



The Canadian Paralympian Project

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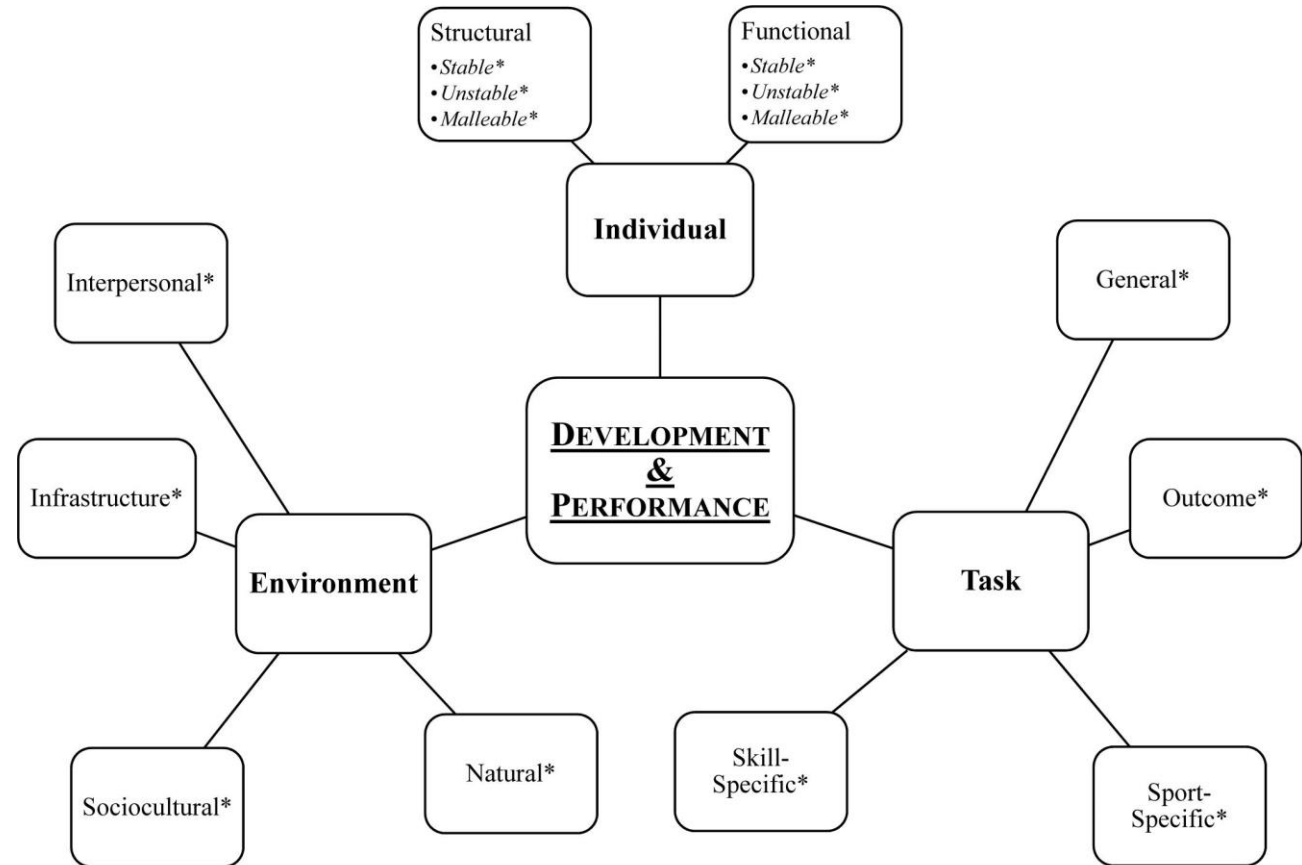
- Our research focuses on understanding the process of athlete development and skill acquisition.
 - Over time this has evolved into working with sports and sport governing bodies.
- Dehghansai et al. (2017) – From 1950 to 2015 only 21 studies on aspects of athlete development, with most focusing on short-term interventions.

Project Objectives:

- Develop a more comprehensive understanding of the psychosocial factors affecting the development of Canadian parasport athletes.
- Provide a stronger evidence-base for practitioners working in this area.

Phase 1

Research synthesis and theory design:



Dehghansai et al. (2020). Understanding the development of elite parasport athletes using a constraint-led approach: Considerations for coaches and practitioners. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11: 502981.

Phase 2

Large scale survey:

213 Australian and Canadian Paralympic athletes from 18 sports

All participants completed the Developmental History of Athletes Questionnaire (Hopwood, 2013)

Modified for Paralympic context

The survey examined training and environment-related factors across their development

Dehghansai, N., Pinder, R., & Baker, J. (in press). Pathways in Paralympic sport: An in-depth analysis of athletes' developmental trajectories and training histories. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly*.

Dehghansai, N., Allen, V., Pinder, R. & Baker, J. (in press). Examining the influence of impairment type on the development of Paralympic sport athletes. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly*.

Phase 3

Qualitative Interviews:

Participants (coaches, high performance directors and athletes) from a range of sports provided information about:

- Talent and athlete selection
- Issues related to optimizing athlete development
- Talent transfer
- Tokyo 2020/21

Dehghansai, N., Pinder, R. & Baker, J. (2021). Looking for a golden needle in the haystack”: Perspectives on talent identification and development in Paralympic sport. *Frontiers in Sports and Active Living: Elite Sports and Performance Enhancement*, 3, 635977.

Dehghansai, N., Pinder, R. Baker, J., & Renshaw, I. (2021). Challenges and stresses experienced by athletes and coaches leading up to the Paralympic Games. *PLOS ONE*, 16 (2). e0251171.

General Findings

- Injury/impairment onset is important for understanding development trajectory
 - Athletes with congenital or early onset impairments reached milestones earlier
 - Athletes who started later due to later impairment onsets achievement milestones more quickly (faster progression)
- Type of impairment – only starting to understand this variable
- Notions of ‘talent’ have vastly different meanings in Paralympic contexts
 - Influence of classification, access to key developmental resources, etc.

Tokyo 2020/21

- Unique issues that were uniquely affected by the ongoing pandemic as athletes responded to delays in Tokyo Games and prepared for the running of the Games in 2021.



Para athlete development is highly nuanced and although there may be relevant research from able-bodied settings, strong differences between sports and disability groups emphasize the need for context-specific models

The Future of Sport...

- *Greater awareness of Paralympic sport*
- *Greater understanding of key factors affecting development in different groups of athletes (Para sport is not a homogeneous group!)*
- *Greater attention to how broader social factors (access and availability) relate to 'success'*
- *Establishment of strong evidentiary foundations for policies and practice around athlete development*

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