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 health behaviour change and the psychology of physical activity, children with disabilities, and inclusive physical education.

Accessibility, Inclusion, and Quality Participation: A Look at the Literature

This report was developed as a supplement to *A Quick Guide to Accessibility, Inclusion, and Quality Participation.* The guide is a practical resource for disability sport program builders, including administrators, coaches, and policy makers. It provides concise definitions of accessibility, inclusion, and quality participation — including how these concepts are related, and how they can be applied to the design or evaluation of disability sport programs. This document briefly summarizes the literature supporting the definitions of accessibility, inclusion, and quality participation outlined in the guide.

Accessbility

The United Nations defines accessibility as having the flexibility to accommodate each person's need and preferences[1]. It is a relative concept that depends on the interaction between an individual or group and the design or demand of the environment[2]. Notably, accessibility is most often understood in terms of the natural or built environment[2] — that is, the physical features of the environment, ranging from elevation and weather to stairs and sidewalks, that have the potential to act as barriers to locations, buildings, or outdoor spaces. In reality, accessibility is a much broader concept[2–3]. The ability to access information, technology, systems, and policies are all important components of an accessible society or space[2–3]. Consequently, accessibility is influenced by a variety of factors, including (but not limited to) architecture, transportation, language, literacy, communication, social support, societal attitudes, and economic resources[4]. In general, accessibility is achieved when information, services, products, and spaces can be modified to meet each person's needs and preferences, or through universal design, in which products and spaces are designed to be usable for everyone, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation[5].

Based on this information, the CDPP defines **accessibility** as *information, products, services, and spaces that have the flexibility to accommodate each person's needs and preferences, or that are usable for everyone without the need for adaptation.*

Inclusion

In general, inclusion is defined as having the opportunity to participate in every aspect of life to the fullest extent possible[6]. However, while accessibility refers to the design or demand of information, products, services, and spaces, inclusion reflects an *attitude* or *approach* to a person's involvement in a particular activity and context[7–8]. With this in mind, accessibility is a prerequisite for inclusion, and universal design (i.e., products and spaces that are usable for everyone, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation) is one example of how inclusion can be accomplished[5]. As such, inclusion goes beyond accessibility to ensure that every individual, regardless of (dis)ability, can participate in everyday activities in similar capacities or roles to their peers[9]. Such activities may range from education and employment to sports and recreation. They involve the use of public services (e.g., libraries, transit, healthcare) and the ability to move about communities, as well as engaging with other "socially expected" roles, such as having relationships and parenting. Inclusive programs are developmentally appropriate, individualized, and value and celebrate individual differences[10–11]. At the most basic level, inclusion means individuals have equal opportunities to participate and contribute to their chosen group[12–14].

Based on this information, the CDPP defines **inclusion** as *activities, programs, events, or roles in which everyone can participate and contribute to the fullest extent possible.*

Quality Participation

To generate an evidence-informed framework of quality participation in disability sport, and to identify conditions that support these experiences, researchers from the CDPP synthesized existing literature[4,15–16] conducted original research[17–19], and sought stakeholder input[20]. The multi-step process was based upon international standards for developing practice guidelines.

Accordingly, the Quality Parasport Participation Framework[20] was developed. In this framework, quality participation occurs when an individual has quality experiences – that is, experiences that are positive, satisfying, and enjoyable – that are repeated in an activity over time. The accumulation of quality experiences over time contributes to the perception that one's participation has been positive, satisfying, and enjoyable on the whole. For an activity to foster quality experiences, one or more of six 'building blocks' need to be in place. These building blocks include: autonomy (i.e., having independence, choice, or control), belongingness (i.e., feeling included and accepted, respected, or part of a group), challenge (i.e., feeling appropriately tested), engagement (i.e., being 'in-the-moment', focused, absorbed, or fascinated), mastery (i.e., feeling a sense of achievement, accomplishment, or competence), and meaning (i.e., contributing towards obtaining a personal or socially meaningful goal). Conditions in the physical environment (e.g., accessible facilities), social environment (e.g., trained coaches and instructors), and program environment (e.g., inclusive activities) support the building blocks of quality participation, and in some cases, are necessary for participation of any form to occur.

In brief, the CDPP defines **quality participation** as *an individual's perception that their participation in an activity, program, event, or role has been positive, satisfying, and enjoyable*, which results from repeated experiences of autonomy, belongingness, challenge, engagement, mastery, and/or meaning over time.

Better Together: Accessibility, Inclusion, and Quality Participation

When a program is accessible — that is, information, products, services, and spaces have the flexibility to accommodate for individual needs and preferences — it makes participation possible. As such, accessibility is necessary condition for inclusion and quality participation. However, it does not guarantee that participants will feel included or have a quality experience.

When a program is inclusive — meaning that every person can participate and contribute to the fullest extent possible — it actively engages participants such that they experience a sense of belonging, feel trusted and valued, and have choice in their activities. Consequently, inclusion fosters the building blocks of quality experiences (i.e., autonomy, belongingness, challenge, engagement, mastery, and meaning), and thus contributes to quality participation.

Ultimately, inclusion is similar to quality participation and can be fostered in variety of ways depending on the person, place, context, and time. While inclusion involves equal opportunities to participate and contribute to one's chosen group, quality participation extends to one's subjective perception that participation (e.g., in an activity or group) has been positive, satisfying, and enjoyable on the whole. As a result, quality participation is more likely to occur if inclusion (and the building blocks) are fostered consistently over time.

To summarize:
- Accessibility is a condition that allows for inclusion, and in turn, quality participation, to occur.
- While accessibility lays the foundation, inclusion generates the building blocks of quality experiences.
- When quality experiences are repeated over time, the result is quality participation.

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Authors

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Contact Information

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