like CABA, CAWAD reported fewer challenges regarding motivation. The main challenge for motivation was planning to promote positive developmental outcomes, such as confidence.⁷

Overall

Overall, coaches provided valuable information regarding potential challenges that may arise when coaching AWAD. The most important theme that emerged from the open-ended questions was that coaches perceived that they lacked the necessary evidence-informed training, education, and guidelines to promote positive athlete development for AWAD.



In Summary

The research presented in the 2018 report, "An Investigation of Coaches' and Classifiers' Perceptions of Working with Athletes with a Disability", provides insight into the demographics; thoughts, beliefs, and behaviours; and knowledge of coaches working in the sport system in Ontario.⁷ The findings highlight that psychological capability, physical (i.e., equipment, facilities, time funding) and social opportunity (i.e., stereotypes, norms), and reflective motivation are important factors influencing coaches' experiences when working with AWAD.⁷ Moreover, the findings indicate that CAWAD value interacting with other coaches, learning by doing, and sport-specific NCCP as the most important sources of coaching knowledge, learning, and development.⁷ Coaches reported a strong desire for formal and informal learning opportunities.⁷ We recommend that program providers use this information to target barriers associated with coaching athletes with a disability to ensure quality experiences for all persons involved. Coaches play a vital role in promoting quality sport participation among AWAD. We hope these findings will be useful in guiding future interventions and initiatives that aim to make sport more inclusive.

This KT bulletin was prepared by Shagun Jain, Hannah Strasdin, and Stephanie M. Flood, MSc
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