Reflective Practice and Consultant Effectiveness: An Examination of Sport Psychology Practice

Brendan Cropley

Thesis submitted to the University of Wales in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Cardiff School of Sport, University of Wales Institute, Cardiff,

September, 2009
DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed: (Candidate)

Date: 28.09.2009

STATEMENT 1

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by giving explicit references. A biography is appended.

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STATEMENT 2

I hereby give consent for my thesis, if accepted, to be available for photocopying and for inter-library loan, and for the title and summary to be made available to outside organisations.

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This thesis is dedicated to the loving memory of Peter Lewis Grunnell… A man who has given me the desire, determination, and values to succeed. Poetry in Motion!

When you walk through a storm
   Hold your head up high
   And don't be afraid of the dark

   At the end of the storm
   Is a golden sky
   And the sweet silver song of the lark

   Walk on through the wind
   Walk on through the rain
   Though your dreams be tossed and blown

   Walk on walk on with hope in your heart
   And you'll never walk alone
   You'll never walk alone

   You’ll Never Walk Alone
   (Gerry and the Pacemakers, 1963)
ASSOCIATED PUBLICATIONS

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Peer-reviewed conference communications


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British Association of Sport & Exercise Sciences (BASES) Workshop: Consultant Effectiveness in Applied Sport Psychology. Conducted by Dr. A. Anderson, D. Tod, and B. Cropley (Edinburgh, December, 2005).
Abstract

The emergence of professional status within the field of Applied Sport Psychology (ASP) has resulted in a greater need for ASP consultants to consider the effectiveness of their practice and thus attempt to meet the increased levels of accountability that are associated with their professional standing. As a result, this thesis provided an in-depth examination of effective practice and the potential contribution of reflective practice for the development of effective ASP service delivery. Utilising both emergent qualitative research methods and a more traditional staggered single-subject multiple-baseline intervention design, the programme of research presented in this thesis comprised three empirical studies that collectively aimed to: (a) examine the potential links between reflective practice and the development of consultant characteristics associated with effectiveness; (b) generate a more holistic understanding of effective practice in ASP and the role of reflection within the concept of effectiveness; (c) examine how reflective practice can be taught; and (d) investigate the effects of developing skills in reflective practice on the effectiveness of ASP support. In an attempt to achieve these aims it was important for the researcher to first become immersed in professional ASP practice and develop an understanding of and skills in reflective practice. In doing this, Study 1 reported the author’s personal reflections-on-practice, which provided the basis for an exploration of the link between reflection and the development of consultant characteristics associated with effectiveness. The findings derived from the author’s experiences provided support for the notion that reflection improves self-awareness and generates awareness and understanding of knowledge-in-action that can enhance ASP service delivery. In order to investigate effective practice and its potential relationship with reflection further, the purpose of Study 2 was to develop a more encompassing definition of effectiveness in ASP. The definition that emerged encapsulated a multi-dimensional process that focused on meeting the needs of the client and engagement in evaluative and reflective practices. Through further exploration of the concept of effective practice, reflection emerged as a vital component in the development of effectiveness, with participants also highlighting the seminal role of reflection in experiential learning. Finally, Study 3 attempted to provide support for and build on these findings through the investigation of the effects of enhancing reflective practice skills on ASP service delivery effectiveness. Specifically, the findings from a 14 week staggered single-subject multiple-baseline intervention provided support for the effects of the training programme on participants’ (n = 3) ability to reflect on their practice, the learning outcomes gained through reflection, and the effectiveness of their service delivery. Participants’ reports, and their client’s perceptions, supported the notion that by developing reflective skills they were able to generate practical and professional knowledge, improve self-awareness, make sense of their approach to ASP, and begin to understand the impact of their judgements and decisions on practice. This prolonged research programme has resulted in substantial support being generated for the relationship between reflective and effective practice within ASP. Indeed, the findings of this thesis are thought to have initiated an evidence-base that: (a) confirms reflective practice as a process allowing consultants to develop a range of characteristics associated with effectiveness in ASP; (b) identifies reflective practice as a framework for experiential learning and thus an integral aspect of the process of effectiveness; (c) exemplifies the need for practitioners to engage in reflective practice training; and (d) supports the notion that enhancing reflective skills results in the improvement of service delivery effectiveness. It is thought that these findings have the potential to direct future developments in professional training and education programmes within ASP, which could help to ensure neophyte practitioners are better equipped to engage in the process of reflective practice and enhance the effectiveness of their service delivery.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“Follow effective action with quiet reflection. From the quiet reflection
will come even more effective action.”

Peter Drucker
(American Educator)
Introduction

Recognition of the value that Applied Sport Psychology (ASP) support may have for the enhancement of sporting performance, personal growth, and the quality of athletes’ sporting experiences has resulted in a growing interest in the process of sport psychology practice (e.g., Andersen, 2005; Giges & Petitpas, 2000; Harwood, 2008; Woodcock, Richards, & Mugford, 2008). Consequently, ASP practitioners are becoming increasingly accountable for the support they provide (cf. Kelly, 2004). As the field continues to evolve, attention is therefore shifting from what techniques work to a focus on the processes and factors that influence the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of service delivery (Anderson, Knowles, & Gilbourne, 2004; Simons & Andersen, 1995). Nevertheless, research considering factors related to effective practice has tended to focus on the characteristics of effective consultants rather than the examination of a holistic concept of effectiveness (cf. Orlick & Partington, 1987; Yukelson, 2001). Thus, the deliberation of how effective practice maybe developed and evaluated has tended to be restricted.

Importantly, a consistent phenomena emerging in the professional practice and development literature within ASP, which is suggested to be intrinsically linked to both personal and professional development and the enhancement of consultant effectiveness, is that of reflective practice (cf. Anderson, Knowles, & Gilbourne, 2004; Holt & Strean, 2001; Martindale & Collins, 2007; Woodcock et al., 2008). Currently, however, the literature available on the value and integration of reflective practice into ASP has been limited and has tended to be anecdotal in nature. Consequently, there appears to be considerable confusion over the concept of reflective practice, and a resistance to engage in reflective processes at both practitioner and governing body levels. Indeed, although reflective practice has been
recognised by the British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences (BASES) Supervised Experience programme for sport psychologists since 2002, to date BASES has failed to issue any significant guidance on its use, provide substantial opportunities for sport psychologists to learn and develop as reflective practitioners, or fully integrate reflective practice into its professional development training programmes (cf. Knowles, Gilbourne, Tomlinson, & Anderson, 2007). Expansion of our understanding of the links between reflective practice and a more holistic conceptualisation of effective practice, as well as the way in which reflection can be integrated more systematically into ASP professional development programmes would have significant implications for practitioners and governing bodies alike.

Purpose of the Thesis

This thesis reflects a programme of research that involved a detailed examination of the role of reflective practice in the development of effective ASP support. Due to the understanding that available literature focusing on reflective practice and ASP support services has tended to be anecdotal in nature, an overarching aim of this thesis was to provide empirical evidence in attempts to generate information suitable to initiate evidence-based reflective practices within sport psychology. Specifically, the goals of this thesis were to: (a) examine the potential links between reflective practice and the development of consultant characteristics associated with effectiveness; (b) generate a more holistic understanding of effective practice in ASP and the role of reflection within the concept of effectiveness; (c) examine how reflective practice can be taught; and (d) investigate the effects of developing skills in reflective practice on the effectiveness of ASP support. As a consequence of the nature of these goals and the very essence of reflective practice, a qualitative approach was adopted to examine factors pertinent to the current
investigation in depth. This involved embracing alternative methods of qualitative enquiry (e.g., personal reflective narratives), as well as more traditional approaches (e.g., focus groups with neophyte and Accredited sport psychologists), and the design and implementation of an intervention to enhance the ability of ASP practitioners to reflect on their consultancy. Importantly, the thesis further presents a movement away from traditional intervention social validation procedures by incorporating an in-depth, semi-structured interview approach intended to support links between the development of reflective skills and the enhancement of applied practice.

**Structure of Thesis**

This thesis comprises six main chapters and contains three large scale empirical studies which are presented as a series of research papers. The thesis is concluded with a *reflective epilogue* that attempts to document the journey of the author over the duration of the research programme.

Following this ‘Introduction’, Chapter 2 provides a review of the professional development, effectiveness, and reflective practice literature in sport psychology. Chapter 2 provides the basis for the rationale to investigate the utility of reflective practice in attempts to develop the effectiveness of ASP support services. This chapter is currently under peer review as: Cropley, B., Hanton, S., Miles, A., & Niven, A. (under review). The value of reflective practice in professional development: An applied sport psychology review. *International Review of Sport & Exercise Psychology*.

Chapter 3 (Study 1) reports an examination of the reflections on the consultancy experiences of the author, gained over one full year, in attempts to establish potential links between reflective practice and the development of consultant characteristics associated with effectiveness. Findings suggest that reflection improves
self-awareness and generates knowledge-in-action that can enhance the delivery of ASP. The results also suggest that a more holistic understanding of effective practice is required in order to consider more explicitly the relationship with reflective practice. This study has been published as: Cropley, B., Miles, A., Hanton, S., & Niven, A. (2007). Improving the delivery of applied sport psychology support through reflective practice. *The Sport Psychologist, 21*, 475-494.

Chapter 4 (Study 2) presents an investigation into the concept of effectiveness in ASP and its relationship with reflective practice. Specifically, a definition of effective practice was constructed, with follow-up focus group discussion considering the notion that reflection is explicitly linked to the process of effectiveness. The findings of this study provided useful information for the development of a context specific reflective practice intervention (Study 3) through consideration of current practices, beliefs, knowledge, and understanding of ASP consultants. Further the findings have facilitated the conceptualisation of effectiveness in a more holistic manner. This study has been submitted for publication as: Cropley, B., Hanton, S., Miles, A., & Niven, A. (under review). Exploring the relationship between effective and reflective practice in applied sport psychology. *The Sport Psychologist*.

Chapter 5 (Study 3) reports an investigation into the effects of developing knowledge, skills, and experience in reflective practice on the effectiveness of ASP consultants. The findings indicate the value of specific training activities and practices on the development of reflective skills and thus provide a framework for the integration of reflective practice into ASP professional training and development programmes. Further, the study highlights the specific benefits obtained by ASP consultants through systematic engagement in the process of reflection-on-action (cf.
Schön, 1983). This chapter is currently in preparation for submission to a peer-reviewed journal.

Chapter 6 summarises the overall findings of the research programme and discusses the conceptual issues derived from it. The chapter also considers the practical implications emanating from the findings, and discusses the strengths and limitations of the research programme. Finally, areas for future research are considered in attempts to elicit pertinent areas for investigation that will ultimately influence the training, development, and practice of applied sport psychologists.

Following Chapter 6 a reflective epilogue is provided that considers the author’s journey during the research programme. The reflective narrative contained in this section is designed to encourage discussion and allow readers to consider for themselves the transferability of the author’s experiences to their own practice situations.

*Considerations in the Presentation of the Thesis*

The extended period of time taken to complete this thesis was attributable mainly to the longitudinal nature of Study 1, which involved a full years training and data collection, and Study 3, which lasted for one full year. During this time Study 1 (Cropley, Miles, Hanton, & Niven, 2007) has been disseminated via a published output. In addition, the review of literature (Chapter 2) and Study 2 (Cropley, Hanton, Miles, & Niven, under review) are currently under peer-review at the *International Review of Sport & Exercise Psychology* and *The Sport Psychologist* respectively.

Inevitably, the findings from Cropley et al. (2007) have been used by other researchers in attempts to understand the value of reflective practice in the development of ASP service delivery. Specifically, Woodcock, Richards, and Mugford (2008) have considered the findings of Study 1. Being cognisant of the timing of this publication,
and to ensure a logical progression throughout the thesis, Woodcock et al. (2008) have been deliberately omitted from the review of literature in the second chapter, but are considered in the discussion of Chapter 4 and the introduction and discussion of Chapter 5. As Study 1 has been disseminated via a published output it was decided to present this study in the exact manner and format that it appears in the public domain with the exception of altering the spelling to English format and including references to appendices, which was not possible in the publication. Thus, in order to ensure a consistent approach throughout the thesis the following format was adopted for all six chapters: a) American Psychological Association format with English spelling (5th Edition); b) Table and Figure numbering re-start with each new chapter; and c) precise reference lists presented at the end of each chapter. The relevant appendices, which consist of: example reflective templates; focus group and interview guides; exemplar transcripts from the studies; and intervention material, follow the reflective epilogue.

Summary

This thesis presents a detailed examination of the role of reflective practice in the development of effective ASP support. The rationale for conducting such an investigation is based upon: a) the growing need for ASP practitioners to be able to consider the effectiveness of the support that they provide; b) the consistent support for reflective practice as a process that may influence levels of professional effectiveness; and c) the lack of empirical research in the extant literature. In attempts to address the central aims of this research programme a range of qualitative methods have been employed, sampling an array of both neophyte and Accredited practitioners in order to examine phenomena pertinent to the study in considerable depth. To the author’s knowledge this is the first thesis dedicated to the study of the influence of reflective practice on the effectiveness of ASP support.
References


CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Value of Reflective Practice in Professional Development: An Applied Sport Psychology Review

“By three methods we may learn wisdom: first, by reflection, which is noblest; second, by imitation, which is easiest; and third by experience, which is the bitterest.”

Confucius
(Chinese Philosopher)
Abstract

The purpose of this review is to situate the concept of reflective practice within the professional training and development of Applied Sport Psychology (ASP) practitioners. In particular, to consider the progression of the field of ASP into professional status and examine the potential value of reflective practice as a mechanism to assist practitioners develop their effectiveness. The review initially outlines recent developments in professional training and development within ASP in order to frame the current environment in which neophyte consultants are trained and professional practitioners work before progressing to consider reflective practice, its definitions and relationship with experiential learning and professional practice. The use of reflective practice within sport psychology is then considered, with the final section of the chapter focusing on potential limitations of the available sport psychology literature and thus the rationale for further investigation.
The Profession of Applied Sport Psychology: Age of Accountability

For the past two decades researchers and practitioners have reported significant developments in the discipline of Applied Sport Psychology (ASP) and deliberated over the professional status of the field (e.g., Anderson, Miles, Mahoney, & Robinson, 2002; Rowell, 1998; Silva, 1989; Zeigler, 1987). With the emergence of professional bodies (e.g., The British Association of Sport & Exercise Sciences [BASES]; The British Psychological Society’s Division of Sport & Exercise Psychology [BPS-DSEP]; The Association for Applied Sport Psychology [AASP]) each with their own code of conduct, code of ethics, professional training frameworks, and continuing professional development programmes, it is now widely accepted that sport psychology has achieved professional status. Such claims are further supported by considerable research output that has augmented the body of specialised knowledge available within the field. This knowledge has been disseminated to practitioners through a range of applied peer-reviewed journals (e.g., Journal of Applied Sport Psychology; The Sport Psychologist) and is regarded as an important determinant of a profession (Pellegrino, 1983).

Both BASES and BPS professional training frameworks are mechanisms for ensuring quality and professionalism from practitioners by recognising their ability to demonstrate professional competence and practice independently. These programmes have undergone review over recent years (BASES and BPS in 2004) in attempts to meet the demands associated with the professionalisation of the field. Consequently, those wishing to gain Accreditation (BASES) or Chartership (BPS) must engage in a period of supervised experience in order to develop a level of competence deemed appropriate to achieve professional standing. This period is usually three years in duration and involves the development of knowledge, skills, and experience in several
pre-defined competency areas (see BASES Supervised Experience guidelines, 2007; and BPS Chartership handbook, 2007). Formal training and development opportunities have further evolved with BASES introducing the ‘High Performance Sport Accreditation Framework’ (HPSA, BASES, 2006). HPSA is directed at those providing sports science services to high performance sports organisations and offers accredited practitioners the chance for progression, thus confirming the commitment of professional bodies to sustain the popularity and credibility of the field.

Martindale and Collins (2007) proposed that, “External market forces have added to the internal professional requirements for accreditation” (p. 459). Hence, due to the professions now serving a global market it would appear imperative to present standards that ensure that ASP services are effective, provide quality, and allow for continued progression of the field. As a result attention is shifting within ASP from what techniques work to a focus on the processes and factors that influence the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of service delivery (Holt & Strean, 2001). This has led to growing research effort focusing on the elucidation of the constituents, measurement, and enhancement of effective practice. Due to the recognition of the central role of the practitioner in successful practice, however, much of the research focusing on the constituents has been limited to exploring the characteristics of effective consultants rather than considering the concept of effective practice more holistically. Nevertheless, such research has provided pertinent information that has helped to expound evaluative processes and provide a framework to guide the professional development and practice of ASP consultants (Anderson et al., 2002; Anderson, Miles, Robinson, & Mahoney, 2004). Research using a range of approaches (e.g., interviews, questionnaires, anecdotal reports) has uncovered a plethora of characteristics associated with consultant effectiveness (see Table 1).
Table 1. Characteristics Associated with Effective ASP Consultants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ability to demonstrate the use of their own mental skills</td>
<td>(e.g., Hardy et al., 1996).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to develop a working alliance</td>
<td>(e.g., Poczwardowski, Sherman, &amp; Henschen, 1998; Tod &amp; Andersen, 2005).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approachable</td>
<td>(e.g., Anderson, Miles, et al., 2004; Shambrock &amp; Bull, 1995).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Available</td>
<td>(e.g., Bull, 1997; Weigand et al., 1999).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aware of the boundaries of their expertise</td>
<td>(e.g., Weigand et al., 1999).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarity of the role adopted by the practitioner</td>
<td>(e.g., Anderson, Miles, et al., 2004).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment and passion</td>
<td>(e.g., Yukelson, 2001).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselling skills: empathetic, genuine, and patience</td>
<td>(e.g., Petitpas, Danish, &amp; Giges, 1999; Yukelson, 2001).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective intervention skills / good practice service</td>
<td>(e.g., Anderson, Miles, et al., 2004; Meichenbaum &amp; Turk, 1987; Yukelson, 2001).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible in approach to ASP</td>
<td>(e.g., Partington &amp; Orlick, 1987; Yukelson, 2001).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good communication and listening skills</td>
<td>(e.g., Anderson, Miles, et al., 2004; Weigand, Richardson, &amp; Weinberg, 1999).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honest and trustworthy</td>
<td>(e.g., Hardy, Jones, &amp; Gould, 1996; Petitpas et al., 1999).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledgeable about sport and sport psychology</td>
<td>(e.g., Anderson, Miles, et al., 2004; Orlick &amp; Partington, 1987).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptive</td>
<td>(e.g., Anderson, Miles, et al., 2004).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality / interpersonal skills</td>
<td>(e.g., Partington &amp; Orlick, 1987; Yukelson, 2001).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding and implementing professional philosophy</td>
<td>(e.g., Poczwardowski, Sherman, &amp; Ravizza, 2004).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The progression of the field of ASP into professional status has resulted in consultants becoming increasingly accountable for their practices (Martindale & Collins, 2007). In fact, it has been recognised for some time that the field has entered an ‘age of accountability’ (Smith, 1989). Consequently, there is an increased demand for practitioners to take responsibility for evaluating and documenting their effectiveness (Anderson et al., 2002; Strean, 1998). Although the presentation of a wide range of consultant characteristics has helped to progress understanding of ‘how’ and ‘what’ to evaluate in attempts to examine the effectiveness of service delivery, Hardy and Jones (1994) previously accepted that systematic evaluation of practice was not a customary process in the field. Nevertheless, interest in the evaluation of the sport psychologist’s effectiveness by coaches and athletes has been positively influenced by the development of standardised evaluation forms (e.g., the Consultant Evaluation Form, Partington & Orlick, 1987). However, it has been suggested that such measures might not sufficiently cater for methodical evaluation given the evolving nature of ASP (Martindale & Collins, 2007). Indeed, the assessment of only the characteristics of the consultant is unlikely to provide reliable evidence concerning the efficacy of performance enhancement interventions and thus the impact of the support (cf. Martindale & Collins, 2007; Strean, 1998). Accordingly, other approaches to evaluation (e.g., Goal Attainment Scaling, Kiresuk & Sherman, 1968) have been suggested and successfully implemented in some cases (e.g., Martin, Thompson, & McKnight, 1998), but again it appears that such methods are not customary nor indicative of providing evidence to determine the quality of the service provided or the impact of the practitioner. It is difficult, therefore, to establish the accountability of the consultant to their practice.
In attempts to address issues concerning limitations in evaluative practices, Anderson et al. (2002) proposed a case study approach that utilizes a battery of effectiveness indicators (e.g., performance, psychological skills and well being, athlete response to the support, and consultant effectiveness). Anderson and her colleagues proposed that using the indicators in triangulation to evaluate practice would comprehensively improve confidence over whether support was effective or not. Martindale and Collins (2007) suggested that although Anderson et al.’s work provides the most comprehensive coverage of the issues surrounding evaluation it also requires further consideration and debate. Further, validation and practical application of the case study method is still to be considered and thus it is difficult to verify the value of such an approach. Martindale and Collins substantiated the need for additional insight by implying that Anderson et al.’s indicators do not represent the full picture of what signifies effectiveness in ASP practice. The authors subsequently recommended the inclusion of professional judgment and decision making (PJDM) into evaluative case studies. Explicating the ideas of Hill and O’Grady (1985), Martindale and Collins (2007) outlined that by assessing PJDM the practitioner’s ‘intention for impact’ could be measured, which in turn offers insights into cognitive elements that mediate intervention choice. This suggestion has helped to reveal additional process measures of effectiveness and further elucidate holistic evaluation procedures that can help to comprehensively assess and represent the work of applied sport psychologists.

As well as the outcomes of evaluation providing evidence to increase the practitioner’s accountability to the client, the profession, and themselves (cf. Anderson et al., 2002), they also add to the evidence-base of knowledge concerning what actually works in practice. This is important in the professional climate ASP now finds
itself in as responsibility to engage in evidence-based practice is at the forefront of issues regarding the provision of ASP service and is consistent with the demands of being a profession (Dinsdale, 2008). Practice-based knowledge is therefore currently highly valued within ASP as it has been widely documented for some time that the application of theory to practice is problematic within ASP (cf. Martens, 1987). Due to this, a common theme emerging from the ASP literature on evaluation of practice is that of the utility of reflective practice. Indeed, reflective practice has been reported as a mechanism to enable practitioners to better understand themselves, the effectiveness of the service they provide, and actually learn about ‘doing’ sport psychology by generating practice-based knowledge (cf., Andersen, 2000; Anderson, Knowles, et al., 2004). Moreover, practitioners from a variety of fields (e.g., nursing, sports coaching) have consistently suggested that reflective practice is synonymous with professional practice (e.g., Larrivee, 2008; Williams, 2001; Yip, 2006). Mirroring developments in other fields (e.g., nursing), professional practitioners who provide supervision to neophytes during the practicum experience element of their training within ASP have recognised the need to provide supervisees with the essential skills for understanding their own practice (Knowles, Gilbourne, Tomlinson, & Anderson, 2007). As a consequence, systematic reflection is considered integral to ASP practice and both BASES and BPS have recognised the value of reflection and incorporated it into their professional training and development programmes. Before examining the research that focuses on the utility of reflective practice in ASP in greater detail it is first important to consider what reflective practice actually is and explicate its proposed role in both personal and professional development.

Reflective Practice
In order to frame the utility of reflective practice within ASP it is important to initially consider where reflection is situated in the process of experiential learning by examining the work of Kolb (1984). Building on this notion of experiential learning, it is then necessary to attempt to reveal what reflective practice actually is. Despite recent research attempting to provide a better understanding of reflective practice for ASP practitioners (e.g., Anderson, Knowles, et al., 2004) some confusion over the concept and its practical application appears to remain. This is also considered to be true in other fields where distinctions between reflective practice and other modes of reflective theorising are not clear (e.g., education, Procee, 2006). Such confusion in ASP may be manifested by the lack of guidance and instruction provided by professional bodies (e.g., BASES) on its use and integration into practice. It is therefore essential to consider the work of Ghaye and Lillyman (2000) and Schön (1983, 1987), which is proposed to illuminate the relationship between reflective practice and the practice of ASP as well as the value that reflective practice potentially has for the development of ASP practitioners and the field as a whole.

**Reflection in Experiential Learning**

In consideration of the value of reflective practice as a mechanism for practitioner development within ASP, the concept of experiential learning must be examined. In general terms, the distinguishing features of experiential learning are that it refers to the organisation and construction of learning from observations produced in a practical situation, with the implication that the learning can lead to action or improved action (Moon, 1999). Further, it is suggested that experiential learning is a programme for profoundly re-creating our personal lives and social systems (Kolb, 1984). Accordingly, the outcome of experiential learning is action or learning and is best expressed in Kolb’s cycle (see Figure 1). Although cyclical in diagrammatic
representation, Kolb suggests that it should be approached as a continuous spiral. Indeed, the process of *reflective observation* enables the *concrete experience* to be brought into a state of *abstract conceptualisation*. When framed, the abstract concepts guide *active experimentation* and subsequently lead to more *concrete experience*. If learning has taken place a new form of experience on which to reflect and conceptualise should be created in each cycle as subsequent action is experienced in a different set of circumstances (e.g., enhanced practitioner understanding of their client).

*Figure 1*. The experiential learning cycle (Kolb, 1984).

In ASP, particularly during the supervised experience element of professional training, there are lots of opportunities to gain experience. However, if practitioners are to hone their skills, learn about themselves, and better serve the needs of their
athlete-clients, frameworks that engage practitioners in a process of learning are essential (Van Raalte & Andersen, 2000). It is important to avoid presuming that learning is an automatic process associated with ‘having an experience’. Indeed, recent research that has attempted to develop understanding of the term ‘experience’ in the context of sport highlighted that, “Experience is the current product of a process whereby knowledge is acquired and adapted so that action, reflection, and learning take place” (Hanton, Cropley, Neil, Mellalieu, & Miles, 2007, p. 32). Additionally, through examining potential learning experiences that contribute to service delivery competence in ASP, Tod, Marchant, and Andersen (2007) emphasised the need for a greater focus on reflective practice to assist practitioners in developing knowledge and skills. Thus, the role of reflective practice in potentially learning from experience appears to be vital and is consistent with experiential learning theory (cf. Burnard, 1991; Kolb, 1984).

Although the work on experiential learning is helpful in furnishing us with ideas about how to guide reflection in learners, the sequencing of the stages of the model of experiential learning may be problematic. Indeed, Dewey (1933) suggested that in relation to reflection a number of processes can occur at once. Consequently, Kolb’s learning cycle maybe too neat and simplistic for blind application within ASP. The nature of providing ASP support is a complex one that involves making in-vivo decisions about how best to act in situations that unfold in the moment. Action, reflection, conceptualisation and learning, therefore, do not always present themselves in neatly defined stages. Further, whilst Kolb (1984) outlined that the quality of reflection is crucial in ensuring that the learner does progress in their learning, his work does not expand on and uncover the elements of reflection itself (Boud, Keogh,
& Walker, 1985). Therefore, if the role of reflection in experiential learning is to be better understood, interpretations of reflective practice must be clarified.

**What is Reflective Practice?**

It is reported that the Westernised concept of reflective practice was born out of the work of Dewey (1859-1952) who took the notion of reflection from philosophy and introduced it into the fields of psychology and pedagogy. Dewey allied reflection with thinking and described it as the kind of thinking that consists in turning a subject over in the mind and giving it serious thought (cf. Moon, 1999). Dewey indicated that reflection may be seen as an active and deliberate cognitive process involving sequences of interconnected ideas which take account of underlying beliefs and knowledge. Reflective thinking generally addresses practical problems, allowing for doubt and perplexity before possible solutions are reached (Edwards, 1999). In essence, Dewey created a greater sense of valuing practice in ways that went beyond any superficial sense of just thinking about practice. Through the notion of reflection, practice could be seen as being more informed (Dewey, 1933). By being more informed, a practitioner could be regarded as being particularly skilful and therefore possess important knowledge of practice. In this sense, reflection rings true to many professions as a concept because it raises thinking about practice to a position from which it can be viewed as a specialised form, and therefore has important ramifications in relation to knowledge of practice (Loughran, 1996). Consequently, since its inception, the term *reflective practice* has been widely examined with authors building on the ideas of Dewey and others (e.g., Habermas, 1971) who have thought to have given currency to the way in which the term is viewed. In light of this, Loughran (2002) highlighted that, “Reflection has developed a variety of meanings as the bandwagon has travelled through the world of practice” (p. 33).
Reflective practice is often seen as representing a choice for practitioners to be reflective or not about their work, but in reality, all practitioners engage in reflection about the professional service they provide (Bright, 1993). What passes for reflection, however, is often not representative of reflective practice. For example, contemplating an experience or event is not always purposeful and does not necessarily lead to new ways of thinking or behaving in practice, which is the crux of effective reflective activity (Andrews, Gidman, & Humphreys, 1998). This implies that in order to engage in reflective practice the process must be purposeful and result in change to beliefs, values, understanding and/or behaviour and thus supports Dewey’s (1933) contention that reflective practice must be deliberate. Other commonalities that appear to exist in definitions of reflective practice are that it involves the self and that it is triggered by the questioning of actions, values and beliefs. For example, Boyd and Fales (1983) suggested that reflection is, “The process of internally examining and exploring an issue of concern, triggered by an experience, which creates and clarifies meaning in terms of self and results in a changed conceptual perspective” (p. 100). This definition, along with those of other authors (e.g., Barnett & O’Mahoney, 2006; Daudelin, 1996), suggests the process is initiated when individuals become aware of or concerned with an incident or problem. However, although reflecting on problems is important it should not be done at the expense of other aspects of our working lives, such as reflecting on experiences where behaviour has been effective (Loughran, 2006). Raelin’s (2002) definition of reflective practice may therefore offer a more apt understanding:

The practice of periodically stepping back to ponder the meaning of what has recently transpired to ourselves and to others in our environment. It illuminates what the self and others have experienced, providing a basis for future action.
Particularly, it privileges the process of inquiry, leading to an understanding of experiences that may have been overlooked in practice (p. 66).

In contrast to Dewey, Ghaye and Lillyman (2000) outlined that reflective practice is not just an intellectual endeavour but a complex process involving the whole person, including their emotions, thus making a simple definition elusive. In attempts to understand the concept of reflective practice more comprehensively and thus frame reflection within the practice of ASP it may therefore be more valuable to consider the principles associated with reflective practice. Indeed, Ghaye and Lillyman acknowledged that it is beneficial to see reflective practice holistically and subsequently outlined 12 principles that are proposed to define the ‘landscape of reflective practice’. These are presented in a framework in Figure 2. Themes within this framework represent common ideas emanating from other holistic approaches to defining reflective practice (e.g., descriptive frameworks, see Johns, 2000). Such themes include: recognising the nature of the workplace as self-focused and context specific; stressing improvements to self; generating practice-specific knowledge; and recognising the psychological processes utilised by the practitioner during reflective practice. Although the landscape map conceptualisation of reflective practice was originally developed within health care, it is deemed viable for consideration within ASP due to the similarities in activities and practice goals between the professions. The 12 principles should be questioned in terms of what they actually mean for ASP practice but in essence provide a more inclusive insight into the concept.

Reflection in Professional Practice

The work of Schön (1983) has particular relevance for the field of ASP as it examines the way in which professionals go about their daily practices. Schön’s contributions also afford greater understanding of the design and implementation of
Figure 2. An emerging landscape of reflective practice. Twelve principles of reflection (adapted from Ghaye and Lillyman, 2000, p. 120).
reflective practice. Although a full discussion of Schön’s theories goes beyond the scope of this review some elements thought to be intertwined in the practice and development of ASP are considered briefly and these are: technical rationality, knowing-in-action, reflection-in-action, and reflection-on-action.

Technical rationality. Technical rationality is linked to the idea of practice being separated from theory, and of the practitioner being seen as a ‘technician’ who simply applies theoretical knowledge (developed in educational establishments) to their own practice. Indeed, within sport psychology and other professions, professional knowledge has traditionally been defined in terms of a positivistic framework (Martens, 1987; Schön, 1987). Schön argued that within this framework, practitioners are seen as instrumental problem solvers who exact solutions by applying theory and techniques derived from systematic scientific knowledge. This application of theory to practice may be suitable for well defined and recognisable problems (cf. Rømer, 2003). However, within ASP problems rarely present themselves in easily definable and resolvable form, thus making the neat application of theory to practice difficult (Anderson, Knowles, et al., 2004). In support of this, the findings of Tod et al. (2007) indicated that graduates and teachers of ASP Master’s programmes devalued learning research and theory as in some cases it was not applicable to clients and practical situations, and “too textbook” reducing its relevance to real-life practice (p. 327).

Technical rationality is therefore thought to devalue the knowledge which practitioners develop about and through their work (Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998). Subsequently, Schön (1983) turned the view of technical rationality around and considered how reflective practice can help us to frame problems, as well as how we should value and use the type of knowledge that is embedded within our workplaces. Such knowledge is
thought to be generated by our practice experiences and is considered as tacit knowing-in-action (Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998).

Knowing-in-action. In a different view of theory than technical rationality, Schön (1987) discussed the use of knowledge-in-action as core to the artistry of professional practice. He suggested that, “Artistry is an exercise of intelligence, a kind of knowing, though different in respects from our standard model of professional knowledge. It is not inherently mysterious; it is rigorous in its own terms; and we can learn a great deal about it” (p. 13). Knowledge-in-action has also been labelled as craft knowledge (e.g., Knowles, Gilbourne, Borrie, & Neville, 2001) and tacit knowledge (e.g., Martens, 1987) and is suggested to be constructed of two parts. First, is that improving practice and professional development begins with reflecting on what we actually do, on our own experience. This reflection generates a rich and detailed knowledge base derived from practice (Ghaye & Lillyman, 2000). Second, this knowledge is used by practitioners in their work and thus it becomes our knowing-in-action. Much of this knowing is often difficult to make verbally explicit but it manifests itself in a practitioner’s behaviour (Schön, 1987). Accordingly, knowing-in-action is a view that professional practice is no longer to be understood as a mechanical application of scientifically based rules, but the function of personally tailored theories about what does and does not work in practice. Schön recognised the importance of making these theories explicit and the value of reflection in linking our espoused theories (e.g., what we say or claim we do) with our theories-in-use (e.g., what actually happens in practice). Hence, using reflection to examine not just the research based knowledge that influences our practice but also hands on knowledge-in-action, we will be in a better position to identify good practice and take steps to learn from it. Importantly, Johns (1995) suggested that reflective tacit knowledge-in-
action should be seen as, “The most substantive form of knowledge and should properly constitute the body of knowledge of a practice discipline” (p. 25).

Reflection-in-action. This is described by Schön (1983) as, “An epistemology of practice implicit in the artistic, intuitive processes which some practitioners do bring to situations of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and value conflict” (p. 49). Reflection-in-action occurs during the work of a practitioner and concerns thinking about how to reshape and adjust what we are doing whilst it is underway (Ghaye & Lillyman, 2000). Schön argued that it is central to the art by which professionals handle and resolve their difficulties and concerns about practice, whilst actually in practice. This has particular links with the delivery of ASP services because in many instances practitioners are required to ‘think on their feet’ and display intuitive action in order to deal with the problems and issues that arise out of the idiosyncrasies of practice. With ASP practitioners now becoming increasingly engaged in humanistic approaches and counselling-based activities (e.g., Holt & Strean, 2001) it is likely that their ability to reflect-in-action will be a determinant of the effectiveness of their practice due to the client in such approaches and activities having a major role in directing interventions (cf. Hill, 2001). Critics of the notion of reflection-in-action, however, question whether practitioners have the time to reflect during action. Indeed, Van Manen (1991) described reflection-in-action more as a process of making a decision. Nevertheless, in contrast, Larrivee (2008) actually defines reflective practice as, “On the job performance resulting from using a reflective process for daily decision making and problem-solving” (p. 342). Despite the potential value of reflection-in-action in both aiding practice and better understanding how ASP practitioners work it is a confusing phenomenon that requires more research to better appreciate it.
Reflection-on-action. Reflection-on-action is the form of reflection that occurs after action and relates, via verbalised or non-verbalised thought, to the action that the practitioner has taken (Moon, 1999). It is a deliberate and conscious activity that can be conducted privately or publicly and is principally designed to improve future action (Ghaye & Lillyman, 2000). Thus, it is reminiscent of the definitions of reflective practice stated earlier. Reflection-on-action is thought to allow practitioners to access and make sense of their knowledge-in-action and subsequently allows practitioners to make more informed decisions in practice based on the knowledge generated from previous experience.

Reflective Practice in Applied Sport Psychology

Growing research interest has been placed on understanding reflective practice and reporting the benefits of engaging in reflective practices within ASP. The increasing amount of publications is indicative of alternative methods of research becoming more accepted and trusted in the field (cf. Sparkes, 2002). Further, the product of reflections is suggested to have the potential to offer a rich resource highlighting the knowledge-in-action required to do sport psychology (Anderson, Knowles, et al., 2004), and thus answer calls from practitioners for the reporting of real-life consulting experiences (Andersen, 2000). It is thought that the use of reflective narratives to outline specific issues concerning ASP practice has the potential to not only inform the supervision of trainee sport psychologists but also enhance the effectiveness of sport psychologists’ professional practice (Jones, Evans, & Mullen, 2007). For example, transcripts and self-reflections on neophyte practice have identified key issues (e.g., self-awareness, role of supervision) related to the process of sport psychology service delivery, provided a sense of what aspiring professionals can expect during their initial training experiences, and outlined relevant
practice knowledge to aid in the growth of sport psychology consultants-in-training (e.g., Holt & Strean, 2001; Jones et al., 2007; Tammen, 2000; Tonn & Harmison, 2004). Thus, the practitioners at the centre of these research papers also consistently advocate the use of reflective practice.

Reflective accounts reported by professionally accredited practitioners have traditionally been less readily available, particularly within the peer-reviewed literature. In an early paper, Bull (1995) offered reflections on a five year consultancy programme delivered to an international cricket team in attempts to inform the practices of other practitioners. Whilst the paper clearly describes many aspects of practice and offers recommendations to those embarking on extended periods of ASP support there is a lack of emphasis on the reflective process he engaged in to draw his conclusions. Indeed, this lack of attention to the reflective process is representative of many narratives (e.g., McCann, 2000) available by both neophyte and professional practitioners and has compounded the confusion experienced over the integration of reflective processes into the practice of ASP consultants. However, the potential learning opportunities provided by honest and insightful reflections is thought to outweigh such limitations and consequently the emergence of reflective accounts offered by professional consultants is now apparent. This is best seen in the special issue of the BPS Sport & Exercise Psychology Review (2006), which, guided by the principles of reflection, presents experienced practitioners reflective accounts of providing in-event support at the Athens Olympics. This narrative analysis of ‘Athens’ provided recommendations for those ‘in-event’ psychologists working towards the Beijing Olympics and substantiates claims over the value of reflection in providing a source for learning and development within ASP.
Anderson, Knowles, et al. (2004) have provided the most substantial understanding of reflective practice and its role within ASP to date. Prior to the development of Accreditation and Chartership schemes (circa 2004), Petitpas, Giges, and Danish (1999) raised issues over whether training models were equipped to support sport psychology trainees in learning the requisite humanistic skills to provide athlete-centred services. Based on this premise, Anderson and colleagues presented a case for the value of reflective practice as an approach to professional training and development that can assist practitioners in effectively managing themselves in practice. By drawing on the types of knowledge that are valued within ASP and considering the work of Schön (1987), Anderson et al. proposed that, “Through reflective practice, sport psychology practitioners can access, make sense of, and learn from the relevant knowledge-in-action that contributes to actually doing sport psychology” (p. 191). Such proposals are in agreement with those made in related fields (e.g., sports coaching, Knowles et al., 2001) and raise awareness of the utility of reflective practice in helping practitioners to understand their work and themselves. This is consistent with Petitpas et al.’s view that greater emphasis on self-knowledge and adaptability is required to prepare practitioners to practice more effectively. Further, Poczwardowski, Sherman, and Henschen (1998) contented that, “By paying attention to the self, thoughtfully analysing consultations and being aware of limitations, self-interests, prejudices and frustrations; practitioners will be in a better position to manage themselves and their practice effectively” (p.199). In addition, Poczwardowski et al. suggested that reflecting on each consulting experience is essential for maximal personal growth and development.

The relationship between reflective practice and self-awareness is a common theme emanating from the ASP literature. Specific accounts of practitioner’s
reflections-on-practice have highlighted reflection to be a valuable process in examining the “self” and uncovering more effective ways of “being”. For example, Holt and Strean’s (2001) narrative account of neophyte practice focused on the process of becoming a more athlete-centred practitioner. Through the understanding that a crucial element of athlete-centred approaches is the development of trust and rapport (cf. Ravizza, 1990) and the fact that reflection may be an appropriate mechanism to help practitioners develop the self-understanding required to build working alliances in sport psychology relationships (cf. Poczwardowski et al., 1998), Holt engaged in a process of critical incident reflection. The findings reported that personal reflections helped to increase self-awareness and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses arising from initiating a consultation. Subsequently, this helped to identify key issues related to service delivery and led to improved self-management and applied practice.

Similarly, Tonn and Harmison’s (2004) account of neophyte practice revealed that reflecting on her (Tonn’s) experiences allowed the enhancement of self-awareness regarding how she provided sport psychology services to athletes in a team setting. Tonn and Harmison additionally suggested that trainees can benefit tremendously from the process of self-reflection regarding their practicum experience by gaining a deeper insight into practice and self-awareness. Support for these recommendations has been provided by Tod et al. (2007) who interviewed participants regarding potential learning experiences within ASP. The participants in this study revealed a belief that the benefits of practical experience are enhanced with self-reflection, which leads to enhanced self-awareness. A contention further corroborated in related fields (e.g., nursing, Conway, 1998; education, Scanlan & Chernomas, 1997). Subsequently, Tod et al. indicated that practitioners enhance their understanding of their client
interactions and themselves with self-reflection, and such knowledge might help them become more effective consultants.

Building on the notion that reflective practice enhances self-awareness, Winstone and Gervis (2006) outlined the potential importance of reflection in combating against the occurrence of countertransference in ASP practice. Countertransference refers specifically to the direction of the transference from practitioner to client, and occurs when thoughts and feelings in the sport psychologist are evoked by the client (Winstone & Gervis, 2006). Strean and Strean (1998) highlighted that if practitioners are not aware of negative feelings toward clients, or have no way of talking about them and working with them, they are likely to repress them. The danger is that without self-awareness of potential countertransference the sport psychologist/athlete relationship will be compromised, which will have a significant effect on the effectiveness of the support provided. Referring to the work of Anderson, Knowles, et al. (2004), Winstone and Gervis outlined that despite the intuitive value of reflective practice in helping practitioners to resolve this issue, little research attention has considered this relationship in any detail. However, Candy, Harri-Augstein, and Thomas (1985) suggested that if people are aware of what they are presently doing and can be encouraged to reflect on it and to consider alternatives, they are in an excellent position to adjust their ways of behaving. Therefore, it seems imperative that practitioners are able to access knowledge of self-awareness and act upon it appropriately. Attempting to do this in situations where countertransference may be an issue may lead to feelings of discomfort and vulnerability, but Anderson, Knowles, et al. suggested that if reflective practitioners are committed to improving practice, then challenging thoughts and emotions should ultimately enable them to learn from their experiences and understand the context of their practice.
Self-awareness gained through reflecting-on-practice has also been highlighted as an important contributor to the understanding, development, and integration of professional philosophy within ASP. Understanding the philosophical underpinnings of approaches to ASP (e.g., psychological skills training) has the potential to enhance the effectiveness of service-delivery within ASP (Poczwardowski, Sherman, & Ravizza, 2004). However, Lindsay, Breckon, Thomas, and Maynard (2007) explained that a lack of congruence between chosen methods and practitioner beliefs and values may become apparent if ASP practitioners do not examine and become familiar with their own personal philosophy. Further, Poczwardowski et al. (2004) suggested that questions relating to core beliefs and values should be addressed through a practitioner’s ongoing self-reflection and training to foster and develop knowledge of the self. Lindsay et al. therefore presented autoethnographic accounts and reflections on consultancies by an ASP practitioner in attempts to explore one practitioner’s journey towards congruence in professional philosophy. Lindsay and his colleagues disclosed that the process of formal reflection-on-action adopted by the practitioner in the study was central to making changes to his practice and thus establish an approach and act in a manner that was far more congruent with his underpinning values. This supports suggestions in other fields that reflection offers a focus to become more self-aware of the contradictions that exist between how we would like to practice, and how we actually do (Driscoll & Teh, 2001). Accordingly, Lindsay et al. indicated that practitioners need to clearly identify opportunities to reflect, particularly on sessions that have an increased degree of emotional significance for the practitioner. Indeed, Ghaye and Lillyman (2000) suggested that we are unable to reflect on every aspect of what we do and should therefore consider “significant” aspects of practice or “critical”
situations, which is consistent with the practice of using critical incidents to promote reflection as advocated by Griffin (2003).

Considerations of the specific reflective processes practitioners have engaged in are scarce within the ASP literature making it difficult to inform decisions about how to integrate reflection in ASP practice. For example, although Tonn and Harmison (2004) advocated the value of engaging in reflective practice for the development of ASP practice they do little to explicate the approaches adopted that resulted in such perceptions. Anderson, Knowles, et al. (2004) suggested that the practicalities of engaging in reflective practice are flexible, but in a field where reflective practice is in its infancy an evidence-base of models of best practice may enhance the adoption of systematic reflection-on-action and thus aid practitioners to elicit the proposed benefits of reflecting on their experiences. Importantly, Anderson, Knowles, et al. suggested that becoming a reflective practitioner is more than a collection of techniques, and instead involves an all-encompassing attitude to practice that requires the practitioner to commit to professional and personal development. Nevertheless, Johns (1994) argued that reflective practice is a profoundly difficult thing to do and therefore guidance to support practitioners’ reflections is important.

Anderson, Knowles, et al. (2004) highlighted that a commonly used method of engaging in reflective practice involves writing a journal (Scanlan & Chernomas, 1997), which could be structured by a reflective guide (e.g., Gibbs, 1998, six-staged cyclical model). Such an approach has been successfully adopted within ASP by Lindsay et al. (2006) who proposed that the cyclical approach of Gibbs’s model facilitated the continual development of the practitioner as they progressed through each stage of the model’s process. In addition, the focus of the model on practical action plans meant that the practitioner was able to generate behavioural solutions to
issues that they faced in their practice. Additional reports of the use of specific reflective methods have been provided by Anderson (1999) who used Johns’s (1994) structured model. The model developed by Johns was designed to tune the practitioner into his or her experience and facilitate reflection and consists of a range of questions that guide practitioners to examine actions, thoughts, and feelings in an attempt to develop a deeper understanding of practice. In response to the comments of Johns who warned practitioners against blindly following the structured reflection, Anderson recommended several changes to the structured procedure for use in sport psychology practice. As a consequence, Anderson demonstrated that engaging in reflective practice can increase practitioners’ understanding of their practice. Specifically, Anderson suggested that reflective practice assisted her in accessing and making sense of her knowledge-in-action. This is also evident in the findings of Lindsay et al. (2006) who outlined how reflective practice helped the practitioner to realise that the theoretical tools developed in the ‘classroom’ were not sufficient in the successful development of a rapport with the client. Hence, the practitioner was able to make specific changes to practice in behaviour and in a subsequent consultation and thus practice more effectively. Such findings offer support for the use of more formalised, structured approaches to reflection where practitioners are encouraged to reflect methodically. Indeed, Anderson et al. (2002) proposed that formal reflective models could provide a framework within which sport psychologists can reflect on their practice in a structured and effective way. This supports Knowles et al.’s (2001) claim that without structure there may be a tendency to simply ‘mull over’ an experience rather than systematically reflect. Further, learning through reflection may be more potent if there is an understanding of frameworks that encourage a structural process to guide the act of reflection (Platzer, Snelling, & Blake, 1997).
Despite support for the use of structured reflective writing, personal reflection can be limited by our own knowledge and understanding; therefore, sharing experiences with others publicly may create a forum to facilitate an interchange of views (Knowles et al., 2001). Certainly, engaging in reflective conversations with others presents the practitioner with the opportunity to access the knowledge of a colleague and thus make more informed decisions about developments to future practice in light of the current experience. Indeed, Johns (2000) considered that through sharing reflections on learning experiences greater understanding of those experiences could be achieved than by reflection as a lone exercise. This is additionally supported by Anderson, Knowles, et al. (2004) who clearly advocated supervision and mentoring structures to support reflective practice, which appears to be the first call for ongoing supervision in the literature from a UK sport psychology perspective. Nevertheless, recent research has highlighted that many sport psychologists do not have access to regular and frequent supervision (Winstone & Gervis, 2006). This has implications for the way in which training and professional development programmes attempt to implement reflective practice and develop practitioners capable of taking responsibility for their own learning. Johns (1994) suggested that a supervisor could provide a supportive environment that will encourage reflective practitioners to develop a deeper, more critical understanding of their work. This clearly lends itself well to the supervised experience framework for practitioner development within ASP, where the professional practice supervisor could encourage the use of reflective practice by engaging their supervisees in reflection. However, Johns proposed that although the practitioner’s supervisor may be appropriate to fulfil this role, it is important that a relationship of mutual respect and understanding is developed between the supervisor and practitioner. This is indicative...
of the concept of the ‘safe learning environment’, which is proposed to be essential to
learning the skill of reflection (Saylor, 1990). A safe environment is one in which
students are free to examine and reflect on their work thoughtfully and honestly
without fear of judgment or reprisal (Riley-Doucet & Wilson, 1997). Supervisors must
therefore be aware that such conditions must be met. Building on the concept of shared
reflection, Knowles et al. (2007) explored the value of reflective practice in facilitating
the supervision process associated with professional training programmes. Over a
three year period of supervision the supervisee in the study outlined that, “The
combination of experiences increased my capacity to make sense of my applied
experiences, to critically evaluate my own practice, and to manage my own
professional and personal development” (p. 119). Knowles and colleagues also
outlined the significance in a shared (two-way) approach to reflection that assisted the
supervisee in better understanding new approaches to practice. It must be noted,
however, that the potential success of this approach to supervision may lie in the
ability of the supervisor to engage in a shared reflective process. In Knowles et al.’s
investigation, the supervisor was experienced in the research and application of
reflective practice, thus it cannot be assumed that by merely applying a process of
reflection the benefits stated in previous research will be achieved. Indeed, Andrews et
al. (1998) outlined that supervisors not only need to be skilled in reflecting but also
need to be competent in facilitating reflectiveness in others. This may mean that in
order to teach reflectively we have to become reflective ourselves (cf. Scanlan &
Chernomas, 1997).

**Critiquing Reflective Practice: Future Directions for the Field of ASP**

Reflective practice appears to be developing more prominence within the field
of ASP with researchers and practitioners promoting the value of reflection in the
personal and professional development of ASP consultants. However, before the field unquestioningly embraces the concept of reflective practice it is important to raise a number of issues concerning its integration into ASP practice.

First, understandings of the concept of reflective practice are still equivocal in ASP. This may be due to the field taking its understandings of reflection from related areas and applying them without due consideration for the milieu of ASP practice. For example, Martindale and Collins (2007) acknowledged that there is little guidance concerning “what” ASP practitioners should actually be reflecting on. Thus, the benefits so widely acknowledged in other fields are not recognised. Consequently, a greater awareness of the way in which reflective practice can be adopted by both trainee and qualified ASP practitioners is required. Second, reflective practice is recognised as a highly skilled activity (cf. Andrews et al., 1998) and it appears as though these skills may be taken for granted with assumptions within ASP being made that reflecting requires little effort. Such notions are compounded by the fact that professional ASP bodies place little emphasis on the development of reflective skills, and offer little guidance on its use (cf. Knowles et al., 2007). Subsequently, we are in danger of labelling reflection as “something to be done” rather than a mechanism for developing effective practice. Additionally, little evidence exists in the ASP literature that suggests how or even if reflective practice skills can be taught (cf. Ghaye & Lillyman, 2000). Third, despite the intuitive and narrative reports that support the value of reflective practice, little empirical evidence exists to suggest that practice development occurs as a direct result of reflective practice (Andrews et al., 1998). Most studies have utilised self-report feedback as a means of assessing the effectiveness of reflective practice (e.g., Tammen, 2001; Tonn & Harmison, 2004) and no studies have used objective measures of performance which can determine
improvements in applied practice. Thus, the relationship between reflective practice and effectiveness is not explicitly clear. If reflective practice is to be accepted as a valid means for practitioner development, future research should empirically examine the potential of reflective practice to enhance the effectiveness of ASP support so that a more holistic understanding of its value and integration in professional training and development can be gained. Forth, reflective practice literature within ASP, in many cases, contains little detail about the approaches to reflection adopted by the practitioners within the study. It is therefore difficult to empathise with the authors and learn from their experiences with complete confidence. As the reporting of reflective narrative becomes a more accepted method of investigation, it is hoped that researchers will be more lucid in their explanations of their reflective approach to practice. Finally, Anderson et al. (2002) suggested that reflective practice could be used to self-evaluate practice and increase sport psychologists’ accountability to their client, themselves, and their profession. Whilst using reflection to examine and justify practice, and take personal responsibility for monitoring practice and striving to increase effectiveness is clearly beneficial to the development of ASP practice, reflective practice as a means of being accountable to the profession may be problematic. The monitoring of practitioners by professional bodies (e.g., BASES) through reflection may result in practitioners engaging in a socially desirable practice in order to meet the requirements associated with the training and development syllabus. Certainly, honest reflections of what ‘actually’ happened during practice would undoubtedly raise ethical issues about a practitioner’s actions and behaviours (cf. Ghaye, 2007).

Summary

The purpose of this review was to situate the concept of reflective practice within the professional training and development of ASP practitioners. In particular, to
consider the progression of the field of ASP into professional status and examine the potential value of reflective practice as a mechanism to assist practitioners develop their effectiveness. The professionalisation of ASP has resulted in practitioners becoming increasingly accountable for the quality of their practice. As a result, a greater focus on the evaluation and development of the effectiveness of practice is evident. Reflective practice has been consistently highlighted to be a process that has the potential to aid practitioners in enhancing their self-awareness, making sense of practice, and addressing issues concerning effective practice in a number of related fields (e.g., nursing, education). Nevertheless, research examining the value and integration of reflective practice into ASP is still in its infancy. Consequently, understandings of definitions, processes, benefits, and applications of reflective practice for sport psychologists are somewhat equivocal. Reflective practice literature within ASP is also largely anecdotal with little empirical evidence available to substantiate claims regarding the potential value of reflection for the field. Additional research is therefore required in order to address a number of concerns emanating from the extant literature. It is proposed that such research would illuminate a concept that has the potential to enhance the effectiveness of service delivery within ASP.
References


CHAPTER 3

STUDY 1

Improving the Delivery of Applied Sport Psychology Support through Reflective Practice

“The real man smiles in trouble, gathers strength from distress, and grows brave by reflection.”

Thomas Paine
(British Political Pamphleteer)
Abstract

This study offers an exploration of factors that influence the effectiveness of applied sport psychology delivery through reflection on a series of consulting experiences. Knowledge gained by a British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences (BASES) trainee sport psychologist (author), through a process of reflective practice during the first year of supervised experience, is presented around a number of themes that have emerged from current literature regarding the characteristics of effective service providers (Anderson, Miles, Robinson, & Mahoney, 2004b). It is argued that reflection improves self-awareness and generates knowledge-in-action that can enhance the delivery of applied sport psychology. Support is therefore provided for the adoption of reflective practice as a tool for personal and professional development.
Introduction

It has been well publicised that the field of applied sport psychology has entered an “age of accountability” (e.g., Anderson, Miles, Robinson, & Mahoney, 2004b; Gould, Murphy, Tammen, & May, 1991; Smith, 1989) where a need to evaluate practice and improve the effectiveness of delivery is paramount. Moreover, Anderson, Knowles, and Gilbourne (2004a) have stressed that as applied sport psychology moves towards professional status attention is shifting from what techniques work, towards a focus on the processes and factors that influence the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of service delivery. However, due to the complex nature of applied sport psychology a clear definition of effective practice has been elusive. We suggest that effectiveness refers to the ability to achieve stated goals or objectives. Therefore, within applied sport psychology effective practice may relate to the application of psychological theories, principles, and techniques to induce psycho-behavioural change in athletes to enhance performance, the quality of the sport experience, and personal growth (cf. Anderson, Miles, Mahoney, & Robinson, 2002; Poczwardowski, Sherman, & Ravizza, 2004).

Research that has attempted to improve our understanding of effective practice has tended to focus on the characteristics of the sport psychology consultant. For example, early studies by Orlick and Partington (1987) and Partington and Orlick (1987) with Olympic athletes and coaches respectively, indicated that effective consultants were: good listeners, able to work individually with athletes, interested and caring, able to relate well with athletes, energetic and hard working, flexible, able to demonstrate useful and relevant sport psychology skills, and provided follow-up meetings by establishing ongoing programmes. Ineffective consultants had poor interpersonal skills, were not flexible in meeting individual needs, had poor applied
sport psychology skills, and had limited consulting contact with the athletes (Orlick & Partington, 1987). Subsequent research has consistently identified that the personality of practitioners and their ability to develop a working relationship with athletes/clients has a major influence on practice (Andersen, 2000; Petitpas, Giges, & Danish, 1999; Poczwardowski, Sherman, & Henschen, 1998; Weigand, Richardson, & Weinberg, 1999; Yukelson, 2001). Further, it has been acknowledged that the professional philosophy of a consultant is the driving force behind the technical aspects of the consulting process, and thus plays a key role in the effectiveness of the service provided (Poczwardowski et al., 1998; Poczwardowski et al., 2004).

More recently, Anderson et al. (2004b) attempted to increase the understanding of factors pertinent to the effective practice of applied sport psychology. Utilising semi-structured interviews with 30 elite UK athletes, six higher order themes, thought to represent the characteristics of effective practitioners, were identified. First, Anderson and colleagues recognised the need for the sport psychologist to be personable, which is suggested to relate to the personality and interpersonal skills of the practitioner. This is integral to the development of a collaborative relationship between the client and the practitioner, or a working alliance (cf. Tod & Andersen, 2005). Second, the provision of a good practical service, relating to the sport psychologist considering the practicalities of consultancy and working with athletes to provide a good service, was highlighted. Third, Anderson and colleagues found good communication to be a characteristic of the effective consultant. Indeed, it is suggested that effective sport psychologists are easy to talk to and are willing to actively listen to athletes (Orlick & Partington, 1987; Weigand et al., 1999; Yukelson, 2001). Fourth, it was identified that effective consultants were knowledgeable and experienced about sport and sport psychology. The importance of understanding the theoretical principles
related to applied sport psychology has frequently been demonstrated as a characteristic of effective practice (Gould et al., 1991; Hardy, Jones, & Gould 1996; Tod & Andersen, 2005). Further, having the appropriate skills to apply this knowledge is paramount and is likely to distinguish between practice that is effective or ineffective. Related to this, it is suggested that an apposite level of understanding of the sport with which the consultant is working can form a foundation for successful outcomes by helping the practitioner to contextualise their theoretical knowledge and applied skills (e.g., Bull, 1995; Thomas, 1990). Fifth, Anderson and colleagues found that effective consultants exhibited professional skills. This characteristic has been reported to cover a range of qualities that influence effective practice such as: a) the sport psychologist demonstrating use of their own mental skills, b) approachable, c) perceptive, and d) someone who is easy to relate to (Hardy et al., 1996; Yukelson 2001). Finally, the ability to be honest and trustworthy emanated from Anderson et al.’s (2004b) study. This characteristic is related to the athlete perceiving the sport psychologist as someone who they can have faith in and trust with their disclosures.

Current effectiveness research that focuses on the characteristics of the effective sport psychologist could provide a framework for neophyte practitioners to guide professional development and facilitate self-evaluation through reflective practice. Indeed, a number of authors have advocated the use of reflection as a tool for the consultant to self-evaluate and improve their understanding of the effectiveness of their own practice (e.g., Anderson et al., 2002; Partington & Orlick, 1991; Simmons & Andersen, 1995). Further, literature from a variety of fields has consistently highlighted the benefits of reflective practice in personal and professional development (e.g., coaching, Knowles, Gilbourne, Borrie, & Nevill, 2001; education, Crockett, 2002; nursing, Williams, 2001). Additionally, the importance of reflective
practice has recently been recognised by BASES (2004), which has placed a greater emphasis on the utility of reflection throughout its accreditation programme. Consequently, a developing body of literature has reported the reflective practices of sport psychology consultants (e.g., Andersen, 2000; Holt & Strean, 2001; Tod, 2007). The authors in many of these articles, however, have not been guided by a framework to aid their self-reflections, nor have they typically reflected on their own practitioner characteristics.

Essentially, reflection is thought to afford the practitioner the opportunity to examine their own practice, and the thoughts and feelings that are associated with their actions within the particular context in which they occur. Thus, reflection results in the generation of knowledge and self-awareness that can be used to inform and improve future behaviour. It is thought that reflection creates a link between the application of professional knowledge and practice, and raises into consciousness intuitive or tacit knowledge (Anderson et al., 2004a). Schön (1987) argued that this tacit knowledge (knowledge-in-action) is core to the artistry of professional practice as it guides practitioners in dealing with complex practical situations where it is insufficient to simply apply theory to practice. Further, encouraging practitioners to reflect upon practice creates the opportunity for the exploration of good practice, the identification of areas for improvement, and the formulation of ideas for change (Knowles et al., 2001). In light of this, using reflective practice as a developmental tool during the process of accreditation is thought to be a valid means of attempting to improve the effectiveness of applied sport psychology (Anderson et al., 2004a). Indeed, reflective practice provides the opportunity to become aware of the characteristics associated with effective consultants, identify current levels of competence within these characteristics, and uncover ways in which this level of competence can be improved,
ultimately increasing the effectiveness of practice. The thoughts of Petitpas et al. (1999) and Simmons and Andersen (1995) provide support for this by arguing that applied sport psychologists could be prepared to practice effectively if they had a greater awareness of self-knowledge and were able to adapt to situations (adapting their knowledge to meet the demands of the varying situations experienced in applied sport psychology). It has been identified that these are attributes that can be improved through the process of reflective practice (Schön, 1983, 1987).

Despite consistent support for the use of reflective practice by applied sport psychologists, research has not considered the influence that reflection has on the development of consultant characteristics associated with effectiveness. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to provide a reflective account of the author’s experiences during his first year of BASES supervised experience. The paper specifically aims to demonstrate how reflective practice has helped the author to develop his practice in the context of consultant effectiveness characteristics. Further, the paper provides insights into the personal and professional development of a neophyte practitioner through the use of reflective practice. Extracts from personal reflections will be presented with particular emphasis being placed on issues concerning the effectiveness of the consultant in the successful delivery of applied sport psychology support. It is thought that this will provide a unique insight into the practical application of reflective practice and highlight its importance in professional practice, learning, and development.

Method

Alternative methods of qualitative research (e.g., biographies, narratives of the self) are becoming more widely accepted and utilised in the sport psychology literature (e.g., Gilbourne, 2002; Holt & Strean, 2001; Tonn & Harmison, 2004). Indeed, reports
that draw upon authors’ highly personalised experiential accounts can extend our knowledge and understanding of specific phenomena (Sparkes, 2000). Authors have expressed that embracing different research paradigms will encourage creativity in finding the best strategies to answer the myriad of questions in sport psychology, thus increasing our knowledge and understanding of the application of psychological concepts (Brustad, 2002; Krane & Baird, 2005). In light of this, and adhering to the comments of Andersen (2000), who suggested that current literature does not provide adequate examples of what “real-life” sport psychology looks and feels like, this paper attempts to add to valuable anecdotal reports from sport psychologists in the field (e.g., Bull, 1997; Gordon, 1990; Yukelson, 2001). Specifically, extracts taken directly from the authors’ reflective narrative are presented to illustrate how reflection contributed to the consultant’s professional development (for examples of reflective narratives see Appendix 1).

Consultant Background

Having been a performer, who competed in sport at both amateur and professional levels, I had gained first hand knowledge of the demands placed upon elite athletes. The difficulty that I experienced in attempting to cope with these demands provided the motivation that has driven me to try and better understand the psychological principles associated with successful sports performance and the methods that can be employed to help athletes develop personally and professionally. During the completion of my postgraduate degree in Sport and Exercise Science I became particularly intrigued by the relationship between thoughts, feelings, and behaviours and began to understand how psychological skills can be used as tools to impact the relationship between these constructs to enhance athletic performance. Over time, I developed into a strong believer that how athletes perform in competition
may ultimately be influenced by what they are thinking. Thus, my background within sport and academia inspired me to undertake professional accreditation within sport psychology, and I subsequently enrolled on the BASES Supervised Experience programme.

As a result of my experiences I approached consultancy in my first year from a cognitive-behavioural perspective. However, as the year and my experience progressed I became aware of the importance and value of other frameworks, consequently developing my philosophy to encompass a more holistic approach where humanistic theory complimented the cognitive-behavioural perspective. Further, as a Supervised Experience candidate I have been adamant about providing the most effective service possible, which stems from perfectionist characteristics developed as a performer. Therefore, I have attempted to address issues of quality and professional development at every opportunity.

**Supervised Experience**

Throughout my first year of supervised experience I worked individually with two university rugby players and two professional rugby players, accumulating an approximate total of 76 contact hours. The support that I provided centred on a mental skills training programme, which followed a similar model to that proposed by Thomas (1990). This programme was clearly focused on performance enhancement, which was discussed and agreed upon between each client and myself. Specifically, the support involved: an introduction to sport psychology; performance profiling; goal setting; confidence building; imagery; relaxation; and concentration training. Where appropriate specific areas were divided so that a comprehensive range of mental skills could be suitably addressed (e.g., self-awareness, positive self-talk, and cognitive restructuring for confidence building; muscle-to-mind and mind-to-muscle techniques
for relaxation). Preceding the start of the mental skills training programmes I met with the coaches of each individual athlete, with the athlete’s consent, in attempts to generate initial information. These meetings helped me start to understand each individual’s situation as well as become accustomed to the type of language used within the sport, thus making the process of creating a rapport with the athletes easier.

I met with each client once a week, sometimes seeing two clients in the same day. This is pertinent because in between consultations I was able to reflect briefly on what went well, what didn’t go so well, and what I could do to improve from the first meeting. This reflection was usually aided through conversations with my supervisor who facilitated my decision making concerning any changes I would make. Additionally, I met with my supervisor on a weekly basis to discuss any issues arising from reflecting upon my experiences, as well as to gain feedback on the preparation that I had completed prior to a consultation. The relationship that I developed with my supervisor during this term was of particular importance to my personal and professional development within applied sport psychology. My supervisor was vastly experienced and directed me through the performance enhancement process, not by giving me the answers to problems or questions, but guiding me to find the answers out for myself. This enabled me to gain a better understanding of applied practice and my approach to doing sport psychology. Further, the quality of my reflections benefited from social interaction, in this case with my supervisor, because reflecting with another person allowed greater understanding and exploration of the issues associated with the experience being reflected on (cf. Barnett & O’Mahony, 2006).

Reflective Methodology

Although a range of both structured and unstructured methods of reflective practice are available, in this instance my reflections were conducted using Anderson
et al.’s (2004a) model of guided reflection (a full copy of the model is available upon request). This model, developed from Johns’ (1994) model of structured reflection, contains five sub-sections (description, reflection, consequences of actions, alternative tactics, and learning) designed to guide practitioners through their experience in a structured and meaningful way. This method of reflection was particularly useful in this instance due to the fact that at the start of the BASES supervised experience process I was unfamiliar with reflective practice and unsure as to how to participate in it. Using a structured method gave me the chance to identify the specific information, thoughts and feelings that would allow meaningful reflection. In this way, the model allowed me to systematically reflect rather than simply mull over the experience (cf. Knowles et al., 2001). Thus, this method facilitated an in-depth reflective process that resulted in a greater understanding of my own reflective and applied practice.

All structured reflections were conducted 48 hours after the consulting experience had occurred. During this time, however, an informal reflective process of mentally reviewing some of the more pertinent issues to arise during the consultation would take place. I found that this aided the reflective process because prior to completing my formal reflection I had already started to make sense of the experience, which is believed to have improved the depth and quality of my reflections (cf. Riley-Doucet & Wilson, 1997). Indeed, a dual-staged process by which both immediate and delayed reflection-on-action occurs is thought to promote self-reflection and improve understanding of the experience (Knowles et al., 2001). This procedure was conducted on all applied consulting experiences during my first year of BASES supervised experience in order to aid my own development and as a requirement for the accreditation process.
Results: Reflecting on Consultant Effectiveness

Selected extracts from reflections on my first year of applied experience are provided below and have been organised into several themes that emerged from Anderson et al’s. (2004b) examination of the effective applied sport psychologist (e.g., personable, provider of a good practical service, good communicator, knowledgeable and experienced about sport and sport psychology, and exhibits professional skills). Importantly, the honest and trustworthy characteristic has not been included in this section as specific information regarding this quality did not emanate from my reflections during the outlined period.

Dates are included to give the reader an idea of how my effectiveness may have developed over the one year period, indicating the value of reflective practice as a tool for professional development. To conclude the section on each characteristic I have provided a further layer of analysis by *reflecting on my reflections*. This method, advocated within the reflective practice literature (cf. Riley-Doucet & Wilson, 1997), has provided me with the opportunity to consider the overall development that I have made within each characteristic and has helped to further make sense of and learn from my consulting experiences. It is important to reiterate at this juncture that reflections do not relate to the same client. They take into account my experiences with all clients that I worked with during year one of supervised experience in order to demonstrate how reflective practice aids the development of characteristics associated with effectiveness.

**Personable**

The following reflective extracts are provided to indicate how reflection on my experiences improved my ability to develop a working alliance with clients.
Reflection dated January 24, 2004. I was consciously aware throughout the session that I needed to work on developing a rapport. I kept reminding myself of how important this had been indicated in the applied literature. Because I was thinking, and worrying to some extent, so much about this I stopped listening to the client and found it hard to converse as a result. I also found it difficult to phrase questions, show empathy, and properly demonstrate that I was clearly interested in what the client was saying.

Reflection dated February 24, 2004. In the first couple of sessions I have entered with the attitude that “I’m the sport psychologist and they (the client) are here to listen to me.” The balance and focus is completely wrong. I must realise that I am working with the client and not for the client. I must work to understand the client and their experience but at the same time make the process personal. Share some personal experiences, converse freely, be friendly, and create that positive working relationship. At the moment I feel as though I am providing an impersonal service rather than support.

Reflection dated April 23, 2004. I was pleased, immediately after the session, that this consultation had gone better than the previous in terms of developing a rapport and the information gained from the client. I was also pleased that I was able to alter the way that I approached questioning the client, which improved the flow of the conversation. We also shared humorous incidents that we had both experienced. This helped me to relax and feel that the client was comfortable talking about themselves.

Reflection dated May 3, 2004. By sharing some of my own experiences of competition the relationship between the client and myself was able to develop. I really think that the client appreciated this as it showed empathy and understanding of
his situation. He appeared to relax more and started asking questions about my situation and how I coped with the incidents. I really feel as though the rapport between myself and the client has come a long way since the start of the support.

Reflection dated October 21, 2004. The rapport that had been developed over the time I have been working with the client made me feel comfortable. This is in relation to understanding the language that the client used and responded positively to, and the format of the consultations that the client preferred. From previous reflections I knew that although he did have the ability to concentrate for long periods, he appreciated exercises and tasks that gave him the chance to apply the specific skill in question. This, therefore, influenced the way that I designed the session protocol and my approach (athlete-centred) because the working relationship allowed us to explore the client’s sporting experience in greater depth.

Reflections on reflections: Personable skills. Before starting my tenure as a trainee sport psychologist I was fully aware of the importance of the relationship between the athlete and consultant and was keen to ensure that I had skills available to aid the development of the rapport between myself and the client. I was conscious of the fact that I have a naturally out-going personality and am quite extroverted, which means that I am able to converse well with people and confident in doing so. However, I was also conscious of the fact that the role of a sport psychology consultant carries a great deal of responsibility and clients would expect something from me in the form of help or guidance. This initially made me quite nervous as I started to question whether I was adequately equipped to develop this working alliance.

The process of feedback from the client and my supervisor, coupled with formal reflection, not only allowed me to make sense of the importance of the working alliance in practice, but also helped to formulate an awareness of my interpersonal
skills. This helped me to understand what was actually required in terms of developing a rapport with the client (e.g., actively listening to the client; demonstrating empathy with the client’s situation) and aided in the decision making process concerning how I was going to improve my future practice. For example, I realised the need for formal counselling training and to talk to other practitioners about their methods of “gaining entry.” The notion of improving understanding and self-awareness is supported by the reflective practice literature (cf. Ghaye, Danai, Cuthbert, & Dennis, 1996). Ultimately, I realised that I had to change the way that I felt about the applied sport psychology process. Subsequently, I needed to become more aware of my approach to doing sport psychology and how best to implement that approach, which has been identified in the literature as an important process of developing competence and effectiveness (Holt & Strean, 2001; Tonn & Harmison, 2004).

Reflecting on my consultancy allowed me to become very focused on working with the athlete, helping them to formulate their own solutions and empowering them to implement mental skills into training and competition, rather than giving them all of the answers. I realised that in order to work in this way I needed to gain a good understanding of the client, develop a rapport characterised by honesty and trust, and make the support fun and enjoyable. Indeed, Tod and Andersen (2005) refer to this working relationship as a key determinant of successful outcomes. Improvements in the way that I tried to develop a rapport, however, did not occur instantly. Some personally negative experiences early on made me feel more nervous in subsequent sessions in terms of developing the client/practitioner relationship. For example, a lack of interaction with the client resulting in one way communication during the session, which I believed manifested a distinct lack of interest by the client. Gradually, I understood that I did not have to try and befriend the client but develop a positive
working relationship that could be productive and importantly in which the client felt comfortable.

Provider of a Good Practical Service

The reflective narrative associated with this characteristic considers my developing ability to adapt in practice in order to meet client needs. Further, the provision of individualised support to improve the quality of the service provided is reflected upon.

Reflection dated April 15, 2004. I delivered the same content in the same manner as in the previous session as it had gone particularly well and I was able to meet a number of the aims set before the consultation. However, as the current experience progressed I started to realise that it was not going as well. The client found it difficult to answer questions and recall information, and I did not really adapt well to this situation. Consequently, the conversation did not flow, I felt awkward and I think the client did also. Thinking about this now I appreciate the need to understand the client and tailor the session to meet their specific needs and personality, rather than thinking that by repeating exactly what I have done previously the same outcomes will occur.

Reflection dated August 27, 2004. Knowledge of the client’s injury situation (he would resume training in two weeks time) gave me the opportunity to work with him to set a specific imagery training plan to help guide his actions and to use his imagery at appropriate times (e.g., before/after weight training sessions), as well as making best use of the time whilst being injured. I felt that by altering the content and structure of this session we could discuss how imagery could be used to aid the recovery process and help to maintain a certain level of confidence so that when he returned to action he wouldn’t have lost too much of his edge. I think that the client
appreciated this and found the session very useful, as he expressed that he was pleased
to have identified techniques to aid the recovery process.

Reflection dated October 21, 2004. The client had broken his foot and was
awaiting a medical consultation to see whether or not he required an operation.
Consequently, I thought that it would be an ideal time to work through both mind-to-
muscle and muscle-to-mind relaxation techniques because he would have time to
practice them and may want to use them during this difficult period. I made sure,
therefore, that I explained that the relaxation techniques can be used both inside and
outside of the sporting environment and to help him get to sleep, or relax after a
stressful day. I hadn’t planned to do this previously, but the client had called me a
couple of days before we were due to meet to let me know about his injury situation.
Consequently, we discussed what we could do that may be more useful to him at this
time and came to agreement on relaxation techniques.

Reflection dated November 16, 2004. I asked the client how he found
completing the relaxation tasks in the environment we were in (a relatively quiet
university cafeteria). Although he said that he found the tasks “OK” I felt as though he
wasn’t telling the complete truth. So we talked further about whether he thought he
would be able to implement the techniques in training or competition, which he was
very unsure about. Having reflected on previous relaxation sessions, and consultations
in general, I realised that if something wasn’t particularly working then I must try to
change the way that the mental skill is being delivered in order to improve the
effectiveness of the support rather than aimlessly progress through what had been
planned. So we agreed that it would be better to go out onto the field (rugby pitch) and
work through the specific relaxation techniques in the environment in which the client
would attempt to use them. The client found completing the techniques in a more
natural environment more difficult, yet more beneficial. He also commented that through using imagery he was able to recreate game situations and, to some extent, the thoughts and feelings associated with those situations. He seemed relieved at the end of the session that we had put the skill into context demonstrating how it could be used on the pitch.

Reflection dated January 24, 2005. I was inclined to follow a similar protocol to what I had completed previously due to the success that I had experienced. However, previous reflections had highlighted this may not be an effective approach. Knowing the client and realising that this was the first session back after a relatively long break I tried to get him involved a great deal and get him excited in the work by making it very specific to his situation. The client’s interest and enthusiasm seemed to almost double when we started to talk about an individualised mental skills training programme that focused on incorporating the mental skills into his specific training regime. The importance and benefit of just demonstrating to the client that you have their specific needs and situation in mind seems paramount to getting them to completely buy into the applied sport psychology process.

Reflections on reflections: Provider of a good practical service. My ability to offer an individualised service to clients increased as my knowledge and experience of applied sport psychology grew. This was further influenced by a developing level of self-confidence to try new things and step outside of my comfort zone as an applied practitioner. Indeed, research supports the notion that participating in reflection can improve self-confidence in a practitioner and thus enhance overall practice (Cox, 2005). Further, reflection can improve creativity by encouraging the consultant to learn from experience and ask “what if” type questions regarding the way in which they practice. Certainly, the idiosyncratic nature of consultancy implies that two
consulting situations will never be the same. Thus, the neat application of theory to practice fails to be effective in different situations (Anderson et al., 2004a).

Importantly then, as a result of methodical reflection, my applied knowledge seemed to be ever developing allowing me to better understand ways in which theory could effectively be applied within the context in which I was working.

Reflective practice has helped me to emphasise the ways in which psychological techniques can be adapted to fit the clients’ personality and situation in which the skills will be used. I therefore feel that the knowledge generated through reflecting on my experiences has enabled me to follow an athlete-centred approach to applied sport psychology by improving my understanding of the principles and benefits of this approach within a mental skills training programme. Nevertheless, initially I feel that I was only confident enough to provide a “one-size-fits-all” package, which Tod and Andersen (2005) have suggested is unlikely to help the majority of athletes. However, once I had gained consulting experience, received supervisor feedback, and progressed through reflective practice, I became aware of myself in terms of knowing what I could and couldn’t do to offer individualised support. Consequently, I was able to make informed decisions about seeking advice and appropriate knowledge to alter my practice accordingly.

Good Communicator

The following reflections indicate a definite progression in my communication and listening skills as a result of gaining applied education in counselling skills through a BASES professional development workshop, and reflecting on my ability to converse with clients.

Reflection dated April 9, 2004. I wasn’t prepared, or didn’t demonstrate the ability to elicit in-depth answers from the client when he found questions difficult to
answer. Instead of adapting to the personality of the client and the uniqueness of the situation I found myself becoming nervous when he gave short answers to questions that I expected more detail from. I didn’t really have the ability to converse with the client and I think this was because I felt a little uncomfortable being the consultant and thought that I should behave in a particular way. I should have re-phrased questions, probed better, or simply just had a conversation with the client about his experiences rather than asking him probing, academic questions.

**Reflection dated April 9, 2004.** As a result of briefly reflecting on the first consultation I conducted on that day I decided to ease the client into the questioning by attempting to uncover performance related information. I decided to talk generally about how the client was finding the university course and how things were going (coping with academic workload and training and competing commitments). I then prepared the client by introducing the idea of talking about thoughts and feelings in greater depth better than I did in the first consultation so that he was more prepared, and more willing to answer the questions.

**Reflection dated April 15, 2004.** I have found over the past few consultations, and in particular with this one that it is me who is doing most of the talking. If I’m honest I don’t think that I listen to the client 100 percent. I seem to be too busy either taking notes, thinking of the next question to ask, or wondering whether I’m doing well. I think that if I spent more time listening and encouraging the client to talk through more attentive questioning the consultation process will become a lot easier, enjoyable, and more effective.

**Reflection dated August 27, 2004.** I didn’t have any client feedback to prepare from, so I made sure that each individual imagery task that the client had worked through was discussed in full. I was unsure what kind of input the client would have in
the session also, so I devised a series of questions for each of the exercises so that if the client was quiet or struggled to express something I was able to question him and uncover some pertinent information that perhaps he hadn’t thought about previously. Intervening in this way helped the client because I was able to involve him constantly so that the feedback was two-way. Also just by implementing the active listening skills (e.g., awareness of verbal tone and non-verbal cues, reflecting client comments, demonstrating interest and support) and trying to empathise with the client made the process so much easier. For once I put the textbook down, so to speak, and managed to be there with the client acknowledging what he was saying and then helping him to identify solutions to problems.

Reflection dated October 21, 2004. I knew the theory better than in previous consultations and had learnt a great deal from the applied relaxation literature. I also had the benefit of being able to reflect upon and learn from previous experiences of delivering the skill of relaxation. Thus, I felt more adept at conversing with the client in a manner that would make him feel comfortable as well as being more adept at rephrasing questions if the client had difficulty answering them. Building on previous sessions I made sure that I actively listened to the client when he talked through his experiences. Ultimately this afforded me a greater understanding of the client’s situation and experiences allowing adjustments to be made to the session to meet the client’s specific needs.

Reflections on reflections: Communication skills. Reflecting on my communication skills has been an enlightening process. Before I started consulting I would have said that my communication and listening skills were a particular strength. Nevertheless, reflection has led to an awareness that would initially suggest otherwise. I have been significantly influenced, however, by formal education in counselling
skills, and the adoption of a number of principles originating from this education has allowed me to implement the core conditions (i.e., empathy, unconditional positive regard, and genuineness) related to an athlete-centred approach (Rogers, 1974). Additionally, I have been able to listen more actively during consultations, and reflecting on employing this technique has worked to improve this skill further. For example, I have become more attentive to non-verbal cues and the subtle differences in intonation that indicate different emotional states. Indeed, active listening is suggested to be the auditory equivalent of reading between the lines (Mallon, 1987). Understanding these skills and developing an awareness of my behaviours in practice has ultimately allowed me to communicate in a more effective manner. Indeed, reflective practice has provided the opportunity to make sense of my consultancy experiences by improving my understanding of what happened, why it happened, and how my effectiveness was influenced. This has given me the self-confidence to listen actively and communicate more naturally.

Knowledgeable and Experienced in Sport and Sport Psychology

Due to the weight and depth of this characteristic as outlined by Anderson et al. (2004b), I have focused on two qualities that fall under the umbrella of knowledge. Self-reflection has contributed to my ability to apply theory and my athlete-centred approach to service delivery. These factors are considered separately in order to outline the subtleties of effective practice associated with this characteristic.

Applying theory to practice.

Reflection dated April 15, 2004. Before this session I was keen to implement some of the skills that I had learnt from the BASES Counselling Skills Workshop (BASES, 2004). I think that this made me quite conscious of my practice and worried about whether or not I’d remember everything that had been discussed… I was pleased
that I was able to implement certain skills learnt from the workshop (e.g., generating thoughtful silences by taking time to take brief notes, where the client was able to feel comfortable in thinking about the task rather than nervous that nothing was being said). However, I noticed that I spent a lot of time thinking about the skills and how to implement them and this distracted my concentration from what the client was actually saying at times.

**Reflection dated April 29, 2004.** Previous experiences of conducting performance profiles, and subsequent reflections, had highlighted particular areas that I needed to address in order to amend my technique and improve the quality of the session in terms of client understanding and input. For example, in preparation for the meeting I made sure that I had a battery of questions or examples that I could ask or give to the client to help him generate an exhaustive list of qualities without directly influencing him (e.g., think about the ideal player in your position; think about players you admire who may play in other positions; think about things your coaches may have wanted you to work on). This made me feel more prepared and more confident as I knew I wouldn’t have to think on my feet too much. In hindsight this may not have been the best thing to do because the session may have progressed in different directions not covered by this preparation.

**Reflection dated April 30, 2004.** Even though I feel that I had prepared well in terms of content of the session I was unsure as to what the outcomes of the session should look like. Specifically, would I have the knowledge and skills to be able to facilitate the client in setting beneficial goals? Having brushed-up on my knowledge of goal setting theory I felt confident in being able to educate the client, to some degree, as to the importance of goal setting, goal types and goal proximity. However, despite in-depth preparation I was unsure about helping the client in the development of a goal
setting programme, and thus applying the knowledge that I had to guide the client in the use of goals within his specific situation.

Reflection dated November 12, 2004. I was pleased that my preparation had paid off and I knew the material well, particularly in reference to guiding the client in the applied use of mental skills to aid with concentration and focus, with attention to his specific situation. I didn’t have to keep referring to the notes that I had made for myself, which signified to me that I was able to understand the theory and the client working with him to identify ways in which the skills should be implemented in his training and competition. I feel that having reflected on delivering sessions previously (even when the focus has been on other mental skills) you start to understand what makes the application of mental skills effective and that can be used with a number of the mental skills to improve the support that I have provided. However, it may be beneficial to actually practice the imagery tasks myself before going into the session and asking the client to complete them so that I can ensure they work on maintaining focus and make it easier to empathise with the client as he is practicing the skills.

Reflections on reflections: Applying theory to practice. One of the factors that I was most concerned with during my first year as a neophyte practitioner was having a good grasp of the theory behind each of the mental skills but being unsure as to the best methods for the implementation of mental skills into practice. In addition, early reflection revealed that I was worried about trying new things to help the client apply the skills to their specific situation. I also was concerned about offering successful support, and in hindsight I think that this actually held me back from being effective. During this period I probably spent too much time thinking about what I was doing rather than concentrating on what the client was saying. In context I would suggest that I was in the conscious incompetence phase of learning (Howell & Fleishman,
Research implies that in this phase the practitioner becomes aware of the required skills for effective practice but also demonstrates a deficiency in this area (Howell & Fleishman). However, my supervisor always encouraged me to develop my own solutions to problems and reflect on my experiences so that I could make a commitment to learn the necessary knowledge and skills resulting in improved future behaviour.

As I became more aware of the client, their personality, and their learning preferences I was able to make more informed decisions as to how each mental skill should be applied. Subsequently, I made sure that I prepared meticulously by reviewing previous reflections, completing background reading, speaking to my supervisor and other accredited sport psychologists, and practicing the tasks myself. This gave me the chance to modify the way the particular mental skill was delivered using my experience and knowledge of the client.

*Approach to sport psychology.*

*Reflection dated April 15, 2004.* My supervisor provided examples of various types of performance profiles, however, I didn’t want to be influenced by these too much as I wanted to implement my own approach. I wanted to try to develop the profiling technique in light of what I knew about myself as a trainee and the client ensuring that the client directed the process. It was important to me that the client took control and felt empowered to make decisions regarding the progress and use of a performance profile. Being conscious of these concerns over my ability to integrate my approach successfully, made me more focused.

*Reflection dated May 16, 2004.* Greater client involvement is something that has surfaced as a need from previous reflections and again from this experience. I have found it difficult at times to follow my approach to sport psychology, and I think that
this may stem from a lack of confidence and understanding of how to implement an athlete-centred approach effectively. I found myself dominating the session somewhat, and thinking back there was ample opportunity to get the client involved and explore their thoughts and feelings. This is something that I must clearly attend to and speak with my supervisor about.

Reflection dated August 27, 2004. The session was intended firstly to help the client understand what confidence actually is, and secondly for me to gain his views on what confidence means to him. Working in this way before introducing mental skills to improve and maintain confidence followed my general approach to sport psychology in that the session was designed to be very personal. This gave me the chance to understand the clients’ situation and therefore tailor the mental skills (self-talk; thought changing) to the client. Further, we discussed times when the client had felt particularly confident and times when the client did not feel confident at all, exploring the self-talk that accompanied these thoughts and feelings. This orientating process allowed the rest of the session to focus specifically on the client making it more individualised in nature. Specifically, rather than just applying a standardised set of self-talk skills they could be modified to account for certain individual characteristics. I was also able to approach this in a way that empowered the client to make decisions, which he mentioned improved his understanding and belief in the techniques.

Reflection dated October 28, 2004. By questioning the client where necessary and working off the information that he provided I was able to give a fair amount of feedback. I was also able to guide the client through situations allowing him to develop his own solutions, which was pleasing because I have been keen to empower the client to make decisions rather than giving him the answers to any problems. I
think that the client appreciated this and acknowledged a greater understanding of how
the mental skills (imagery) could help in different situations.

*Reflections on reflections: Approach to applied sport psychology.* At times I
have found it difficult to implement my approach to sport psychology in that I haven’t
always adopted an athlete-centred method. One particular factor materialising from my
reflections that may have influenced my approach and effectiveness has been the
thoughts and feelings I have experienced before and during a consultation. For
example, in the early stages of my supervised experience if the client wasn’t being
very communicative or receptive to activities I would become anxious and start to
dominate the session by talking a lot and offering solutions to the client. This hindered
the rapport that I was able to develop with the client, which is proposed to lie at the
The reflective process has again helped in this instance. I have been able to reflect not
only on my experiences but on feedback from the client and my supervisor to
implement my approach more explicitly. However, although reflective practice has
made me aware of my thoughts and feelings before and during consultations and the
behaviours that are associated with them, I have found it difficult to control and
overcome negative symptoms related to anxiety. Consequently, they may have
compromised the effectiveness of the support that I have offered throughout my first
year of supervised experience.

Reflection has improved my appreciation of the athlete-centred approach and
understanding for the need of rapport and trust to be developed between the client and
athlete, as well as providing unconditional positive regard and considering the wider
context of athletic participation (cf. Poczwardowski et al., 1998). Further, I have been
able to adopt strategies to empower the client to uncover solutions to problems faced
when applying mental skills (e.g., the use of reflective questioning). In this sense, reflection has fulfilled a practical role, which is suggested to be particularly beneficial in assisting practitioners to effectively manage themselves (Anderson et al., 2004a). Indeed, consideration has specifically been given to the influence of my experiences, perceptions, and understanding of the context of my feelings and actions. Knowledge generated in this way should increase practitioners understanding of their practice and ultimately their effectiveness.

Exhibits Professional Skills

Professional skills have impacted upon my practice considerably and have provided the basis for gaining entry with a client, establishing a rapport, and empathising with the client. Indeed, an emerging theme from my reflections has highlighted the significance of demonstrating the professional skills to gain an understanding of the client and their situation.

Reflection dated April 9, 2004. I had met previously with the client’s coach in order to gain some initial information on the client prior to our first consultation. I thought that this was important because in previous initial meetings with new clients I had struggled to initiate conversation and ended up providing a somewhat impersonal service. Having the information from the coach helped to break the ice in this instance as I was able to talk to the client about some of the things he had been doing both in and outside of sport. In this sense I feel that I was able to let the client know that I could be approached to discuss a range of issues, which seemed to improve the flow and quality of the conversation.

Reflection dated April 29, 2004. In our first meeting the client came across as being very relaxed and willing to engage himself in the activities. I was pretty sure, therefore, that he would work hard on his profile and share personal experiences with
me, which resulted in me being more relaxed and confident both before and during the session because the pressure was off me, as far as I was concerned, in terms of having to drive the conversation and help him on every aspect of the profile. Knowing the client a little better meant that I could take more facilitative role which would aid the process.

Reflection dated May 14, 2006. After our last meeting I was perceptive enough to recognise that the client found it difficult to concentrate during the middle to late stage of the afternoon, maybe due to university commitments and a strict training schedule. So I agreed to meet the client at 10 am before he had any lectures. The client indicted that he appreciated this and was definitely more involved in the session. Doing this also meant that the client had time at the end of the consultation to prepare himself for the other duties he had that day.

Reflection dated October 21, 2004. In light of my reflections on previous sessions that I had conducted with the client I made sure that I involved him throughout the educational process by asking him certain questions and for his personal experiences. I found that this enhanced the flow of conversation and also gave the client the chance to talk about things that he thought were important, making the session more personal. I also shared some of my own personal experience and how I utilised mental skills. Previous reflections had highlighted the positive effects this had created by making it easier for the client to relate to me.

Reflections on reflections: Exhibits professional skills. One particular issue to emerge from my experience was the ability to be perceptive during consultations. Anderson et al. (2004b) suggested that, “Effective sport psychologists are aware of and able to pick up on individual’s moods, experiences and reactions” (p. 267). Therefore, being perceptive encourages the practitioner to reflect-in-action and make
informed decisions about practice as it occurs to meet the current needs of the client. I noticed that as I became aware of this skill I was more inclined to focus on the client and actively listen for signs concerning whether or not the client felt comfortable, or found the situation to be enjoyable and/or beneficial. I attempted to utilise this information to inform my practice and improve the effectiveness of the support I was offering. Once again reflective practice has resulted in an improved self-awareness of the professional skills that I possess and the ways in which I have tried to employ these in practice (e.g., perceptiveness, positive attitude, approachable). It has also increased my understanding of what professional skills actually are and their importance within the practice of applied sport psychology. In this particular instance, reflective practice has allowed me to embrace the sometimes uncertain nature of the application of professional skills and provide the confidence and direction to seek answers to the problems that I have faced. Consequently, I have been able to consistently develop my beliefs and knowledge of professional skills to improve my overall behaviour and practice.

Conclusion and Implications

This paper has documented how reflective practice has helped me to develop my practice in the context of consultant effectiveness characteristics. It has also provided evidence to suggest that reflective practice offers a framework from which we can examine and learn about actually doing sport psychology. Indeed, by adopting reflective practice as an integral part of my development through an applied sport psychology accreditation programme I have been able to analyse the interaction of my thoughts, feelings and behaviours and the context in which they have occurred. This has allowed me to make sense of my practice and become aware of my knowledge, skills, values and beliefs. Consequently, I have been able to deal with issues that have
emerged from my experiences and recurrently consider the effectiveness of myself and my practice. In concurrence with this, Anderson (1999) reported that through reflection she could understand why problems associated with practice occurred and thus deal with or avoid these situations in the future.

This investigation has provided an insight into the utility of reflective practice as a tool for personal and professional development. Further, it has provided a practical demonstration of how reflective practice can increase self-awareness and develop the knowledge-in-action that is required to meet the constantly evolving environment in which applied sport psychologists conduct their work. Additional support is therefore offered for the systematic inclusion of reflective practice into accreditation programmes. Indeed, reflection presents a method to access, make sense of, and learn through experience (Johns, 1994), which fits well with the practicum supervised experience framework adopted by accrediting organisations (e.g., BASES, AASP). This is supported by Ghaye et al. (1996) who suggested that reflective practice allows a person to, “Look back and make sense of practice, learning from this and using this learning to affect future action. It is about making sense of your professional life” (p. 2). Thus, by accepting reflective practice more explicitly governing bodies will encourage applied practitioners to develop the knowledge and skills required to provide sport psychology services as well as equipping their practitioners with the skills necessary for self-evaluation, which will ultimately influence consultant effectiveness.

It is important that practitioners are aware of the difficult process involved with reflective practice. As Bolton (2001) has highlighted, “Reflective practice will not provide neat answers to the conundrums of practice. It will not directly answer the question: ‘what should I have done?’ Yet more questions are likely to be thrown up”
Further, reflection is about adopting an approach to practice that requires sport psychologists to be open and questioning of common routines and habitual practices. Anderson et al. (2004a) have proposed that such examination may lead to feelings of discomfort or vulnerability. Nevertheless, Anderson and colleagues added that if we are committed to improving practice, then challenging thoughts and emotions should ultimately enable us to learn from our experiences and understand the context of our practice. Being able to reflect effectively is therefore not a straightforward process, and considerable thought should be given the development of reflective skills.

Supporters of reflective and critically reflective practice suggest that the development of these reflective abilities should be inextricably linked to professional development and can be developed through active repeated guided practice (Williams, 2001). In light of this, there are distinct implications for the application of reflective practice emanating from this investigation. First, utilising a structured reflective approach has allowed the author to develop knowledge and understanding required to produce effective reflections. Second, having the opportunity to reflect with a mentor or supervisor adds to the depth and clarity of reflections on a consulting experience. Finally, the importance of developing an individualised reflective process that meets the needs of the practitioner is paramount to gaining the outlined benefits of reflective practice.
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CHAPTER 4

STUDY 2

Exploring the Relationship between Effective and Reflective Practice in Applied Sport Psychology

“Insanity is doing the same things over and over again and expecting the different results.”

Albert Einstein
(Theoretical Physicist)
Abstract

This study offers an investigation into the concept of effective practice in applied sport psychology with emphasis being placed upon the role that reflective practice may have in helping practitioners to develop the effectiveness of their service delivery. Two focus groups, both consisting of three British Association of Sport & Exercise Sciences (BASES) registered sport psychologists, were conducted to generate a working definition of effective practice, and discuss the concept of effectiveness development through a focus on current knowledge, beliefs, and practices concerning reflective practice. The resulting definition encapsulated a multidimensional process involving reflection-on-practice. Initial support for the definition was gained through consensus validation processes involving BASES Accredited Sport Psychologists (n = 34) who agreed with the notion that although effectiveness is context specific it is directly related to activities designed to meet client needs. Reflective practice emerged as a vital component in the development of effectiveness, with participants highlighting that reflection is intrinsically linked to service delivery, and a key tool for experiential learning. Participants acknowledged the need for greater empirical support and guidance on the integration of reflective practice into applied sport psychology.
Introduction

With applied sport psychology now commonly recognised as having gained professional status, emphasis is increasingly being placed on the effective practices of service providers (Grove, Norton, Van Raalte, & Brewer, 1999; Hack, 2005; Tod & Andersen, 2005). Nevertheless, research that is available on developing understanding of effectiveness within sport psychology has largely focused on examining the characteristics of applied sport psychology consultants rather than on effective practice in its entirety (e.g., Anderson, Miles, Robinson, & Mahoney, 2004; Orlick & Partington, 1987; Petitpas, Giges, & Danish, 1999; Poczwardowski, Sherman, & Henschen, 1998). Although findings from such investigations have provided a more in-depth understanding of the characteristics that must be developed by sport psychologists in their efforts to provide an effective service, a number of researchers have commented that there is still a distinct lack of literature that considers the specific factors of service delivery in applied sport psychology that might contribute to successful outcomes (e.g., Holt & Strean, 2001; Petitpas et al., 1999). Certainly, little effort has been made to define what ‘effective practice’ is within applied sport psychology beyond the confines of goal achievement (cf. Cropley, Miles, Hanton, & Niven, 2007). Although this may appear to offer a valid interpretation of effectiveness, emphasis is generally placed on the achievement of outcome goals (e.g., helping an athlete to overcome a crisis in confidence) making it problematic to distinguish causation, the influence of the practitioner and their interventions, and consequently evaluate the effectiveness of practice in such a way (cf. Mawer, 1999). Thus, it is suggested that the evaluation of applied effectiveness and the development of an evidence-base to guide practice have been limited (Martindale & Collins, 2007).
Stream (1998), some time ago, indicated that effective evaluation of the
efficacy of performance-enhancement interventions is, “Among the most pressing
needs in applied sport psychology” (p. 340). Indeed, with increased accountability
resulting from the attainment of professional status, applied sport psychologists must
engage in systematic evaluative processes in order to render judgment, facilitate
improvement, and generate knowledge (cf. Anderson, Miles, et al., 2004; Chelimsky,
1997). However, previous understandings of ‘what’ and ‘how’ to evaluate
effectiveness have been limited by equivocal understandings of what actually
constitutes effective practice. In attempts to address such issues Anderson, Miles,
Mahoney, and Robinson (2002) proposed a case study approach to evaluation
involving the collective examination of four effectiveness indicators (e.g.,
performance, psychological skills and well-being, athlete response to the support, and
consultant effectiveness). In addition, Martindale and Collins (2007) suggested that
professional judgment and decision making (PJDM) should be included into case
studies that are used to evaluate practice. Importantly, such research presents both
outcome (e.g., psychological skills) and process (e.g., social validity, PDJM) measures
of effectiveness and has thus helped to elucidate the wider concept of effective
practice. However, both Anderson et al. and Martindale and Collins have
acknowledged that future research is necessary to establish valid and reliable measures
of each of the effectiveness indicators. Interestingly, however, a common theme
emanating in both papers is the notion of reflective practice as a method for evaluating
process indicators and developing knowledge that can be used to enhance the
evidence-base available to practitioners.

Research from a variety of fields has suggested that reflecting on an experience
is an intentional and skilled activity requiring an ability to analyse practice actions and
make judgments regarding effectiveness (Driscoll & Teh, 2001). Indeed, the utility of reflective practice has been widely acknowledged in recent literature that has attempted to consider how practice can be evaluated and thus how knowledge can be generated to inform and develop the effectiveness of future practice (e.g., Anderson, Knowles, & Gilbourne, 2004; Cropley et al., 2007; Schinke et al., 2006; Tod, 2007). Further, Tod, Marchant, and Andersen (2007) advised that the multidimensional process of service delivery competence should incorporate practitioners reflecting on how they have influenced the interactions and outcomes of service provision. Although Tod et al.’s proposal focuses on competence it may also contribute to a greater understanding of the determinants of effective practice by encouraging us to consider the concept as a multidimensional process that is intrinsically linked to reflective practice.

In order to illuminate the relationship between effectiveness and reflective practice further three key principles of reflection can be considered. First, reflective practice is about learning from experience (Ghaye & Lillyman, 2000). Consequently, practitioners engaging in reflective practice can begin to act on the notion that knowledge is embedded in the experience of their work and use that knowledge to consider potential alternative courses of action in order to affirm effective future practice (cf. Amulya, 2004; Flemming, 2007). Second, reflection can improve practice (Ghaye & Lillyman, 2000). Reflective practice is proposed to help practitioners make more sense of difficult and complex situations by creating links between professional knowledge (e.g., theory) and practice and raise knowledge-in-action (e.g., tacit or craft knowledge) into consciousness (Anderson, Knowles, et al., 2004). Schön (1987) proposed that knowledge-in-action is core to the artistry of professional practice and that by, “Turning a problem upside down” (p. 12) and examining not just the research
based knowledge that influences our practice but also hands on knowledge-in-action, we will be in a better position to identify good practice and take steps to learn from it. This is particularly pertinent for the field of sport psychology where the simple application of theory to practice is unlikely to achieve successful results (Andersen, 2005). Third, reflection involves respecting and working with evidence (Ghaye & Lillyman, 2000). As it is based on real-life, reflection can generate practice-based knowledge, which adds to evidence concerning ‘how we actually practice’ (Driscoll & Teh, 2001). In light of current calls for sport psychologists to engage in evidence-based practice to demonstrate that what they do is actually effective (cf. Rowland & Goss, 2000), it would appear imperative that practitioners seek to develop their knowledge of ‘what actually works in practice’ through reflection.

Despite apparent connections between reflective practice and effectiveness within applied sport psychology there is currently a lack of empirical support for such connotations. Indeed, Newman (1999) warns against accepting the value of such a reflective approach to practice without questioning the evidence upon which claims are based. Additionally, the majority of our current knowledge and understanding of reflective practice and how it can be successfully integrated into applied sport psychology has been deduced from related fields (e.g., nursing, education). Whilst we can learn about the potential value of reflective practice we must also take into account a range of issues that have been raised in these related fields. For example, from an educational perspective Scanlan and Chernomas (1997) indicated that people may think they are reflecting but often they are confused between what reflection is and other mental processes (e.g., pondering, scrutinising, ruminating). This lack of conceptual clarity is supported by Totterdell and Lambert (1999) who question whether practitioners really understand what reflective practice is or whether there is
substantial research evidence to deem it effective. Allied with these issues is the actuality that reflective practice has been assimilated into applied sport psychology training and development programmes (cf. the British Psychological Society [BPS], and the British Association of Sport & Exercise Sciences [BASES]) with little guidance or instruction resulting in the likelihood that reflective practice becomes something to ‘be done’ to fulfil accreditation requirements rather than a mechanism for developing practice. This concern is also raised in nursing (cf. Andrews, Gidman, & Humphries, 1998). Thus, the nature and potency of reflective practice for sport psychology must be considered carefully and critically.

If the field of applied sport psychology is to continue to progress and meet the demands placed upon it by the acceptance of professional status then greater clarity of the processes that may influence the level of effectiveness of practice must be obtained. Such information, accompanied by current understandings of the characteristics associated with effective consultants, will provide a more holistic understanding of the concept and provide a platform for the enhancement of the evidence-base that currently informs practice. Advances in our understanding of effectiveness will also allow a more thorough examination of the relationship it has with reflective practice. Investigating possible links will help to generate potentially significant information regarding the successful integration of reflective practice into applied sport psychology, and thus generate evidence to support the value of reflection. Accordingly, the aims of this study were to: (a) develop a more holistic understanding of effective practice through the development of a working definition, (b) examine the relationship between effectiveness and reflective practice, and (c) explore current practices, knowledge, and beliefs of applied sport psychologists with regards to reflective practice. The present study adopted a qualitative approach to
probe participants’ responses and establish detailed information regarding the research question (cf. Hanton & Connaughton, 2002; Anderson, Miles, et al., 2004).

Specifically, two focus group sessions were conducted with sport psychologists at differing levels of professional status (e.g., neophyte, accredited) to discuss the concepts of effective and reflective practice. This approach is thought to allow the inspection of individuals’ experiences whilst engaging all participants in directed discussion. Thus, with a permissive atmosphere that fosters a range of opinions, focus groups allow a more complete and revealing understanding of the issues to be obtained (Greenbaum, 1998).

Method

Participants

In attempts to generate valuable information that addressed the specific research area, the focus group sample was selected using purposive techniques (Patton, 2002). Specifically, criteria were set in order to obtain a ‘rich’ sample characterised by homogeneity but with sufficient variation among participants to allow for contrasting opinions (Krueger & Casey, 2000). In order to sample the widest range of knowledge and experience it was deemed that participants must have worked with teams and individual athletes from a variety of sports and had to be providing sport psychology support at the time of the focus group session so that current opinions of the context of modern-day consultancy, effectiveness and reflective practice could be discussed. Finally, it was decided that each focus group should consist of practitioners at different levels of BASES accredited status (e.g., supervised experience candidates, accredited and re-accredited consultants, see BASES, 2007).

In line with research adopting similar methods, a triad of participants was selected for each focus group to make it easier for the session leader to probe
comments and obtain more input and details from each group member (e.g., Hanton, Cropley, Neil, Mellalieu, & Miles, 2007). Further, Edmunds (1999) suggested that smaller focus groups generate greater participant interaction and discussion, allowing issues to be investigated in more depth. Consequently, six BASES registered sport psychologists, were contacted, screened in relation to the purposive criteria, and asked to take part in the study, all of whom agreed. Participants, who ranged in age from 26 to 46 years ($M = 32.5, SD = 7.1$), were then selected for one of two focus groups. The trainee sport psychologists ($n = 2$) were at year one and three of BASES Supervised Experience, the accredited practitioners ($n = 2$) had been qualified for one and five years, and the re-accredited practitioners ($n = 2$) had eight and 12 years of experience resulting in them being re-accredited once and twice respectively at the time of the focus group sessions. Each focus group consisted of one practitioner from each stage of professional accreditation.

**Focus Group Procedure**

A preparation booklet was sent to participants one week prior to their focus group session to allow them to become familiar with the content of the focus group and thus aid the depth of the discussion during the session (cf., Jones, Hanton, & Connaughton, 2007). Following procedures advocated by Jones, Hanton, and Connaughton (2002) and Hanton et al. (2007), as an aid to the focus group process, a protocol was developed using the extant literature. Although the protocol had several definite sections it was not rigid in structure, but instead served as a map to chart the course of the focus group from beginning to end whilst allowing the moderator to probe more deeply where necessary (cf. Vaughn, Schuum, & Sinagub, 1996). Indeed, with the focus groups being used for grounded theory development in this
investigation, it would have been inappropriate to restrict the flow of the discussion by using a strictly structured protocol (cf., Edmunds, 1999).

The full protocol (see Appendix 2) was separated into six sections. Section one contained an introduction to explain issues of confidentiality, reasons for audio-taping, and a statement of the individual’s rights. Participants were provided with a standard set of orientating instructions preparing them for the subject matter and the way in which the focus group would function. Section two offered the participants the opportunity to discuss what effective practice meant to them as practitioners. The discussion was guided by the moderator using probes such as: “how would an athlete describe effective service delivery?” and “how does effectiveness differ from competence?” Section three invited participants to debate and discuss a definition of effective practice within applied sport psychology. Participants were encouraged to engage with one another and verbally formulate their ideas before being asked to reach a consensus on the definition. Importantly, both focus groups were asked to develop their own definition of effective practice so that the concept could be explored holistically (cf. Jones et al., 2002). Section four required participants to consider their knowledge of and approaches to evaluation and reflection in applied sport psychology practice. The discussion in this section was developed through the use of probes such as: “how do we (psychologists) learn from experience?” and “how do we (psychologists) generate knowledge and develop the effectiveness of our practice?” Participants were also asked to discuss their personal methods, protocols, and experiences of evaluating and reflecting on their own practice. Section five gave the participants the chance to discuss related issues such as: “are there any types of situations that you cannot learn from?” and “can learning from the experiences of others influence the effectiveness of your own practice?” Finally, section six acted as
a conclusion by affording participants the chance to revisit the definition and raise any topics they deemed important that had not been covered.

In accordance with the recommendations of Krueger and Casey (2000) both focus group sessions were led by two moderators. This allowed one moderator to focus on facilitating the group while the other was able to take detailed notes and deal with the mechanics of the recording equipment. Both focus group sessions were conducted face-to-face in a neutral setting to aid the flow of conversation and to avoid any environmental bias. The sessions lasted for approximately 120 minutes each, were audiotape recorded, and subsequently transcribed verbatim yielding 186 pages of text (an example transcript can be seen in Appendix 3).

Data Analysis

Due to the exploratory nature of this investigation, a combination of inductive and deductive content analysis procedures was employed to address the three research questions. Initially, transcripts were independently studied in detail by the research team to ensure content familiarity before the common underlying trends from the transcripts were clustered within new emergent themes, which were categorised based on links with the extant literature (Greenbaum, 1998). In line with previous qualitative research, it was decided that the reader should be given the opportunity to interpret the data in a manner that may be more meaningful to them (e.g., Hanton et al., 2007; Woodman & Hardy, 2001). Data gathered, therefore, are reported in the form of direct quotes from the transcripts to enable the reader to empathise with, and immerse themselves in the participants’ experiences while illustrating important points (cf. Sparkes, 1998). Trustworthiness characteristics were considered throughout via thick description, the recording and transcribing of all interviews, peer debriefing, and member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
Effective Practice Definition: Consensus Validation

In order to examine the validity of the proposed definition a four-staged consensus validation procedure was employed (Miles & Huberman, 1994). First, each member of the research team reviewed the session transcripts independently before collectively constructing and agreeing upon the definition of effective practice that incorporated all of the key elements emanating from discussion in the focus groups (cf. Hanton et al., 2007). Second, the definition was sent to the focus group participants for confirmation and feedback, incorporating member checking. Third, the definition was emailed to all members of the Sport and Exercise Psychology Section of BASES who were asked to review the definition and to: (a) comment on anything that clearly stood out as being overlooked; (b) make any positive comments regarding the definition and what it encompasses; (c) offer any thoughts on its wording or structure, and (d) provide any other more general comments. Of the 129 members emailed 34 (26.4% return) responded. Finally, responses from stages two and three were reviewed collectively by the research team before discussing any plausible changes to the definition. This debate continued until agreement was reached.

Results

Due to the complex and multifaceted nature of this investigation the results are divided into four sections allowing the reader to empathise with the depth of data collected. The definition of effective practice is presented in the first section. This is followed by three sections that outline specific aspects of the focus group discussion relating to the research questions: i) effective practice and associated conceptual issues; ii) reflective practice and effective applied sport psychology; and iii) applied sport psychology consultants current beliefs, attitudes, and practices of reflection. Each of these are sub-divided into higher order themes, deduced from the session
transcripts, that strive to sequence the findings in a meaningful way for the reader to interpret (Anderson, Miles, et al., 2004).

**Effective Practice Definition**

The definition of effective practice emerging from the previously described focus group and consensus validation procedure was as follows:

Effective practice in applied sport psychology concerns meeting the needs of the client(s). Effective practice is therefore a process where, (a) a working alliance is developed between client(s) and practitioner, (b) clients goals are clear and agreed by all stakeholders, (c) appropriate evidence-based interventions are undertaken to achieve goals, and (d) goals are achieved or reformulated. Honest evaluation and reflection on the process then occurs to inform future practice, which requires the consultant to pro-actively seek sincere feedback.

Therefore, effective sport psychology practice was considered to be a multidimensional process linked to athlete-centred service delivery where the consultant endeavours to meet the client needs. The process of effective practice was also suggested to be associated with the willingness and ability of practitioners to engage in systematic evaluative and reflective practices, central to which is the collecting of evidence or feedback from a variety of sources.

Consensus validation procedures involving BASES Accredited Sport Psychologists, not directly involved in the initial construction of the definition, resulted in a plethora of comments ranging from matters concerning punctuation and wording to conceptual issues. For example, one respondent commented, “I think the mark of an effective practitioner is to know their limits or boundaries of their knowledge and expertise. However, I’m not sure how it would fit into the definition.”
Another remarked, “One suggestion I have is that I don't think the word ‘stakeholders’ is the right word to use here.” However, the majority \((n = 21)\) provided confirmation that the definition does capture ‘effective practice’. For example, some of the respondents comments acknowledged, “I agree that the definition contains all of the main elements concerning effective practice”, and “I agree with the stated definition. These are generally the things that I would look to try to achieve.” Further, one participant suggested:

I tried to think about how each step could be missed out and still allow effective practice to happen. I wanted to see if I could find a ‘hole’ in it because it didn’t feel right initially. However, I could not think of a good reason, or a situation where those stages should not or could not occur in truly effective delivery for all stakeholders.

Importantly, as a result of recurring themes being raised regarding potential improvements to the definition (e.g., “Goals cannot be set until effective rapport is built”, and, “Perhaps add ‘evidence-based’ before activities in ‘c’”)) minor elements of the definition were altered.

**Effective Practice: Conceptual Issues**

*Competence versus effectiveness.* This theme emanated through agreement by participants in both focus group sessions that clear distinctions can and need to be made between competent and effective practice in order for effectiveness to be defined. However, participants were clear that both concepts were interlinked. For example, one participant suggested, “I think you have to have competence in order to be effective.” Distinctions were based on the notion that competence refers to practitioners having theoretical knowledge and “how to” practice skills to implement that knowledge ethically, whereas effectiveness refers to the practitioner being able to
apply and adapt their knowledge to the specific context in which they find themselves in order to meet the needs of the client. Indeed, one participant suggested, “Traditionally books will tell you how to do an imagery session. But then it’s the application of that knowledge with the performer and acknowledging the context that probably distinguishes someone who’s competent from someone who’s effective.” Interestingly, participants agreed that from an athlete’s perspective these client needs would refer to performance enhancement. However, they also embraced the notion that defining effective practice based on client needs would be context specific depending on the intended outcomes of support being provided (e.g., personal growth and development, injury rehabilitation).

Participants also discussed the notion that the knowledge and skills required to practice effectively are learnt “on the job.” Conversely, professional accreditation programmes (e.g., BASES) are focused on the development of competencies. One participant acknowledged, “It (BASES Supervised Experience, see BASES, 2007) involves rating yourself, with your supervisor, on how competent you are in each of the predefined areas and there’s not an awful lot that assesses how effective you are.” Consequently, participants agreed that such training programmes must embrace frameworks that help practitioners learn from their experiences and thus prepare them holistically to meet the challenges associated with applied practice.

*Linking effective practice to reflection.* This theme emerged from participants’ comments that learning is intrinsically linked to effective practice. Indeed, it was reported that, “Effective practice within sport psychology is about learning from your experiences, allowing you to evolve and cope with the different contexts in which you find yourself.” This discussion progressed to suggest that reflective practice allows the generation of a “bank” of knowledge that aids decision making and practice in all
situations. Such knowledge was proposed to allow practitioners to understand ‘what actually works’ in practice, thus enhancing the likelihood of the practitioner engaging in effective service delivery. Regarding this, one participant added:

When you’re training it’s easy to think that sport psychology is ‘black and white’ but in reality it’s the most grey world in existence. You have to recognise that reflection helps you to know the grey parts better so you can practice more successfully.

Consequently, due to the nature of sport psychology and the roles that a practitioner may have to fulfil, reflection-on-practice was suggested as an inherent aspect of effective practice.

Participants in both focus groups agreed that practitioners can learn and generate knowledge from all experiences, including the experiences of other consultants. However, participants conceded that reflecting on first-hand experiences produces more meaningful learning. For example, one participant suggested, “You can get tips to help you in certain situations, but actually being there yourself, ingrained in the situation, I think you learn more.” Therefore, participants agreed that reflecting on the experiences of others can help to inform practice but it will not provide the context-specific answers to problems associated with service delivery. Further, participants indicated that the only experiences you do not or cannot learn from are those that have not been reflected upon. One participant remarked, “You can learn from every experience, positive or negative, it’s whether you chose to learn from it and chose to implement change as appropriate.” In essence then, participants concurred that reflective practice focuses the intensity and effort of motivation to change behaviours and practices based on learning from experience.

*Reflective Practice and Effective Applied Sport Psychology*
Current knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs concerning reflection. This theme emerged from agreement by both the accredited \(n = 2\) and reaccredited \(n = 2\) consultants participating in the focus groups that reflective practice is a relatively new concept in sport psychology. Although one participant suggested that, “We were never asked to do it (reflective practice) formally”, participants agreed that reflection is an integral part of being an applied sport psychologist and something that should form part of everyday practice. Indeed it was proposed that, “It (reflection) is part of the day-to-day aspect of being a practitioner. It’s (reflection) the part of the process where you become a better practitioner…effective, competent, or however you want to define it.” Notably, participants discussed that while BASES have introduced reflective practice into its professional training and development schemes it is commonly seen by practitioners as an additional “tick-box” exercise due to the lack of guidance over the involvement in reflective practices. Consequently, there appears to be some confusion over the definition and the processes involved in reflective practice. One participant admitted, “I struggle sometimes to understand how it differs from effective evaluation.” Nevertheless, participants confirmed that by emphasising the need to reflect BASES have made it “fashionable” and therefore more neophytes are engaging in reflection. One of the trainee consultants revealed that:

For me I think it (awareness of reflective practice) came out through becoming a requirement for Supervised Experience with BASES. It became an extra element that had to be covered and until it was pointed out to me in that context I might not have necessarily come across it in a formal sense.

In relation to this, participants discussed the idea that reflection is a cognitive activity that requires training and guidance, with information to do this not currently being explicitly available. Indeed, agreement was clear that the evidence-base
underpinning the application of reflective practice into sport psychology is limited; “In essence we are a new field and we’re just taking over from the practices and the way they do things in mainstream psychology. The knowledge base about how to do reflective practice isn’t there yet.” It was advocated that, “People need to be trained in how to do it (reflect) because although some people may have a set of reflective skills others don’t, and therefore there needs to be some means of acquiring them.” In attempts to address this it was suggested that initial engagement in reflective practice may benefit from more structured processes. One participant highlighted, “When you start reflecting you need to go through a structured process in terms of asking loads of questions so you can attend to that information you need to focus on to improve your practice.” Another participant recommended that, “I think they’re (accreditation programmes) an issue because you don’t get to develop and get feedback on reflective skills. This could be improved to get people reflecting more deeply earlier on because that’s when you need to reflect the most.”

Participants shared the belief that the quality of supervision in accreditation programmes is important in developing a reflective culture and therefore increasing practitioners’ engagement in and commitment to reflective practice. For example, it was stated that, “The element of having a formal supervisor who is aware that part of the process of effective supervision is reflective practice, will encourage the trainee to reflect more.” Allied with this idea, participants highlighted the importance of practitioners being able to produce honest reflections. One participant shared, “From the guys that I’ve supervised their reflection isn’t honest enough for me, it doesn’t actually reflect what they were thinking it just reflects what they think I want to know.” It was surmised that honest reflection may be borne out of the training of practitioners and the commitment they are willing to give to reflective practice.
Current evaluative and reflective practices. A common theme emanating from discussion on current reflective practices was the importance of reflecting with others (e.g., colleagues, supervisors). Specifically, participants outlined concerns over only engaging in processes of self-reflection due to practitioners being limited by their own knowledge. For example, one participant revealed, “It (reflective practice) can be quite an isolated process. I think as an early practitioner I have found having people in that loop of reflection the most powerful way of increasing my effectiveness.” In agreement, another participant highlighted:

When you’re an applied consultant normally you’re quite isolated so I’ve found that using other people in my reflection has forced me to seek advice from people. I’ve found that useful because otherwise I’d be sitting there with only my own thoughts and ideas about an experience and I don’t feel as though that’s effective reflection because you don’t know what you could have done differently.

Accordingly, one participant suggested that the level of engagement in reflective practice can be improved through the use of a “buddy-system” where you reflect with a colleague who is preferably at a similar level to you. This participant indicated:

I speak to my colleague before and ask him what he thinks about my plans. Afterwards he calls me to ask how the session went, so I guess that creates a formal reflection process…doing this you’re actually developing your consultancy styles together, which I think is more of a beneficial, emergent, developmental process.

The participants also established that, although all reflective methods should be promoted, reflective practice is more lucrative as a formalised, structured process. Such practices were thought to lead to deeper, more critical reflections, thus enhancing
learning. Indeed, it was implied that, “Although we reflect naturally it (structured reflection) takes it to that deeper level. If you make the effort to formalise it (reflection) then you are putting conscious awareness into it leading you to generate or seek more knowledge appropriately.” Support was provided by another participant who noted, “It’s (reflective practice) one of those ideas that by making it more formal you’d get a better learning experience and that makes you more effective.” Coupled with this, participants raised awareness of a need to gain feedback from clients (e.g., athlete, coach, National Governing Bodies [NGB’s]) in order to help structure and focus reflections. Such feedback is proposed to change the level of reflection, as does the nature of the experience. Certainly, it was noted that the type of reflective process engaged in is dependant upon the nature of the experience with more formal reflection currently being engaged in only for critical incidents. For example, one participant stated, “It (reflective practice) ranges in the amount of time and the extent to which you analyse dependant upon the situation.” Another participant also added that, “I reflect informally after every session and formally if an issue came up that was a little bit out of my remit.”

Focus group discussion further exposed that some of the participants benefited from “framing” their experiences immediately post-incident in attempts to reduce the influence of memory decay. Participants highlighted that making notes or expressing thoughts onto a Dictaphone afforded them the opportunity to reflect accurately and in more depth at a later date. It was expressed that such procedures help practitioners to not be influenced by post-incident emotion and thus produce more honest reflections. This was best articulated by one participant who stated, “I put half an hour aside at the end of the day for it (reflection) but sometimes you are so euphoric after something that I don’t actually have clarity so I make notes and leave it for a week later.”
Connected to this came suggestions that time should be put aside for reflection to allow it to become part of everyday practice. Participants were clear that ideally this would happen, however, the nature of applied practice may dictate that consultants may not always get the opportunity to do this. Nevertheless, one participant surmised that, “Reflection becomes such a critical part of some of our existence that actually you almost build in reflection time to your practice.”

Finally, participants outlined that, “It’s not the normal procedure to reflect on good performances.” Indeed, even when the experience has been successful participants suggested that there is a tendency to reflect only on the elements that could be improved. One participant outlined, “I’ll spend less time reflecting on the things that went well and I’ll always be looking for ‘how can I change that for the next time around?’”

Benefits of engaging in reflective practice for the applied sport psychologist. Focus group discussion uncovered participant’s beliefs that reflective practice has several important benefits for applied sport psychologists. First, reflective practice was suggested to improve the self-awareness of the sport psychologist. One participant noted, “Sometimes you’re not aware of the reasons why the errors are occurring and therefore you don’t know how to change them. By reflecting you can improve your self-awareness and understand how to change appropriately.” Participants were in agreement that improving self-awareness further helps practitioners to understand the strengths and weaknesses of their practice, and uncover deficiencies in theoretical and practical knowledge. For example, one participant explained, “It (reflection) helps you to identify where your strengths lie as well because it’s not always about ‘what did I do badly?’” Consequently, participants discussed the notion that reflection is thought to drive the practitioner to make appropriate changes to improve their practice.
Second, participant discussion focused on the development of knowing-in-action. This is best summarised by the comments of one participant who advocated that through reflection, “You’re looking at a grounded theory approach where you develop your view of the world and the way that you practice…You’re developing these models of practice in terms of what you need to do and mechanisms involved.” Further, agreement was achieved on the notion that when you reflect you can begin to understand, “Why you did certain things and whether they were right or not.” Participants voiced the belief that this information can then inform future decisions and practices, subsequently adding support for the value of reflective practice in the development of effective service delivery.

Finally, participants considered the value of reflective practice in the development of a consultant’s philosophy. One participant stated, “I think it (reflection) helps you to develop your philosophy as well if you’re constantly reflecting back on what you’ve done and what your stance is on things.” Further, another participant offered a personal experience of the way in which reflection had helped then construct new understandings of the way in which they practiced: “I’ve learnt from reflection that it’s not that I’ve got every correct tool in my bag to fix problems, so I’ve changed my philosophy, moving away from mental skills and cognitive-behavioural therapy.” Conversation surrounding this idea emphasised the connection between philosophy development and increasing knowledge of ‘real-life’ consultancy through self-awareness by reflecting-on-practice.

Discussion

This study attempted to provide a more explicit understanding of effective practice within applied sport psychology and clarify potential links between effectiveness and reflective practice. Further, the study aimed to explore current
practices, knowledge, and beliefs of applied sport psychologists with regards to reflective practice in attempts to enhance the evidence-base available and thus aid the translation of reflective practice into the field of applied sport psychology. The discussion of the findings of this study is presented in the following sub-sections: effective practice definition and linking effective practice to reflection, reflective practice and effective applied sport psychology, summary and future research.

**Effective Practice Definition and Linking Effective Practice to Reflection**

Inherent within the definition (see page 98) formulated in this study is the notion that effective practice is linked to an athlete-centred approach to service delivery. Central to this is a practitioner’s ability to engage in a “process” focused on meeting the needs of the client. This echoes recent trends in applied sport psychology where humanistic, athlete-centred approaches have become increasingly popular methods of consultation (e.g., Holt & Strean, 2001; Lloyd & Trudel, 1999). Client-based approaches emphasise the development of a relationship between the consultant and the client and focus on the centrality of that relationship in the facilitation of therapeutic change (Rogers, 1957). This raises two important issues. First, it recognises the central role of the practitioner in successful practice (Anderson, Knowles, et al., 2004). Participants in this study discussed this concept by emphasising that although effective practice is about meeting client needs it cannot be assumed that the consultant has the necessary characteristics to do this. Consequently, the definition presented in this manuscript must be considered in conjunction with literature that outlines the characteristics of effective practitioners (e.g., Anderson, Miles, et al., 2004; Petitpas et al., 1999). Indeed, it is recommended that the definition presents a process that is proposed to lead to the achievement of effective practice, while consultant characteristics reflect the attributes required to engage in the process.
successfully. Second, the development of a working relationship is vital to the client-centred approach. This is again cognisant with the findings of this study in which participants agreed that, “You cannot be effective if you don’t have that relationship, that rapport and trust.” Further, the notion of the importance of a working alliance was created out of the consensus validation procedures of this study and subsequently incorporated into the definition. A working alliance refers to the strength of the collaborative relationship between client and practitioner (Hovarth & Bedi, 2002). Tod and Andersen (2005) proposed that integral to this alliance is the rapport between both parties as it aids consultants in obtaining honest histories that contribute to understanding athletes’ needs and helps determine useful interventions. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the working alliance has been consistently associated with successful service delivery outcomes (e.g., Martin, Garske, & Davis, 2000).

The definition also contains the element of agreeing goals with all stakeholders. Participants were specific that goals had to be agreed by those involved in the consultancy process and acknowledged that at times this is simply the client and the practitioner, whereas in other circumstances the stakeholders may include: the coach, team officials, and/or NGB’s. Interestingly, participants proposed that a central part of this goal setting process was the initial establishment of who the client actually is. This supports Andersen’s (2000) contentions concerning the necessity to be clear about who you are actually working for so that appropriate interventions can be designed and administered without interference from stakeholders associated with the ‘client’.

Almost inevitably the definition includes the idea of goal achievement as a determinant of effectiveness. This element is thought to help distinguish this definition of effective practice from definitions of competent service delivery (cf. Tod et al.,
in that consultants can practice competently without achieving the aims of a particular session, but your practice cannot be deemed as effective if you do not ultimately achieve the session goals. It must be noted that participants of this study acknowledged that the setting and achievement of appropriate goals is not as simple as it may appear. Indeed, Gardner and Moore (2005) reported that appreciating athlete’s issues and needs, and determining how to best assist the athlete, can be a complex process. Participants of this study also added that the specific short-term goals (e.g., process and performance goals) agreed upon for practice would fall under several over-arching, long-term outcome goals (e.g., developing independent performers). This belief adds to the complexity of the practice of setting and agreeing goals as well as the design and administration of appropriate interventions. Thus, attempting to measure effective practice without an understanding of the immediate goals in question becomes problematic. Further, it was noted that practitioners need to be “adaptable” to allow the reformulation of goals if unforeseen circumstances inhibit their achievement (e.g., injury). This supports the findings of Orlick and Partington (1987) who uncovered that effective sport psychologists were, amongst other attributes, characterised by being flexible.

It would be naïve to simply consider the achievement of goals as the main determinant of effective practice as such a conception negates the value added to the process by the practitioner (cf. Lyle, 2002). In attempts to address this, participants of this study confirmed the need to consider within the definition the role that the practitioner plays in the process of goal achievement by including: (a) designing and implementing appropriate evidence-based interventions, and (b) engaging in honest evaluation and reflection to inform future practices. Certainly, the view that interventions should be based on the conscientious, explicit, and judicious use of
current best evidence in making decisions about the provision of service delivery is indicative of the recent development of professional practice (Sackett, 1998). However, Gardner and Moore (2006) have articulated concerns within the field of sport psychology over whether it is providing such evidence-driven models for perceiving, conceptualising, assessing, and intervening with athletes. Consequently, Gardner and Moore concluded that, “The efficacy of an intervention should not completely replace a practitioner’s personal decision on the best intervention for the client” (p. 69). To facilitate the selection of the most appropriate interventions, learn from experience, and thus augment the chance of effective service provision, participants in this study advised the adoption of reflective practice.

Interestingly, focus group participants were adamant that reflection and evaluation should be “honest”, the process of which could be aided by the gaining of feedback from clients and associated stakeholders. It was proposed that this feedback would inform the content and basis of reflections following an experience. Related focus group discussion expressed concerns over the risk of practitioners producing socially desirable reflections. This issue has previously been raised in nurse education by Mackintosh (1998) who questioned whether students were likely to write what they really did and thought in a given situation, or whether they were more likely to write what they believe their tutors wanted to read. This could be prominent if practitioners use reflection to increase their accountability to their client and the profession (e.g., through submitting reflections to BASES as part of accreditation requirements). Indeed, it is unlikely that a practitioner would be willing to completely share experiences and reflections on poor and/or unethical practice, thus reducing the value of reflection as a mechanism for personal growth and the development of an evidence-base for the field. Nevertheless, if practitioners are truly committed to improving
practice then embracing experiences of poor practice and difficult situations will allow them to learn from their experiences and understand the context of their practice (Anderson, Knowles, et al., 2004). In addition, the authors of this study agree with Knowles, Gilbourne, Tomlinson, and Anderson (2007) who appealed to editors and practitioners to, “Embrace the value inherent in reflecting on applied experience, be it good, indifferent, or plain bad” (p. 121).

In summary, the definition of effective practice that has emerged from this study embraces a multidimensional process of athlete-centred consultancy designed to meet the client’s needs. The definition also highlights the importance of engaging in evidence-based activities and the engagement in reflective practices in order to learn from experience.

Reflective Practice and Applied Sport Psychology

Several important issues originated from the focus group discussion concerning the current practice, beliefs, and attitudes to reflective practice within applied sport psychology. Participants of this study acknowledged that reflective practice is an integral aspect of being an applied practitioner that specifically allows consideration of the effectiveness of service delivery. It was also accepted that applied practice rarely lends itself to the neat application of theory to practice and involves continuous decision making and judgment activities that require practitioners to work on a reactive basis (cf. Martindale & Collins, 2007). This is reminiscent of a recent shift in the types of activities that sport psychologists are thought to engage in from mental skills models to more counselling based consultancy (cf. Anderson, Knowles, et al., 2004). Further, such thoughts echo the ideas of Schön (1987) who explained that, “Everyday problems are not simply pre-defined, but are constructed though our engagement with the ‘intermediate zone of practice’, which, typically, is characterised
by uncertainty, uniqueness, and value conflict” (p. 6). Consequently, problems that occur in practice cannot always be solved by the application of theoretical knowledge alone. Hence, Schön emphasises the need for practitioners to draw on an integrated knowledge-in-action approach, much of which is spontaneous and tacit.

Importantly, Anderson, Knowles, et al. (2004) have proposed that through reflective practice, sport psychology practitioners can access, make sense of, and learn from the relevant knowledge-in-action that contributes to actually ‘doing sport psychology’. Indeed, the development of knowledge through experience, as a result of reflective practice, can lead to recognition and articulation of professional knowledge, which is indicative of the intertwining of theory and practice (Loughran, 2002). In agreement, participants of this study proposed that reflection allows practitioners to consider how they can apply their knowledge and skills to the specific context in which they are working in order to practice more effectively. Although, this explicates movements away from traditional understandings of knowing and of positivistic frameworks of knowledge generation, if practitioners are to meet the demands placed upon them by the acceptance of professional status and its accompanying levels of accountability, then reflective practice and the value of knowledge-in-action must be embraced more stringently (cf. Ghaye & Lillyman, 2000; Schön, 1987).

The findings of this study indicated that although a variety of reflective methods should be embraced by practitioners, considerable value can be gained by reflecting with others. One issue raised by participants in this study was that by reflecting on their own practitioners are limited by their own knowledge and understanding of practice, a belief shared by Knowles, Gilbourne, Borrie, and Neville (2001). For example, Woodcock, Richards, and Mugford (2008) expressed that by conducting reflections in solitude the practitioner may restrict professional
development processes promoted by shared reflections with supervisors and peers. Sharing experiences with others is thought to create a forum for facilitating an interchange of views (Knowles et al., 2001). Several authors have reported that such ‘action learning groups’ force practitioners to consciously attend to their practice (e.g., Haddock, 1997; Scanlon & Chernomas, 1997). Knowledge-in-action may also be scrutinised as practitioners are forced to verbalise their thinking and associate practice with differing conceptual positions (Scanlon & Chernomas, 1997). Considerable evidence is also available to support engagement in personal reflective practice. However, as was highlighted by participants in this investigation, practitioners may benefit initially from the use of more structured models of reflection that guide them to access and makes sense of pertinent sources of information and thus engage in more systematic reflection (Knowles et al., 2001). It has been suggested that such a process allows practitioners to develop the knowledge and understanding required to produce effective reflections (Cropley et al., 2007). Which ever approach to reflection sport psychologists decide to adopt, the findings of this study encourage practitioners to integrate time for reflection into practice. The process of reflection is widely acknowledged to require highly developed skills of analysis and evaluation and the considerable investment of time (Andrews et al., 1998; Holt & Strean, 2001). Therefore, sport psychologists must consider the allocation of time and resources for reflection to give them the best chance of engaging in an effective process.

Finally, participants in this study outlined the impact that professional accrediting bodies (e.g., BASES, BPS) have had on encouraging practitioners to engage in reflective practices. Specifically, by outlining the need for trainee practitioners to demonstrate evidence of reflective practice in fulfilment of requirements for accreditation, neophytes now intrinsically participate in the process.
of reflection in attempts to learn from their supervised experiences. Similar trends have been witnessed in the health care professions where the implementation of National Health Service reforms have given practitioners added impetus to consider reflection as a practice-based learning activity for re-registration (Driscoll & Teh, 2001). This has had the positive effect of raising awareness of the value of reflective practice and encourages supervisors to facilitate the development of their trainee practitioners through reflective learning, which is conceived to enhance the effectiveness of the supervisory process (cf. Anderson, Knowles, et al., 2004; Knowles et al., 2007). However, participants in this study acknowledged that the introduction of reflective practice into accreditation programmes had been done with little guidance or understanding of the processes involved. Consequently, it appears as though reflective practice has been accepted with little exploration over its successful integration into applied sport psychology practice. Researchers and practitioners have warned against becoming ‘swept along’ with trends without questioning the value of such practices (Ghaye & Lillyman, 2000). Thus, there appears to be a distinct need to develop the evidence-base that can inform our reflective practices within applied sport psychology so that practitioners are able to reflect effectively and engage in the processes associated with effective applied practice. Certainly, although participants in this study outlined in some depth the value that reflective practice potentially has for the development of effective applied sport psychology practice, they also raised issues concerning the lack of evidence-base available to guide reflective practices. In some instances this has resulted in confusion over what actually constitutes reflective practice. Andrews et al. (1998) raised the issue that in nursing practice that many practitioners may believe that reflection has always been part of their practice and that little behavioural change is necessary. Moreover, reflection requires highly developed
skills of analysis and evaluation and it may generally be assumed that professionals have the necessary competence. This may be case within applied sport psychology. However, professional accrediting bodies (e.g., BASES, BPS) have, at present, done little to dispel myths surrounding reflective practice, the skills and processes required to engage it, the potential benefits and impact on practice, and the training and development of reflective practitioners.

Summary and Future Directions

Findings emerging from this study in the form of a definition of effective practice and a better understanding of the value and integration of reflective practice into applied sport psychology represent a platform for the scientific investigation of the development of effectiveness. Further, it is believed that such information has helped to initiate the removal of some of the existing confusion over the concept of reflective practice and its relationship with effectiveness. The study does, however, have its limitations, including the relatively small sample size, and the duration of the focus group sessions, which may have inhibited discussion in the latter stages due to their considerable length. In addition, it could be argued that using only two focus groups with three individuals in each was a potential constraint. Nevertheless, these possible limitations are outweighed by the richness of the data that have emerged allowing evidence to be created to provide initial support for claims regarding the potency of reflection in developing effective practice.

A number of research avenues could be followed as a result of the findings of this investigation. First, the definition provided in this study offers an opportunity for more in-depth examinations of how effectiveness can be developed and evaluated. Future research should consider the value of incorporating a holistic approach to evaluation that considers the process of effective practice as a whole. Second, given
that reflection emerged as a vital component in the process of effective practice, and that it has been highlighted as a highly complex skill, it would be valuable for future research to consider how reflective practice can be taught to applied sport psychologists and how their engagement in reflection can be evaluated. Such research would help to clarify how reflective practice can be more systematically integrated into applied sport psychology professional training and development programmes. Finally, this study has examined explicit links between the use of reflective practice and the development of effectiveness; however, there is still a considerable lack of evidence that highlights whether adopting a reflective approach to consultancy directly improves the effectiveness of practice. Future research should examine this proposed effect as it would also provide empirical support for anecdotal reports regarding the potential benefits of reflection for the individual. As the demand for applied sport psychology services increases the need for practitioners to be able to engage in practice that is both competent and effective becomes paramount. Thus, understanding the concepts that have been proposed to enhance the level of effectiveness of practitioners presents important and challenging areas for investigation that deserve attention.
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CHAPTER 5

STUDY 3

Developing the Effectiveness of Applied Sport Psychology Service Delivery: A Reflective Practice Intervention

“There are three principal means of acquiring knowledge…observation of nature, reflection, and experimentation. Observation collects facts; reflection combines them; experimentation verifies the result of that combination.”

Denis Diderot (French Philosopher)
Abstract

This study attempted to examine empirically the affect of developing skills in reflective practice on the effectiveness of ASP service delivery. Two BASES Supervised Experience candidates, and one BASES Accredited practitioner were selected to participate in a staggered single-subject multiple-baseline intervention aimed at: (a) examining the effectiveness of a context-specific training programme in developing reflective skills; (b) revealing whether a development in reflective skills directly influenced the effectiveness of practice; and (c) exploring how the content and potency of learning altered as practitioners developed their reflective skills. All participants reported improvements in the level they were able to reflect at post-intervention, as well as the value of the intervention in augmenting reflective learning. Objective and subjective measures of effective practice demonstrated little improvement following administration of the intervention. However, social validation procedures, utilising in-depth interviews, substantiated links between participants developing reflective skills and increases in the effectiveness of their practice. The findings demonstrate the value of reflective practice training activities on the development of reflective skills as well as supporting the concept of reflective practice as a mechanism for the enhancement of effective applied sport psychology practice.
Introduction

The professionalisation of Applied Sport Psychology (ASP) has resulted in an increasing need for practitioners to be able to provide ethical, competent, and effective support to clients as well as the ability to manage themselves in practice. Following developments in related fields (e.g., nursing, see National Health Service Reforms, DOH, 2000) that have placed similar demands on their practitioners, professional ASP bodies (e.g., the British Association of Sport & Exercise Science, BASES) have assimilated reflective practice into their training and development programmes under the premise that it offers a legitimate method for practitioners to question their personal effectiveness and responsibilities in the delivery of ASP services (cf. Driscoll & Teh, 2001). Indeed, the concept of reflective practice has grown in stature within ASP, with researchers and practitioners reporting the value of reflection in the measurement and development of effective practice (e.g., Anderson, Knowles, & Gilbourne, 2004; Cropley, Miles, Hanton, & Niven, 2007; Cropley, Hanton, Miles, & Niven, under review; Woodcock, Richards, & Mugford, 2008). For example, Schinke et al. (2006) suggested that through ongoing reflective practice effective strategies could be facilitated for service delivery. Similarly, researchers have suggested that practitioners should engage in reflective practice in order to explore their decisions and experiences and manage themselves and their applied work, meaning that reflection should be considered as good practice for professional development within ASP (e.g., Jones, Evans, & Mullen, 2007; Woodcock et al., 2008).

Advocates of reflective practice within ASP have suggested that the concept is intrinsically linked with effectiveness because it affords practitioners the opportunity to examine and make sense of their practice and raise knowledge-in-action into consciousness (Anderson, Knowles, et al., 2004). The essence of ASP support
involves working with people who, because of their individuality, require practitioners to be responsive and reflective instead of simply carrying out the routine tasks purported in the applied literature. Knowledge-in-action gained through reflection, therefore, allows practitioners to make sense of such complex and ambiguous situations and explore what actually works in practice (cf. Cropley et al., 2007; Wilkinson, 1999). Consequently, it is proposed that reflective practice, by raising knowledge-in-action into consciousness, helps practitioners to examine the intricacies of actually ‘doing’ sport psychology (Andersen, 2000; Anderson, 1999). Despite such intuitive appeal, however, the explicit links between reflective practice and the development of the effectiveness of ASP support have not been investigated holistically. Further, much of the support within the ASP literature has been anecdotal in nature (e.g., Holt & Strean, 2001; Tonn & Harmison, 2004). Whilst these anecdotal accounts have some value in adding to our understanding, in line with calls from related fields (e.g., nursing, Burnard, 1995; Hannigan, 2001), greater empirical evidence is required to increase confidence regarding the importance of reflective practice in the development of consultant effectiveness (Cropley et al., under review). Certainly, some practitioners may find the lack of research demonstrating improvements in practice as a result of adopting a reflective approach difficult to align with the current pressure for engagement in evidence-based practice (cf. Andrews, Gidman, & Humphries, 1998).

Research that has sought to further understanding of the links between reflection and effective practice has focused on investigating the way in which reflection may allow practitioners to consider and develop a range of characteristics associated with consultant effectiveness (e.g., Cropley et al., 2007). Although the findings of this research are compliant with claims from the ASP literature, that
Reflective practice improves self-awareness, develops knowledge-in-action, and can aid the understanding of consultants’ characteristics (e.g., communication and listening skills, adaptability to the practice context), concerns have been outlined over whether examination of these characteristics alone are representative of effective practice as a whole. In attempts to address this possible limitation Cropley et al. (under review) investigated a more encompassing definition of effective ASP practice. The findings revealed that effectiveness is a multidimensional process that includes the active use of reflective practice to assist sport psychologists in learning from their experiences. Additionally, drawing on the knowledge of neophyte and Accredited (BASES) practitioners, Cropley et al. uncovered that reflective practice is thought to be an integral aspect of ASP practice, which specifically allows consideration of the effectiveness of service delivery.

In spite of such findings, three main issues remain with regards to the systematic integration of reflective practice into frameworks of ASP service delivery. First, consistent with concerns discussed in the field of pedagogy, regardless of the numerous benefits associated with reflective practice it is not a common professional behaviour among practitioners (cf. Gelter, 2003; Shoffner, 2008). This may also be true within ASP due to the considerable time and resources required to engage in reflective practice, a lack of guidance on its use, and a lack of evidence to support the use of reflective in both trainee and professional practice. ASP practitioners may additionally believe that they are engaging in reflective practice when in fact they are simply pondering over their experiences in a non-deliberate manner with minimal outcome in terms of ‘change’, thus not engaging in a process symptomatic of the concept of reflective practice (cf. Procee, 2006). Second, due to the complex process associated with reflective practice, it is widely regarded as a highly skilled activity and
therefore must be nurtured and developed within practitioners (cf. Gelter, 2003; Kuiper & Pesut, 2004). Participants in Cropley et al.’s (under review) study supported this notion by suggesting that reflection is a cognitive activity that requires training and guidance. The development of reflective skills is proposed to enhance the level at which practitioners are able to reflect at, which in turn alters the focus, content, and quality of reflections from trivial to potentially profound (Larivee, 2008). For example, Mezirow (1981) defined three levels of reflectivity. Level one (non-reflection) is the absence of reflective thought. Level two reflections are defined as awareness of judgements, observations and descriptions, evaluation of planning, and assessment of decisions. Finally, level three (critical reflection) is the process of reflection and includes an assessment of the need for further learning and awareness that routines are not adequate and thus a change in perspective is required. Consequently, higher levels of reflective thinking augment learning and therefore changes to beliefs, attitudes, and/or behaviours, as a result of learning, may have a more significant impact on the effectiveness of practice (cf. Knowles, Gilbourne, Borrie, & Nevill, 2001). There is an emerging consensus that practitioners can be helped to reflect at higher levels with multifaceted and strategically constructed interventions (e.g., Knowles et al., 2001; Rhine & Bryant, 2007; Russell, 2005). Nevertheless, there is currently no evidence of such strategies being implemented within ASP making it difficult to explicate how reflective practice can be successfully taught to sport psychologists. Third, the inclusion of reflective practice into ASP training programmes remains largely undisputed (cf. Cropley et al., under review). Indeed, the requirement of neophyte practitioners to submit reflections on their consultancy during the practicum experience element of professional training (see BASES Sport Psychology Section Supervised Experience guidelines, 2008) raises
issues over whether reflection is valuable when forced. In similar circumstances, Hargreaves (2004) outlined that while reflective practice is crucial for healthcare training the pressure to perform academically within reflections discourages honest and uninhibited reflection. Practitioners may therefore feel resentment towards a stipulation that asks them to be open and honest about their beliefs whilst implying that a certain response is preferable (cf. Hobbs, 2007). Within ASP there is currently little guidance or instruction on the integration of reflection into ASP practice. It is therefore permissible to accept that confusion may be apparent within neophyte practitioners over the processes, purposes, and intended effects of reflection-on-action, resulting in similar attitudes to reflection as reported by Hargreaves.

With ASP practitioners becoming increasingly accountable for their work due to the professionalisation of the field, research that attempts to expound concepts that may aid practitioners in developing their practice beyond competence and into effectiveness is increasing in value. Thus, in light of the preceding discussion, this study attempted to examine empirically the influence of developing skills in reflective practice on the effectiveness of ASP service delivery. Specifically, adopting a staggered single-subject multiple-baseline research design across individuals the investigation aimed to: (a) examine the effectiveness of a context-specific training programme in developing the reflective skills of ASP practitioners; (b) reveal whether a development in reflective skills directly influenced the effectiveness of practice, and hence elucidate the potential relationship between the two concepts; and (c) explore how the content and potency of learning alters as practitioners develop their reflective skills. It is thought that the findings of such research have the potential to commence an evidence-base allowing for a more systematic integration of reflective practice into
ASP, as well as dispelling some of the myths currently surrounding the value of reflection for the development of ASP practice.

Method

Experimental Design

A staggered single-subject multiple-baseline across individuals design was employed in the current investigation (Martin & Pear, 1996). With a staggered multiple-baseline design the treatment variable is applied to different participants for the same problem, with the treatment being introduced sequentially after longer and longer baseline phases (Barlow & Hersen, 1984). If a change in behaviour occurs immediately after treatment it is implied, with confidence, that the independent variable and not the passage of time, or some extraneous factor caused the observed change (Mellalieu, Hanton, & Thomas, 2009). The design also allows participants to act as their own control and eliminates the ethical issue that may arise of withholding potentially performance enhancing interventions. A number of researchers (e.g., Bryan, 1987; Hrycaiko & Martin, 1996) have highlighted the benefits of single-subject designs, and Greenspan and Feltz (1989) noted such designs as beneficial for the growth of knowledge in sport psychology. Some of the advantages of single-subject designs are that large sample sizes are not a requirement to draw statistical inference, design complexity can be reduced, and individual variability can be studied (Callow, Hardy, & Hall, 2001). Further, single-subject designs allow for the detection of intervention effects that might be masked in group designs (Bryan, 1987). A multiple-baseline single-subject design was, therefore, employed within this study to assess the effect of a multimodal intervention training programme upon the ability of sport psychologists to reflect on their applied experiences.

Participants and Selection Criteria
Participants for this study were selected from Supervised Experience candidates and Accredited practitioners registered as members of BASES. This ensured that all participants had been or were going through a similar education procedure and subsequently had comparable experiences of the demands of training and development within ASP. Following the protocol of recent sport psychology intervention studies (e.g., Evans, Hardy, & Fleming, 2000; Mellalieu et al., 2009) criterion-based purposive sampling techniques (cf. Patton, 2002) were utilised, allowing the selection of a sample suitable for participation in the intervention to be established via a three-step procedure. First, a pre-screening questionnaire was developed (see Appendix 5) that aimed to examine potential participants’ current applied practice situation (e.g., actively providing support or not), their current engagement in reflective practice and adopted processes of reflection, and their current understanding of reflective practice and thus initially determine their suitability for participation in the study. Second, the questionnaire was emailed to BASES general office for distribution to all registered Supervise Experience candidates and practitioners who had been Accredited for less than one year. In the pursuit of participants who would be ‘information rich’ cases, it was thought that a sample with such professional status would be best suited to participate in this study due to their current or recent involvement in the new BASES training programme (post 2004, see BASES Supervised Experience Guidelines, 2008) that initially introduces neophytes to the concept of reflective practice. Further, due to the practicum experience requirements of BASES Supervised Experience, candidates of the programme were likely to have been engaged in service delivery at the time of the study. Third, upon return, the questionnaires were reviewed and potential candidates were selected based on their professional status and the likelihood that they would be providing support to
the same client over the period of the investigation. The selected candidates were then contacted via telephone, informed of the nature of the study, with particular emphasis on their involvement and responsibilities, and questioned with regards to their knowledge, understanding, and practice of reflection. Those candidates with minimal exposure to reflective practice were then deemed suitable for participation.

Five participants were initially selected, however, after involvement in the study for two weeks two participants had to withdraw due to personal reasons. The final sample reported in this manuscript, therefore, consisted of one male and two female BASES sport psychologists aged between 27 and 32 years ($M = 29.3, SD = 2.52$), who provided written informed consent prior to participation. Participants B and C were BASES Supervised Experience candidates at years two and three of the three year training process respectively, with participant A being fully Accredited by BASES for four months at the start of the investigation.

*Practitioner/researcher.* A key feature of the present study was that the same individual fulfilled the roles of both practitioner and researcher, an endeavour successfully undertaken in previous investigations (e.g., Evans et al., 2000; Knowles et al., 2001). The role of practitioner involved providing a reflective practice-based intervention consisting of one-on-one tutorials, provision of feedback and guidance on participant’s reflections, and a mentoring process aimed at encouraging reflective conservation with the participants. As a result of suggestions that ‘educators need to practice reflection to be able to teach students how to use it’ (cf. Scanlan & Chernomas, 1997) and ‘supervisors not only need to be skilled in reflecting but also need to be competent in facilitating reflectiveness in others’ (cf. Andrews et al., 1998) the practitioner/researcher was deemed suitable for the role due to: (a) he was a BASES Accredited sport psychologist who worked within a sports science department
at a British university, (b) he had been trained and mentored in formal reflection on practice over a three year period by experienced consultants with finely tuned reflective skills (see Cropley et al., 2007), and (c) had began the supervision of a BASES Supervised Experience candidate at the start of the study, implementing a reflective approach to the process.

Measures: Reflective Practice

Structured reflective approach. In attempts to foster the participants’ ability to reflect on practice and thereby on their professional development both attitudinally and functionally a structured approach to reflective practice was adopted (cf. Husu, Toom, & Patrikainen, 2008). Initially participants were given a basic framework (see Appendix 6) in order to structure their reflections, aid in the analysis of the reflections, and standardise the procedure adopted by the participants. This involved them structuring their reflections around identification, description, significance, and implications themes (cf. Riley-Doucet & Wilson, 1997). Following the intervention procedure this framework was developed (see Appendix 7) to include additional guidance through reflective questions. These were designed to guide the examination of actions, thoughts, and feelings and encourage participants to engage in deeper levels of reflective thinking, thus resulting in a deeper understanding of their practice (cf. Anderson, Knowles, et al. 2004). The questions were developed through discussion with each participant respectively during intervention tutorials and from review of Gibb’s’ (1988) cyclical model and Anderson, Knowles et al.’s (2004) model of structured reflection. Importantly, participant reflections conducted in this manner not only allowed for the assessment of their ability to reflect but also provided information concerning the potential effectiveness of their practice. Indeed, Anderson, Miles, Mahoney, and Robinson (2002) proposed that reflective practice should be used by
practitioners to evaluate themselves. Reflections were therefore analysed to assess the level of reflectivity as well as to examine the content and reflective learning emanating from the process as a measure of practitioner effectiveness.

Assessment of reflective practice. Mezirow (1981) recognised that different levels of reflection can occur in the process of learning. Mezirow’s hierarchical model of reflection sees reflection as a developmental process whereby different levels of reflection exist increasing in their complexity and by moving up the hierarchy, reflection becomes more complex and beneficial. Thus, it is thought that the level of reflection produced by a practitioner provides a representation of their reflective skill, and as practitioners move up the hierarchy they demonstrate an improvement in their ability to reflect on an experience (cf., Knowles et al., 2001). Nevertheless, the assessment of reflection within taught academic and continuing professional development (CPD) programmes continues to be a contentious point within the literature. Indeed, Mezirow (1981) and Goodman’s (1984) hierarchical models have provided a mechanism for the assessment of reflective journals, though subsequent support is scarce (Powell, 1989). Further, Mezirow’s (1981) model has been criticised for being highly theoretical and not easily applied to the practical considerations of reflective practice (Powell). Therefore, Powell adapted the model for use in the analysis of reflective practice in nursing and such adaptations to practical situations are thought to make it easier to comprehend and more applicable to ASP.

In light of this evidence, and with respect to similar procedures adopted by Knowles et al. (2001), the current study utilised an assessment model (see Table 1) adapted from those proposed by Mezirow (1981), Goodman (1984), and Powell (1989) in order to: a) make the model more applicable to measuring levels of reflection within
the context of sport psychology; and b) establish the necessary criteria for measuring
reflective skill in relation to the specific methods of reflection adopted.

*Table 1.* Assessment of reflective practice mark scheme adapted from Mezirow

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>State Description</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Reflectivity</td>
<td>Awareness, observation, description. <em>Description of the nature of the session</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2a</td>
<td>Affective reflectivity - Consultant</td>
<td>Awareness of the consultant's own feelings. 1 followed by analysis of feelings, e.g. consultant feeling happy/disappointed about session outcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2b</td>
<td>Affective reflectivity - Client</td>
<td>Awareness of client’s feelings. 1 and 2a followed by awareness and analysis of the client’s feelings, e.g. client feeling anxious about what is being asked of them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Discriminant reflectivity - Reflection on relationships between principles and practice</td>
<td>There is an assessment of decision making processes, the implications and consequences of actions, and self beliefs/values as well as the underlying rationale for practice. 1, 2a, 2b and understanding of the influence of approach/framework adopted on the outcome of the situation – recognition of alternative approaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Conceptual reflectivity</td>
<td>Assessment of whether further learning is required to assist in decision making. 1, 2a, 2b, 3 and recognition of the methods or actions that need to be completed in order to use knowledge from reflection in order to influence behaviour/attitudes/perceptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Theoretical reflectivity</td>
<td>Awareness that routine or taken-for-granted practice may not be the complete answer, obvious learning from experience or change in perspective. 1, 2a, 2b, 3, 4 and consideration of the experience in the context of what has been learnt and how this may influence future practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Critical reflection</td>
<td>Issues of justice and emancipation enter deliberations over the value of professional goals and practice. The practitioner makes links between the setting of everyday practice and broader social structure and forces and may contribute to ethical decision making in practice. <em>All above and examination of the constraints that social, political, and economic factors have on action as well as questioning values and actions that may hitherto have been taken for granted</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Measures: Assessment of Effectiveness

Drawing on the work of Anderson et al. (2002) the present study adopted a case study approach to the evaluation of effective practice. In order to consider the level of effectiveness both the participant (practitioner) and their client’s opinions were examined through a range of methods. Specifically, participant’s clients provided both quantitative and qualitative feedback on the support, as well as completing psychometric tests to determine any changes to mental skill use, whereas the participants themselves completed consultant performance profiles and structured reflections on their practice (cf. Anderson et al., 2002). Anderson et al. (2002) also advised the assessment of client athletic performance as an indicator of the effectiveness of ASP support, however, this indicator was not measured in this investigation as it was thought that relationship between a practitioner developing their reflective skills and improvements in their client’s athletic performance could not be identified with any confidence. Additionally, the understanding of effective practice developed by Cropley et al.’s (under review) definition of the concept was integrated into both the consultant and client measures of effectiveness in attempts to examine effective practice holistically.

Consultant self-report: Performance profile. The knowledge, delivery style, and characteristics of the ASP consultant are suggested to have a central influence on the overall effectiveness of service (Anderson et al., 2002). One method for examining these factors is through the performance profiling technique. The performance profile, based on personal construct theory (Kelly, 1955), has been widely adopted by ASP consultants when working with athletes as a means of generating understanding about areas for maintenance and improvement in athletic performance (e.g., Butler, Smith, & Irwin, 1993; Dale & Wrisberg, 1996). Performance profiles are suggested to be
effective in raising an individual’s self-awareness about his or her current state and enhance adherence to intervention programs (Butler, Smith, & Irwin, 1993; Jones, 1993). This approach was therefore deemed to lend itself to the investigation of participant’s own understanding of their current characteristics and provide a method for tracking developments in the participant over the course of the study. Further, it was thought that the performance profile would provide participants in this study with some understanding of the factors they may wish to consider in their reflections, and highlight areas that they could examine to enhance the effectiveness of service delivery. Indeed, performance profiles are suggested to engage participants in decision-making processes concerning the enhancement of performance (cf. Gucciardi & Gordon, 2009). Although performance profiles are usually constructed by examining a person’s self-perception of what aspects constitute performance excellence and his or her own rating of how they currently perceive themselves to be on those aspects (Jones, 1993), in order to ensure consistency in data collection the profiles completed by participants in this study were constructed through the extant literature focusing on the characteristics of effective consultants (e.g., Anderson, Miles, Robinson, & Mahoney, 2004). Using Likert scales, participants were asked to rate: the importance of the characteristic to their own applied consultancy (1 = not important at all, 10 = vitally important); an ideal score for the quality, which was defined as a marker for excellent practice and provided a target for the participant to aspire to (1 = low, 10 = high); and their current self-score on the characteristic (1 = low, 10 = high). For a full copy of the performance profile see Appendix 8.

Client feedback: Assessment of Consultant Effectiveness (ACE). In attempts to assess the effectiveness of the participant their client was asked to complete a standardised feedback form on the service they had been provided with. Despite the
value and intuitive appeal of the Consultant Evaluation Form (CEF, Partington & Orlick, 1987), Martindale and Collins (2007) have raised concerns over whether it sufficiently caters to the current evaluation climate and the evolving nature of applied practice. Based on this Anderson (1999) developed a new evaluation instrument that is proposed to be more comprehensive in the assessment of consultant effectiveness. The Assessment of Consultant Effectiveness (ACE) consists of 22 items that are scored on a seven point Likert scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree) and includes positive and negative phrased items to avoid response acquiescence. As a result of this instrument being developed more recently through interviews with BASES registered sport psychologists, which enhances the contextual validity of the assessment tool in this circumstance, it was deemed appropriate to implement the ACE as a measure of consultant effectiveness in this study. However, as a result of more recent findings regarding effective practice (e.g., Cropley et al., under review) several items were added to the scale with a view to enhancing the holistic assessment of effective practice. These were: item 2, “Clear goals were set for the support and agreed by the sport psychologist and myself”; item 11, “A good rapport was developed that led to a positive working relationship”; and item 15, “Activities were completed that allowed the goals of the sport psychology support to be achieved.” Further, the opportunity for the client to rate the overall effectiveness of the support was provided through an 11-point Likert scale (-5 = hindered/interfered to +5 = helped a lot) was included. The instrument concluded by asking the client to add any qualitative feedback concerning the quality of the support (see Appendix 9 for modified version of ACE).

Client psychological skills use: Test of Performance Strategies (TOPS).

Psychological skills are the learned behaviours used by athletes to regulate their athletic performances (Murphy & Tammen, 1998). Research has identified that elite
athletes appear to have superior psychological skills than their non-elite counterparts and consequently much of ASP practice has focused on developing techniques to improve these skills (e.g., Frey, Laguna, & Ravizza, 2003; Morris & Thomas, 1995). Anderson et al. (2002) outlined that it is therefore logical that evaluation of practice should include an assessment in changes in psychological skills. One approach to such measurement that has support in the ASP literature is Thomas, Murphy, and Hardy’s (1999) Test of Performance Strategies (TOPS) questionnaire. TOPS is a self-report instrument designed to measure specific mental skills used by athletes during practice and competition (see Appendix 10). The practice mental skills the TOPS examines are goal setting, emotional control, automaticity, relaxation, activation, self-talk, imagery, and attentional control. The competition section of the questionnaire includes the same mental skills with the exception of attentional control which is replaced by negative thinking. There are eight subscales for the practice section and eight subscales for the competition section of the TOPS with four items within each of the 16 subscales. Those employing the inventory are asked to rate how frequently the item pertains to them, using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always). The maximum score on each section (practice and competition) of the TOPS is 160, and a higher score indicates a greater use of mental skills in the respective environment (Frey et al., 2003). Therefore, by observing changes in overall TOPS scores judgements can be made about the impact of the support being provided by ASP consultants. The internal consistencies of the subscales on the TOPS range from .66 to .81 ($M = .75$; Thomas et al., 1999). Moderately strong correlations exist among the coefficients for the eight practice mental skills as well as for the eight competition mental skills. These correlations indicate that athletes who use a particular mental skill during practice are likely to use other mental skills during practice (Frey et al., 2003).
**Intervention**

Despite some agreement that critical reflection consists of a process that can be taught to adults (cf. Russell, 2005), without clarity on what reflective practice is, it is difficult to decide on teaching and learning strategies (Williamson, 1997). In this study reflective practice was deemed as a process to engage sport psychologists in experiential learning that requires consideration of the self, the client(s), the environment and the context of practice. Examining these factors and their interaction leads to new understandings and ways of knowing that can help to improve or maintain behaviours associated with effective ASP practice. Further, in agreement with Anderson, Knowles et al. (2004) and Ghaye and Lillyman (2000) reflection must have a purpose and therefore knowledge generated by engaging in reflective practice can be used to serve different interests or principles described as: *technical* (concerned with standards, competencies, and the development of mechanical aspects of practice), *practical* (concerned with exploring personal meaning in a situation), and *critical* (concerned with examining the constraints that social, political, and economic factors have on action) (cf. James & Clarke, 1996). Additionally, reflection is recognised as developmental in nature and can be fostered through reflective writing and guided mentoring (Griffin, 2003). Consequently, it was thought that reflective practice is a mechanism that requires a multi-faceted process of explicit, direct, thoughtful, and patient teaching in order for practitioners to be able to utilise reflection to learn from their experiences (cf. Russell, 2005).

*Individual tutorials.* Based on the premise that learning through reflection is more potent if there is an understanding of frameworks that encourage a structural process to guide the act of reflection (Platzer, Snelling, & Blake, 1997) participants were provided with one-on-one tutorials ($n = 2$) lasting for approximately 120 minutes
each (see Appendix 11 for tutorial material). Both tutorials were interactive involving
discussion and applied activities that aimed to improve participants’ knowledge and
understanding of reflective practice as well as the process of engaging in reflection.
Specifically, tutorial one focused on: understanding what reflection is and is not;
framing reflection within sport psychology and adult learning; the benefits of
reflective learning and how to access them; and potential approaches to reflective
practice. Tutorial two emphasised: the process of ‘doing’ reflective practice; the
development of reflective writing and questioning skills; and organisational
information such as what to reflect on, when to reflect, and how to reflect using a
reflective practice mentor as well as a structured written approach. Tutorial two also
introduced the participants to the use of a structured diary (see Appendix 12) as a
means of framing experiences soon after they had occurred in attempts to reduce the
effects of memory recall when the participants completed their formal reflections at a
later date. Much attention has been given to the value of recording events and
experiences in written form, particularly through the use of reflective diaries and
journals (e.g., Branch & Paranjape, 2002; Zubbrizarreta, 1999). Indeed, the exercise of
diary writing is suggested to promote the qualities (e.g., open mindedness) and skills
required for reflection (e.g., self-awareness, critical analysis, problem-solving) as well
as the motivation for engaging in a formal reflective process (Richardson & Maltby,
1995). Participants were therefore encouraged to complete a diary entry for every
consulting experience they had during each week, which involved noting the nature of
the experience, the key points arising from the experience, and why the experience
may have been worthy of further formal reflection. Participants could then select the
experience deemed as most critical to examine in greater depth. Diary completion was
not made compulsory and participants were advised to adapt the structure of the diary
to suit their needs or use alternative methods to help frame the experience before formulating reflecting on it. Nevertheless, the potential benefits of the diary were discussed and made clear allowing participants to make an informed choice.

The content and activities involved in the tutorials were developed from the extant literature (e.g., Bolton, 2005; Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998) allowing the structure to be similar to an ‘action learning group’. This design was implemented in attempts to facilitate reflective practice by enabling experiences to be shared and encouraging the participant to discuss issues experienced during previous engagement in reflective practice (cf. Haddock, 1997). As a result of this discussion participants were provided with a range of reflective questions designed to enhance their engagement in reflective practice and encourage them to reflect more critically about their experiences (see Appendix 13 for reflective questions). Such prompts are thought to enable practitioners to, ‘gain some critical distance from their work, to confront aspects of it and to come to know it differently’ (Ghaye & Lillyman, 2000, p. 61). In between the tutorials participants were given activities to complete in the form of reflective writing tasks (see Bolton, 2005) that sought to integrate the aforementioned prompts into practice. These tasks were then discussed during the second tutorial and any issues covered.

Mentoring. The value of solitary reflective practice for students, or neophyte practitioners, has been questioned on the basis that students do not have access to the body of knowledge and experience in the day-to-day of the professionals that is seen as the ‘real’ content of professional reflection (Moon, 1999). Although the sampling criteria attempted to account for this issue by selecting participants either in the final stages of their training or those Accredited for less than one year, reflections may still have been limited by participants’ knowledge. Further, many investigations that have
attempted to promote reflective practice in a specific population through reflective writing alone have had difficulty in getting participants to reflect in any depth (e.g., Gustafson & Bennett, 1999). It was therefore deemed appropriate to provide a mentoring service to participants in attempts to facilitate higher levels of reflective writing. Indeed, the use of a supervisor within reflective practice fits comfortably with the recognised need for appropriate supervision and mentorship for practicing applied sport psychologists (Cropley et al., 2007; Van Raalte & Andersen, 2000). The mentoring process consisted of formal conversations every two weeks (during the intervention and post-intervention period) with each participant either via telephone or face-to-face. In attempts to structure the procedure a set of questions were devised to instigate conversation (Ghaye & Lillyman, 2000) with the participants before giving them the opportunity to discuss any particular issues concerning their professional practice or their reflections. However, it was outlined that the role of the mentor was stringently to assist the participant in reflecting on their practice rather than guide practitioners through issues associated with ASP practice and thus potentially cause conflict with the participants’ professional practice supervisor. Participants were also given the opportunity to contact the mentor at any time over the period of the study to discuss any particular issues they may have experienced. Importantly, none of the participants utilised this service and therefore only engaged in the formal mentoring process.

*Feedback.* It has been proposed that sharing reflective writing with a mentor or academic advisor will assist the process of revealing new perspectives (Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998). Indeed, extending evaluative feedback might have a powerful effect on reflective learning (Valli, 1992). Providing probes may cause the learner to continue to think about the topic, such as: “Have you thought about how a skilled operator might
do this?”, “How much of an influence do you think the rapport that you had developed had on the quality of the consultation?” Pointing out other possibilities may also result in additional thought about relationships among factors not previously considered, such as: “Another factor you might consider is how a daily mental skills training programme might have helped the development of such skills?”, “But what if the client struggles to integrate such skills into competitive situations?” Although such feedback may be provided via written comments, it is suggested that feedback maybe most powerful when used interactively in interpersonal dialogue. Indeed, carrying on a dialogue with one or more learners about the work they have completed is probably the ultimate in promoting reflection via feedback (Valli, 1992). Participants in this study were therefore provided with written feedback on their reflections and asked to discuss any issues raised during the mentoring process. The feedback focused on assisting participants in the use of the specific structured process they were presented with as well as encouraging them to consider aspects of their reflections in greater critical detail. For example, comments such as, “So what does this mean for your practice?”, “How did that influence the effectiveness of the support you provided?”, and, “It may be worth considering how your feelings influenced your behaviours?” were provided to guide the participants rather than force them into a particular mode of thinking about their experience.

Procedure

The current study period totalled 14 weeks with participants completing weekly reflections on consultancy sessions for 12 weeks and engaging in a two week intensive intervention (training) period. The procedure adopted during this time period was divided into five main stages. Stage one, the induction phase, consisted of the participants being contacted and asked to attend an initial one-on-one meeting with the
lead researcher to discuss the nature of the investigation, their responsibilities, and the format of the study. During this meeting the participants were informed that in addition to providing evidence for the study the reflections they completed could be used as evidence for their professional training and development and that confidentiality and anonymity would be upheld throughout. Consequently, participants were asked to reflect honestly and thoroughly in order to get to the most out of engaging in the investigation. The meeting was further used to help establish a rapport between the participants and the researcher and enhance their commitment to the study. In line with recent research that has highlighted the importance of the working alliance between the ASP consultant and their athletes (e.g., Andersen, 2000; Tod & Andersen, 2005) it was thought that such a rapport would be vital in enhancing adherence to the intervention. At the end of the meeting participants were asked to complete the performance profile designed to assess subjective opinions regarding current levels of skill within a range of characteristics associated with consultant effectiveness. Participants were also advised to ask their clients to complete the TOPS inventory and provide feedback on the quality of the support being provided using the ACE evaluation instrument during their next consultation.

Stage two, the pre-intervention baseline stage, asked participants to reflect on one subjectively determined critical consulting experience per week. In line with the suggestions of Tripp (1993) and Hannigan (2001) participants were instructed that a critical incident should be determined by a value judgement made on the basis of the significance they attached to the meaning of the incident and should therefore be seen as an experience that was deemed to have been particularly successful or unsuccessful that held the potential for learning and development. To examine a participant’s initial ability to reflect on their experiences they were asked to structure their reflections
using a basic framework (see Appendix 6). Such procedures were thought to allow for the systematic collection of data allowing each participant’s reflections to be assessed using the same criteria without providing specific reflective questions or structures that would have potentially produced an unreliable view of participant’s level of reflective skill. Once the participants had completed their weekly reflections they were instructed to email it to the lead investigator for analysis. The baseline stage was deemed to have been completed when the dependant variable was stable (relatively consistent over time) or demonstrated a trend in the opposite direction of the change anticipated when introducing treatment to each individual (Kazdin, 1982). Upon recognising the completion of the baseline stage participants were asked to complete the performance profile for a second time. Participants were asked to complete the profile independently of their first entries in attempts to avoid the influence of previous scores on current opinion and thus increase the validity of data collection. Participants were also asked to administer the TOPS inventory with their clients and gain formal feedback using the ACE evaluation instrument during their final consultancy session prior to the participant engaging in the intervention.

Stage three, the intervention stage, staggered the introduction of the experimental treatment with participants A–C receiving the training after 5–7 completed reflections respectively. The intervention (tutorials, mentoring, and feedback) was therefore administered by the lead researcher individually to each participant over a two week period with participants completing one individual tutorial and associated tasks per week. Feedback was provided to participants on the completion of the tutorial tasks, as highlighted previously, as well as on the participant’s first reflection following the completion of the second tutorial and thus the intervention stage. The process of formal written feedback then ceased so that the
effect of the intervention and not the ability of the participants to respond to constant
direction could be examined. Although participants were encouraged to continue to
reflect on their consulting experiences during this training period due to the nature of
the intervention and the intensive period of training they were not required to formally
submit their reflections as part of this investigation’s data collection.

Stage four, the post-intervention stage, consisted of participants A–C
independently completing 7–5 reflections respectively using the more structured and
guided process of reflection developed in the tutorials (see Appendix 7). Participants
were again instructed to reflect on one critical consultancy incident per week and
asked to email their reflections to the lead researcher as soon as they had been
completed for analysis. Importantly, the mentoring process continued throughout the
post-intervention stage in the guise of formal conversations every two weeks. The
mentoring process attempted to provide a resource that participants could use to talk
through their reflections and potentially access a greater depth of thought regarding
their reflective experiences. For the final time participants were instructed to
administer the TOPS inventory to the clients and gain formal feedback using the ACE
instrument during the last consultancy with their clients. Following completion of their
final reflection participants were also asked to complete the performance profile under
the same conditions as in stage two.

Social validation. The social validation procedure involved in-depth, individual
interviews with each participant following the lead investigator receiving the
participant’s final reflection (stage four) in attempts to uncover the perceived
mechanisms of the intervention to help explain observed behavioural and cognitive
effects. The need for social validation in single-subject designs has been expressed as
a crucial element for additional individual verification of the results from the
participants of the study (Kendall, Hrycaiko, Martin, & Kendall, 1990). Social validation data allows the researcher to provide a manipulation check by assessing how each research participant actually experienced the intervention. Consequently, a more accurate assessment of the internal validity of the findings can be made (Hrycaiko, & Martin, 1996). Traditionally, the process of acquiring social validation has been met through the adoption of appropriate scales and open ended questions (e.g., Freeman, Rees, & Hardy, 2009; Mellalieu et al., 2009; Ming & Martin, 1996). However, interviews can provide researchers with more detailed information than that given by scales and open ended questionnaires, consequently adding to the validity of the findings and increasing confidence in the potential links between the intervention and subsequent behaviour change (Landin & Herbert, 1999). In addition to the measures examined in this investigation, therefore, detailed supplementary information relating to the intervention programme was collected via the completion of a social validation interview.

An interview guide was developed in order to fully investigate the participants’ experiences over the period of this study and focused on the way in which their reflective practices and the effectiveness of their applied work may have been influenced as a direct result of participation (for a copy of the guide see Appendix 14). The guide was semi-structured, maintaining a set of standardised questions but affording the interviewer the opportunity to probe any issues where necessary (Patton, 2002). This procedural flexibility enhanced the fluency of the interview and the richness of the information collected whilst retaining the systematic nature of the data collection between the participants (Patton, 2002). The interview schedule consisted of six sections. Section one contained introductory comments including issues of confidentiality and the reasons for taping the session, as well as a declaration of the
individuals’ rights and a request for honest answers. Section two asked participants to provide an overview of the support provided to their client over the period of the study in attempts to contextualise their experiences. Section three examined participants’ pre-intervention reflective practices focusing on the value of being asked to reflect, problems experienced with reflective practice, and potential influences on professional practice. Section four progressed to explore participants’ experiences of engaging in reflective practice following the intervention. Specific emphasis was placed on revealing how and why changes in the participants’ reflections may have occurred. Section five questioned participants on the potential influence of developing reflective skills on the effectiveness of practice in attempts to make any links explicit. Specific questions were asked concerning the overall influence of reflection on applied practice as well as how reflective practice may have helped participants consider and develop characteristics associated with effective consultants. Section six concluded the interview with a set of questions that encouraged participants to comment on the performance of the interviewer and on the interview process in general with the purpose of indicating any interviewer bias, as well as their overall satisfaction with their experience in the study.

In order to maximise the retrieval of in-depth data and aid recall, each participant was sent an interview preparation booklet (see Appendix 15) two days prior to the interview and asked to consider their answers (James & Collins, 1997). All of the interviews were conducted by the lead researcher 48 hours after the final data had been collected and face-to-face in a neutral setting to aid the flow of conversation and to avoid any environmental bias. The interviews lasted for approximately 110 minutes each, were audiotape recorded, and subsequently transcribed verbatim yielding 238 pages of single-spaced text (see Appendix 16 for a sample transcript).
Summary of procedure. The following flow diagram (Figure 1) summarizes the procedure adopted in this investigation for each individual participant.

**Initial Contact**
- Initial meeting between researcher and practitioner
- Completion of initial Consultant Performance Profile by the participant

**Baseline**
- Each participant completed one reflection on a critical incident per week
- Initial measurements of TOPS and ACE instruments completed by participant’s client during week 1 of baseline phase

**Pre-Intervention**
- Pre-intervention (post-baseline) measurements of TOPS and ACE instruments completed by participant’s client following the last consultation of the baseline phase
- Completion of second Consultant Performance Profile by the participant following the last consultation of the baseline phase

**Intervention**
- Individual tutorials \((n = 2)\) delivered, 1 per week of the intervention period
- Feedback provided on tutorial tasks
- Commencement of mentoring procedure

**Post-Intervention**
- Each participant completed one reflection on a critical incident per week
- Feedback provided on first reflection completed post-intervention, and mentoring procedure continued – contact made once every two weeks
- Post-intervention measurements of TOPS and ACE instruments completed by participant’s client following the last consultation of the post-intervention phase
- Completion of final Consultant Performance Profile by the participant following the last consultation of post-intervention

**Social Validation**
- Social validation interviews conducted with each participant respectively within 48 hours of final data being collected

**Duration**
- Participant A = 5 weeks
- Participant B = 6 weeks
- Participant C = 7 weeks

**Duration**
- For all participants the intervention period lasted 2 weeks

**Duration**
- Participant A = 7 weeks
- Participant B = 6 weeks
- Participant C = 5 weeks

*Figure 1. Summary of methodological procedure.*
Procedural Reliability

Alongside obtaining social validation and for the benefit of practitioner effectiveness, it was also deemed important to examine the treatment integrity through a procedural reliability assessment (Hrycaiko & Martin, 1996). Following procedures adopted by Mellalieu et al. (2009) to ensure that the intervention had been delivered to each participant in a consistent manner, manipulation checks in the form of a behavioural checklist were employed to ensure equitable application of treatment. Here, a list of agreed procedural steps in the form of a standardised protocol was drawn up by the research team for the lead investigator to follow (e.g., venue and duration of each intervention meeting with participant). Additionally, the lead investigator was responsible for supervising each procedural stage as well as administering the intervention to the participants.

Treatment of the Data

Assessment of data occurred in three phases. First, following procedures adopted by Knowles et al. (2001), the reflections completed pre and post-intervention were assessed by two additional researchers as independent assessors using the adapted model presented in Table 1 to identify the level of reflection. Participant’s reflections were then examined using thematic analysis procedures to highlight how the content and learning emerging from the reflections altered across the period of the study (cf. Hodge, Tannehill, & Kluge, 2003). Thematic analysis allows the researcher to organise what is presented in the data (e.g., statements from within journal entries), “then to re-present a multitude of messages within a theme that seems to do justice to them all” (Connolly, 1994, p. 307). Thematic analysis procedures involved the author and two additional researchers independently identifying themes from the data through a systematic and objective process that required careful review, coding, comparing,
contrasting, and categorising themes from within the individual structured reflections. The researchers, independent of each other, conducted a second and third reading of the journals for coding, elimination of redundancies, and identification of thematic categories and subcategories. Afterwards, the researchers reflected upon the reduced data to better understand the essence of the experiences of this study’s participants (cf. Hodge et al., 2003). Agreement on the final level of reflection and themes emerging from participants reflective transcripts was then achieved through discussion between the research team. Such procedures were thought to add to the trustworthiness of the data by reducing subjective bias in assessment and analysis through triangulation with multiple analysts (Patton, 2002). Further, triangular consensus (a form of credibility within ‘trustworthiness’ criteria) was achieved for both analysis procedures applied to the participant’s reflections through continuing discussion between the research team as well as through member checking where participants were asked to comment on the completeness and accuracy of the final themes (cf. Patton, 2002).

Second, the data were graphed and visually inspected to determine whether an experimental effect had occurred. Although researchers (e.g., Callow & Waters, 2005) have recently questioned the accuracy of visual inspection in favour of statistical analyses these methods have themselves been suggested to be problematic (cf. Huijema, 2004). Further, little consensus exists as to which statistical technique, if any, should be used to analyse single-subject data (cf. Mellalieu et al., 2009; Parker & Brossart, 2003). In light of this uncertainly, traditional visual inspection methods were selected to analyse the data. When examining the effects of a treatment upon the dependant variable, Hrycaiko and Martin (1996) suggested that greater confidence can be assured when the following conditions are satisfied: (a) baseline performance is stable or in a direction opposite to that predicted for the intervention, (b) an effect is
replicated within and across participants, (c) the fewer number of overlapping data points between baseline and intervention, (d) the sooner the effect occurs following the introduction of the intervention, (e) the larger the size of the effect in comparison to the baseline, and (f) the results are consistent with existing data and accepted theory.

For the third and final stage of the analysis, the social validation interviews were both inductively and deductively content analysed (cf. Patton, 2002). All transcripts were independently studied in detail by members of the research team to ensure content familiarity and allow the clustering of common underlying trends from the transcripts within new emergent themes. The construction of these themes was deduced from and categorised based on links with the extant literature (e.g., Cropley et al., under review) in attempts to examine the value of the intervention and its influence on the effectiveness of the ASP support provided by the participants. Trustworthiness characteristics were considered via thick description, the recording and transcribing of all interviews, peer debriefing, and member checking (Anderson, Miles, et al., 2004). Further, consensus validation was employed throughout analysis of the social validation interview transcripts by having each researcher independently identify and discuss key themes until agreement had been reached. In light of recommendations concerning the validity of the presentation of qualitative data, it was agreed that the reader should be given the opportunity to interpret the data in a way that may be more meaningful to them (Sparkes, 1998). Data gathered, therefore, are reported in the form of direct quotes from the transcriptions to enable the reader to empathise with, and immerse themselves in the performers’ experiences while illustrating important points (cf. Anderson, Miles, et al., 2004).

Results
Due to the complex nature of the study and the wealth of data gathered the results section is divided into the following sub-sections: (a) the intervention effects on levels of reflection; (b) the intervention effects on the content of reflections and reflective learning; (c) consultant characteristics associated with effectiveness; (d) client psychological skill use; (e) assessment of consultant effectiveness (ACE); and (f) social validation. Findings in sections (a) to (e) are presented in individual cases to allow the reader to immerse themselves in each participant’s experiences and best interpret the effect of the intervention. Further, section (b) is presented in the form of hierarchical networks with accompanying narrative to guide the reader through the diagrammatic representation (cf. Anderson, Miles, et al., 2004; Hanton & Connaughton, 2002). Two networks are presented for each participant to depict the content of their reflections and ensuing reflective learning outcomes in the pre and post-intervention phases and are best interpreted from top to bottom and left to right. Social validation data is presented in the form of narrative with accompanying quotes taken directly from the interview transcripts to support themes emanating from the validation procedure (cf. Hanton, Cropley, & Lee, 2009).

\textit{Intervention Effects on Levels of Reflection}

The level (see Table 1) at which all participants were able to reflect increased from the pre to post-intervention stages of this investigation immediately after the administration of the intervention (Figure 2). With no overlapping data points some confidence can be obtained for the experimental effect demonstrated. Participants A and B’s baseline reflections were characterised by a descriptive focus with some consideration of their own feelings and the feelings of the client. However, post-intervention, participants A and B were able to assess the quality and influence of their decision making, identify the need for further learning in attempts to enhance the
Figure 2. Levels of reflection for participants A, B, and C during the baseline and post-intervention stages.
quality of the ASP support they provide, and demonstrate an awareness of the shortcomings of routine practices in dealing with the complexities of ASP service delivery. Participant C’s baseline reflections were purely descriptive with some consideration of the consultant’s feelings, where as their post-intervention reflections accessed a deeper level of reflection by taking decision making processes into account as well as the need for further learning and development. Although the participants clearly enhanced their levels of reflective practice none of them were able access a critical level (level six) of reflection during this study (see Appendix 17 for reflection analysis).

**Intervention Effects on the Content of Reflections and Reflective Learning**

**Participant A.** The content of the reflections participant A submitted during the baseline stage (Figure 3) tended to focus equally on themselves and their client, with some consideration being made to the context of the support through a focus on the nature of the intervention being administered. However, in all cases detail beyond basic description of the participant’s experiences was not presented. Nevertheless, analysis of participant A’s baseline reflections revealed reflective learning from the process. This learning focused on the themes of: interpersonal relationships, applied strategies, personal skills, and professional knowledge and skills. For example, in one reflection participant A acknowledged:

I asked a variety of questions (related to thoughts, feelings, and behaviours) which helped the client to verbalise her feelings for the first time, as well as identifying the key consequences for her and how this made her feel. I need to continue using a variety of questioning techniques with this client as it appears to help her formulate and articulate how she feels at a more profound level.
Figure 3. Participant A: Pre-intervention content and learning from reflective practice.
Figure 4. Participant A: Post-intervention content and learning from reflective practice.
Post-intervention reflections submitted by participant A demonstrated considerable advances in the content being examined in the reflections as well as the subsequent reflective learning outcomes being accessed (Figure 4), thus indicating an experimental effect. Greater emphasis was placed on the participant as the ASP consultant in the content of the reflections. For example, participant A started to consider in greater depth the influence of their own thoughts, feelings, and behaviours on the quality of the support being provided as well as on the decision making and professional judgement processes involved with actually practicing. Additional emphasis was also placed on the environment and context of the support being provided with the examination of the value of particular interventions that had been administered and the influence of these activities on the achievement of the service delivery goals. Consequently, reflective learning outcomes increased in post-intervention reflections. Similar themes of learning were apparent to those outlined in participant A’s baseline reflections although less emphasis was placed on understanding interpersonal relationships and more understanding of the value of preparation for consultancy sessions was outlined. For example, in one reflection participant A highlighted, “I have become more aware of my influence on the quality of the session in terms of my philosophy and approach to consultancy.” Further, participant A suggested, “Previous experiences of this technique (intervention) and my reflections on the previous session…put me in a better position to make informed decisions and act effectively in this session.”

Participant B. Analysis of participant B’s reflections revealed similar trends with respect to the level of content and resultant reflective learning to participant A from the baseline to post-intervention stages (Figures 5 and 6) again clearly representing an experimental effect. Initial baseline reflections completed by
Figure 5. Participant B: Pre-intervention content and learning from reflective practice.
Figure 6. Participant B: Post-intervention content and learning from reflective practice.
participant B tended to focus on the context and environment of service delivery, the ASP consultant, and the reflective practices adopted by the client and were again scarce in terms of the depth of examination of the issues highlighted as important by the participant. Learning emanating from the baseline reflections was categorised by the themes of: applied strategies, interpersonal relationships, and professional knowledge and was manifested in the form of the participant improving their understanding of the importance of certain factors for the development of effective support. For example, in one reflection participant B stated, “Immediately I felt out of my depth, which brought home to me that I do not have sufficient knowledge of the sport and the attributes required. This emphasised that I need to do more homework with regards to this sport.”

Participant B’s post-intervention reflections were characterised by greater depth and consideration of a wider range of factors. Increasing emphasis was placed on reflecting on themselves and the environment and context of the support. In particular participant B reflected on the influence of their own behaviours on the effectiveness of the session including the effects of the consultant’s skills on effective service provision as well as the interaction between their responses to client’s actions and their own behaviours. As a result of the greater range of factors examined in the post-intervention period reflective learning outcomes also increased. This learning covered a range of themes such as: interpersonal relationships, practical service skills, supervision, preparation, and professional knowledge and skills. Particular emphasis was placed on the importance of a rapport between consultant and client as well as factors affecting the development of such a working relationship in a number of reflections. For example, participant B suggested that they had learnt of, ‘the value of understanding the client’s sport and associated culture in developing a rapport and
being able to converse with the client at the right level’. Additionally, participant B outlined that a greater understanding of the importance of the ASP consultant having a support network to help gain clarity on their applied experiences. For example, participant B wrote:

> On reflection I miss the opportunity to get things off my chest. Something that occurred regularly when working my supervisor was the opportunity for discussion that cleared the air and helped me move on with a better focus. This helped me to discuss session plans as well as potential intervention strategies.

Finally, analysis of participant B’s post-intervention reflections uncovered that through reflection they were able to better understand the value of their knowledge and skills (e.g., communication, counselling skills) indicating that reflecting provided the participant to reinforce particular strengths as a consultant as well as indicate areas for improvement.

**Participant C.** Of the three participants the greatest experimental effect on the content and learning of reflections was demonstrated by participant C. Baseline reflections (Figure 7) failed to specifically consider the consultant or the client and focused mainly on descriptive accounts of the environment and context of the support being provided, with some emphasis placed on interpersonal relationships. As a result reflective learning outcomes were limited to the participant gaining an understanding of the value of particular applied strategies and of the importance of implementing a humanistic approach to consultancy. However, the reflections completed by participant C following the intervention demonstrated a significant increase in the depth of content as well as the range of factors reflected on. Indeed, although considerable focus on the environment and context of service delivery was maintained greater emphasis was placed on reflecting on their own thoughts, feelings, and
Figure 7. Participant C: Pre-intervention content and learning from reflective practice.
Figure 8. Participant C: Post-intervention content and learning from reflective practice.
decision making processes associated with providing ASP support as well as on factors concerning the client, the consultant’s professional philosophy, and on interpersonal relationships. For example, in one reflection participant C outlined:

The goals of the session were to assist the athlete in seeing that positives could come from negative experiences by engaging in a humanistic, counselling approach to consultancy. I really want to examine how such an approach may be beneficial in achieving such goals.

As Figure 8 demonstrates, the augmentation of depth and range of the reflective content resulted in considerable reflective learning outcomes. Of particular note was the understanding the participant elicited from their reflections concerning the development of and importance of professional philosophy and approach to ASP. For example, the participant wrote, “I have learnt that I don’t have to provide answers all the time. I tend to feel pressured to respond ASAP but I need to listen, take more time to think, and reflect on the advice that I give.” Further, the participant demonstrated that reflecting on positive experiences enhanced their confidence, which was suggested to have a positive influence on subsequent sessions. The participant reflected, “This situation has given me the confidence to try new approaches to visualisation and to not stick to the obvious and well used examples.” Finally, it is important to recognise that participant C’s reflections also allowed them to gain a better understanding of the techniques that actually work in practice. Specifically, referring to the participant’s ability to engage the client participant C wrote:

I felt a little coy about asking certain questions because I felt like I was prying a little, but I knew it was the right thing to do and therefore I managed to rationalise with my feelings to ensure I asked questions in the right sort of way.

Consultant Characteristics Associated with Effectiveness
The participant self-report scores used to assess development in characteristics associated with consultant effectiveness were collated from participant’s performance profiles and are presented in Tables 2 to 4. All participants reported improvements in a range of qualities across the period of the study (start of baseline measurement, pre-intervention measurement, and post-intervention measurement) with the highest scores for each quality being reported during the post-intervention stage. A number of qualities for all participants were also reported to have increased specifically during the post-intervention stage, indicating an experimental effect for those qualities. The importance assigned to each quality by the participants remained relatively stable across the duration of the study. However, for participants B and C, where the importance of a characteristic was reported to have increased similar increases were also reported in the self-score for that quality. This indicates that the growing importance of a characteristic, primarily due to the idiosyncratic nature of the support being provided, may encourage practitioners to focus specifically on the development of that quality. Further, in the majority of cases, where characteristics were reported to have an importance of ‘10’ (vitally important) participant’s self-score increased over the duration of the study.

*Client Psychological Skill Use*

Following the guidelines of Frey et al. (2007) that suggest that TOPS practice and competition sections individually totalling 128 and above are designated as high skill usage, scores between 96 and 127 illustrate moderate skill usage, and scores of 95 and below are considered as low mental skill use, findings emanating from participant’s clients TOPS scores generally demonstrate moderate psychological skill use across the duration of the study, with some exceptions.
### Table 2. Participant A: Performance profile scores for characteristics associated with consultant effectiveness.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Importance of the Characteristic</th>
<th>Self-Score</th>
<th>Difference (Base-Pre/Pre-Post)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Baseline</td>
<td>Pre-Intervention</td>
<td>Post-Intervention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendly</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easy Going</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ability to develop a working alliance with client</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Easy to talk to</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Capacity to relate to the athlete</td>
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<td>Verbal communication</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presentation skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ability to listen</td>
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<tr>
<td>Capability to use appropriate sports-related language</td>
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<tr>
<td>Honest and trustworthy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Available – flexible to meet client needs</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ability to provide an individualised approach to consultancy</td>
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<td>Effort</td>
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<td>Ability to improve client understanding of the support by clearly outlining your role</td>
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<td>Knowledge of a range of sports</td>
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<td>Experience in a range of sports</td>
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<tr>
<td>Knowledge of sport psychology theory</td>
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<tr>
<td>Knowledge of sport psychology – applying theory to practice</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Knowledge of ethics and codes of conduct</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ability to apply ethics and codes of conduct in practice</td>
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<td>Positive attitude</td>
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<tr>
<td>Knowledge of sport psychology – applying theory</td>
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<td>to practice</td>
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<td>practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sensitive to the intensity of the session</td>
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<tr>
<td>Capacity to use reflective practice</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Nevertheless, the findings do reveal some increase in skill use across the duration of the study (see Table 5). Participant A’s client reported increases in the use of psychological skills in both training and competition from the baseline to the pre-intervention measurement, and similarly from the pre to the post-intervention period.

Table 5. Total psychological skill use scores for training and competition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Baseline Practice</th>
<th>Baseline Competition</th>
<th>Pre-intervention Practice</th>
<th>Pre-intervention Competition</th>
<th>Post-intervention Practice</th>
<th>Post-intervention Competition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conversely, Participant B’s client reported increases in psychological skill use in training and competition from the baseline to the pre-intervention measurement but decreases in psychological skill use in both training and competition from the pre to the post-intervention measurements. Finally, participant C’s client reported slight increases in psychological skill use in training across the measurement periods but demonstrated a slight decrease in competition use from the pre to the post-intervention periods. This decrease was observed after an initial increase from the baseline to the pre-intervention measurement. As a result of such findings the experimental effect on the development of the psychological skill use of participant’s clients is not observed with any confidence for participants B and C.

Client Feedback: Assessment of Consultant Effectiveness (ACE)
The ACE instrument afforded the participant’s clients to provide both quantitative and qualitative feedback on their opinions of the support. The quantitative feedback has been collated and presented in Tables 6-8. Participant A’s client did not provide any qualitative feedback over the three data collection periods and review of the quantitative scores provided by the client outlines that improvements in the participant’s behaviours and levels of effectiveness occurred for some of the items from the baseline to the pre-intervention measure, but no further improvements were reported between the pre and post-intervention measurements. Participant B’s client reported increases to some of the items from both baseline to pre-intervention and pre to post-intervention, although one item was suggested to have reduced in the post-intervention measurement. Qualitative comments in response to the ACE item, ‘how could the support be improved?’ that emanated from participant B’s client during the baseline phase stated, “There has only been one meeting so far so it’s hard to judge but it seems to be going well so far and I am confident that the meetings will help improve my performance.” This was followed during the post-intervention stage with, “When it’s closer to competition time maybe the athlete and psychologist should meet more than once a week. Overall the support is very good.” Participant C’s client reported some substantial increases in item scores from the baseline to the pre-intervention measures, with scores also increasing in some items from the pre to post-intervention data collection but to a lesser extent. Again, participant C’s client also highlighted that one item reduced from the pre to post-intervention phase. One qualitative comment was made by participant C’s client regarding the support being offered. The client acknowledged, “I don’t think it (the support) could (be improved)! I think I am very lucky to have the sports psychologist I have; she knows what she is talking about and is very helpful.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Baseline</th>
<th>Pre</th>
<th>Post</th>
<th>Difference (Pre-During / During-Post)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The sport psychologist was generally a nice person and good to have around</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear goals were set for the support and agreed by the sport psychologist and myself</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sport psychologist was easy going and was able to fit in</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I found it difficult to open up and talk to the sport psychologist</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sport psychologist was willing to listen to me</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sport psychologist individualised the sport psychology to fit my individual needs and concerns</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sport psychologist was hard working and made an effort to help out</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sport psychologist had good knowledge of sport psychology</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2/0</td>
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<tr>
<td>I didn’t think the sport psychologist really understood the demands and nature of my sport</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt I could trust the sport psychologist</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A good rapport was developed that led to a positive working relationship</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sport psychologist made their role and who they were working for clear</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sport psychologist knew when to switch off from sport psychology</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt the sport psychologist got to know me and understood me</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities were completed that allowed the goals of the sport psychology support to be achieved</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sport psychologist helped me to develop a deeper understanding of myself in my sport</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sport psychologist presented information in a clear and easy way to understand</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sport psychologist was always very positive</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sport psychologist helped me to deal with my problems constructively</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I found it difficult to get hold of the sport psychologist when I wanted to see them</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sport psychologist treated me as a person and not just an athlete</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sport psychologist provided feedback on the sessions we had</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sport psychology was well timed so that it didn’t start too close to competition</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt that I didn’t have enough sport psychology for it to be beneficial</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sport psychologist gave me the skills to become mentally tough and deal with situations on my own</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How effective was the consultant?</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1/0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7. Participant B: Assessment of Consultant Effectiveness (ACE) Feedback Form.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Baseline</th>
<th>Pre</th>
<th>Post</th>
<th>Difference (Pre-During / During-Post)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The sport psychologist was generally a nice person and good to have around</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear goals were set for the support and agreed by the sport psychologist and myself</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sport psychologist was easy going and was able to fit in</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I found it difficult to open up and talk to the sport psychologist</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sport psychologist was willing to listen to me</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sport psychologist individualised the sport psychology to fit my individual needs and concerns</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sport psychologist was hard working and made an effort to help out</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sport psychologist had good knowledge of sport psychology</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>-1/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I didn’t think the sport psychologist really understood the demands and nature of my sport</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt I could trust the sport psychologist</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A good rapport was developed that led to a positive working relationship</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sport psychologist made their role and who they were working for clear</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sport psychologist knew when to switch off from sport psychology</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt the sport psychologist got to know me and understood me</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4/-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities were completed that allowed the goals of the sport psychology support to be achieved</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sport psychologist helped me to develop a deeper understanding of myself in my sport</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sport psychologist presented information in a clear and easy way to understand</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sport psychologist was always very positive</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sport psychologist helped me to deal with my problems constructively</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I found it difficult to get hold of the sport psychologist when I wanted to see them</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sport psychologist treated me as a person and not just an athlete</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sport psychologist provided feedback on the sessions we had</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sport psychology was well timed so that it didn’t start too close to competition</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt that I didn’t have enough sport psychology for it to be beneficial</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sport psychologist gave me the skills to become mentally tough and deal with situations on my own</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How effective was the consultant?</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0/0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8. Participant C: Assessment of Consultant Effectiveness (ACE) Feedback Form.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Baseline</th>
<th>Pre</th>
<th>Post</th>
<th>Difference (Pre-During / During-Post)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The sport psychologist was generally a nice person and good to have around</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear goals were set for the support and agreed by the sport psychologist and myself</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sport psychologist was easy going and was able to fit in</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I found it difficult to open up and talk to the sport psychologist</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sport psychologist was willing to listen to me</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sport psychologist individualised the sport psychology to fit my individual needs and concerns</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sport psychologist was hard working and made an effort to help out</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sport psychologist had good knowledge of sport psychology</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I didn’t think the sport psychologist really understood the demands and nature of my sport</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt I could trust the sport psychologist</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A good rapport was developed that led to a positive working relationship</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sport psychologist made their role and who they were working for clear</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sport psychologist knew when to switch off from sport psychology</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2/-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt the sport psychologist got to know me and understood me</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities were completed that allowed the goals of the sport psychology support to be achieved</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sport psychologist helped me to develop a deeper understanding of myself in my sport</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sport psychologist presented information in a clear and easy way to understand</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sport psychologist was always very positive</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sport psychologist helped me to deal with my problems constructively</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I found it difficult to get hold of the sport psychologist when I wanted to see them</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sport psychologist treated me as a person and not just an athlete</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sport psychologist provided feedback on the sessions we had</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sport psychology was well timed so that it didn’t start too close to competition</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt that I didn’t have enough sport psychology for it to be beneficial</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sport psychologist gave me the skills to become mentally tough and deal with situations on my own</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How effective was the consultant?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3/1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Social Validation

In attempts to present the findings of the social validation interviews in a manner that allows the reader to best interpret the participant’s experiences this section is presented under the following headings: (a) pre-intervention reflective practices; (b) the value of intervention activities; (c) post-intervention reflective practices; and (d) reflective practice skill development and effective practice. The subsequent narrative summarises the responses of the participants in relation to these themes incorporating ‘thick descriptive’ quotes (Patton, 2002).

Pre-intervention reflective practices. Participants reported that reflections completed during the baseline phase of this study tended to be descriptive accounts of their experiences focusing generally on the value of interventions in achieving session goals rather than on personal factors contributing to the experience. For example, one participant stated, “I found when I read back on my reflections I wasn’t really going into detail about why it (the intervention) was working, I just focused on whether I chose the right intervention.” Another participant acknowledged, “In those initial early stages I was too descriptive in how I was reflecting…and not digging deep into the experience.” This was also true for the remaining participant who suggested that they only reflected in more detail if the experience they were focusing on was negative (i.e. the goals of the session hadn’t been achieved). Such comments support the findings of the thematic analysis regarding the content of the participant’s baseline reflections. Participants further highlighted that their reflections at this stage were descriptive because of a lack of knowledge over the structure they were asked to use and more importantly a lack of understanding of the purposes and processes of reflective practice. Indeed, it was reported by one participant that, “I didn’t have enough knowledge about what I should be including…so I found it hard to know just what to
focus on.” Another participant outlined, “I found I wanted to repeat myself a lot, I’m not sure whether I understood the process of reflection properly. I had my opinion but seeing the structured model made me start to think I wasn’t doing it (reflection) right.” Consequently, the depth and quality of reflections was suggested to have been affected. For example, in response to the question ‘how did your lack of understanding influence the quality of your reflections?’ one participant answered, “Probably negatively…I felt frustrated and actually missed information.” Additionally, another participant remarked that they were only able to focus on a ‘macro’ level, focusing on major occurrences, rather than on ‘micro’ factors that actually influenced their experiences.

Other problems reported by the participants during the baseline phase were with memory recall and the organisation of including reflection into daily practices. Two of the participants acknowledged that the timing of reflection post-incident had a major influence on whether they were able to recall detailed information when reflecting. One participant commented, “I think if I left it (reflection) any longer than a day or two after the session I found it hard to recall information.” With regards to integrating reflection into daily practices one participant suggested, “The only thing is the fact that it’s (reflection) time consuming…because I had to take more time over them (reflections) initially I think I begrudged doing it.” Both of these issues were referred back by participants to their lack of knowledge of the reflective process.

Despite these issues participants also acknowledged several benefits from being asked to engage in a more formal process of reflective practice. For example, one participant reported:
Although they (reflections) were descriptive they still served a good purpose because reflecting gave you a chance to step back from the consultation and think about it again, which is one thing more than what I have done in the past. Two participants recognised that the baseline reflections allowed them to better understand the value of their interventions and how to alter them if necessary to improve them in practice. One participant highlighted, “If I hadn’t thought about that (the intervention) I probably wouldn’t have known how to change it or use it in different situations.” Another participant also recognised that the baseline reflections helped to reinforce their decisions made in practice. Indeed, the participant stated, “I think reflecting helped me to reassure myself, especially with the social support stuff rather than the performance enhancement stuff. Reflecting on those other aspects reassures you that what you were saying was okay at the time.” A different participant reported that reflecting initially allowed them to question their common practices by suggesting, “When you reflect on your core knowledge you understand that your way might not always be the right way.” Although these benefits emanated from the interviews, interestingly, one participant indicated that the reflective practice they engaged in prior to the intervention had no real impact on their consultancy and its effectiveness due to the lack of reflective learning the participant was able to elicit from the process.

The value of intervention activities. All participants reported the value of all aspects of the intervention in helping them to: better understand the concept of reflective practice; enhance their knowledge of and skills in reflective practice; augment reflective learning outcomes from engaging in the process; and address issues concerning the effectiveness of their service delivery. One participant identified that, “If I had reflected the way I was reflecting at the end (post-intervention) at the
beginning it would have been a better consultancy process throughout.” Additionally, one participant noted, “I wasn’t getting as much from reflection in the early stages as what I’ve got from it following the intervention.”

Participants acknowledged the value of the tutorials in helping them to gain a better understanding of reflective practice and the processes involved with the concept. Indeed, one participant noted that, “They (tutorials) added clarity and provided the opportunity to ask questions and gave me the opportunity to get more information (about reflection).” Another participant suggested that the tutorials were the most beneficial aspect of the intervention because:

The tutorials, when we went through the process what I wanted to know was ‘how was I going to be most effective at reflecting?’ The tutorials helped to enhance my understanding of that process and a by-product of that was that they helped me to reflect better.

This participant also stated that the tutorials helped to ‘reinforce’ what they already knew about reflective practice and helped to emphasise current good processes. In support, the final participant commented that, “The tutorials helped me to develop my knowledge post-reflection and helped to reinforce what I was and should be doing.”

Participants also commented on the delivery of the tutorials with one participant reporting, “I think they (tutorials) were tailored to my level of knowledge…so what you (researcher) provided to me was definitely beneficial.” Whereas it was indicated by a different participant that, “They (tutorials) didn’t come across as though you (researcher) were trying to teach us to suck eggs. I appreciated that and that made me become more receptive to the process of reflection.”

The introduction of a framework of reflective questions to help participants guide their reflections and consider their experiences in greater depth was also
highlighted by all participants to be of particular benefit. Indeed, one participant highlighted, “I think the structured questions definitely gave clearer outcomes, so it became clear that these were my options and previously I wasn’t able to get that far in my reflection.” In support, another participant added, “They (questions) encouraged you to dig deeper and after being prompted I think I almost continued to do that (question) myself.” It was also revealed by one participant, in response to being questioned about whether such reflective questions altered the focus of reflections, that, “Yes, I approached reflecting a lot more deeply and it almost helped me in consultations as well because by reflecting on the previous experience I was able to use that in future consultations.” Finally, two of the participants outlined that the reflective questions allowed them to be more ‘consistent’ in their reflections and access ‘different forms of knowledge’ thought to enhance learning from reflecting on their experiences. These participants suggested that this was because the framework enhanced the structure of their reflections and guided the process so that they were able to engage in a practice more indicative of reflection.

Following the tutorials participants were advised to maintain a diary of their experiences in attempts to aid with the recall when they actually formally reflected on those situations. One of the participants reported that they didn’t actually use the diary at all post-intervention:

If I’m being honest I didn’t really use the diary because I tried to reflect within 24 to 48 hours of the actual event, so because I’m in this type of environment (full-time ASP practitioner) all the time it wasn’t the case of having to remember where I was and who I was with and I thought the diary served as more of a factual purpose.
However, this participant did acknowledge the potential benefit such a resource could have for others by highlighting, “The diary would be a little extra help for recalling initial thoughts and feelings, but I tried to reflect pretty quickly after the event.” The remaining participants, however, did discuss the benefits of using the diary as an aid to framing their experiences and to memory recall. One participant indicated that, “I didn’t want to reflect straight after but I could use the diary to put things down and look back at the experience. I’d then use that as a guide for the reflection.” This participant also noted that the diary benefited the quality of their reflections because it resulted in an ‘increased recall of the small intricacies which are as powerful as the major factors in a consultancy situation’. Further, when questioned whether this enhanced the level of learning about the maintenance or development of the participant’s practice, they responded, “Yeah, absolutely.” In support of these comments the final participant recognised that, “I can’t really process all of the information immediately after a session, so having a way to document that information made the final reflection more accurate.” Further, this participant revealed:

I think it (diary) helped me to recall all of the important bits of sporadic reflection that I had, put it all together, and make more sense of it. I think that allowed me to reflect more on myself than the situation.

The mentoring resource established during and post-intervention was only used by participants during the formal contact episodes scheduled as part of the intervention, thus no additional mentoring was provided to any of the participants. Nevertheless, they all acknowledged the value of the mentoring resource in helping them to access deeper levels of reflection and elicit learning from their reflective practices. This is best summarised by the comments of one participant who stated:
Doing the reflection and having our (participant and researcher) conversations about it helped to reassure me that I was on the right lines, and encouraged me to dig a little deeper, to ask further questions about certain areas. I think someone like yourself who’s got that knowledge and experience of the reflective process is good to act as that mentor because you were able to push me to think further and deeper. So having that contact with you increased the quality of my reflections.

In support, another participant acknowledged, “Having you (researcher) as a mentor, who I was able to ask questions to about reflection and practice helped develop my own practice.”

Participants also commented positively on the value of the feedback they received on their first reflection post-intervention and outlined the importance of receiving such feedback on the quality of their future reflections. For example, one participant suggested that the feedback they received helped them to ‘get the bigger picture’ with regards to understanding and learning from their experiences. This is supported by the comments of another participant who indicated, “I think the feedback you gave on one of my reflections…the fact that you just kept asking more probing questions made me ask myself more positive questions and I was able to then reflect more profoundly.” One of the participants revealed that the feedback they received had the biggest impact on their ability to reflect by stating:

I think the biggest impact from the intervention was the feedback you gave of one of my reflections. It wasn’t a whole lot of feedback but you said ‘so what?’ and I think I now ask myself that question a lot when I’m naturally reflecting. I’ll say ‘so what does that mean?’ So that made me think on another level.
Importantly, the participants accepted that the feedback did not coerce them into certain behaviours or ways of thinking but rather acted as a guide to help them to consider their experiences in greater critical depth. For example, one participant outlined, “When you gave the information back you were guiding by saying ‘think about this’ and I found that made the process a lot easier for the next reflection…it’s guidance as opposed to forcing.”

When asked to comment on their experiences of the intervention and the training they received participants acknowledged the overall benefit it had on their reflective and professional practices. One participant stated, “I thought that (intervention) made the difference in terms of changing my perceptions of reflection and in terms of me actually getting benefits from it (reflecting). Had there not been an intervention I wouldn’t have gotten the same gain.” The remaining two participants both agreed that they were satisfied with their involvement in the intervention and indicated that it was both ‘informative’ and ‘rewarding’. Participants widely considered that as a result of the intervention their ability to engage in reflective practice improved. Indeed, one participant revealed:

You think you are engaging in reflective practice but then you are shown the proper way and then you know what to do. The intervention taught me that I probably wasn’t reflecting before, but now I’m in a better position to engage in the process.

Finally, one participant suggested that the intervention training programme could be integrated into professional body (e.g., BASES) neophyte training systems by voicing that, “If you were taking on someone who was starting BASES SE (supervised experience) I think that’s (intervention) a good process to go through virtually as it is presented (in the current study).”
Post-intervention reflective practices. As a result of the intervention the participants all acknowledged that significant changes to their reflective practices occurred. For example, when asked if they would regard the changes to their reflective practice and professional practice as significant as a result of their participation one participant stated, “Yes, definitely! Just an overall increasing self-awareness and the ability to reflect in action as well as on practice, it’s been helpful, significantly.” Participants were able to conceptualise a number of changes to their reflective practices that resulted from their engagement in the intervention. First, all participants recognised that the content and focus of their reflections altered. One participant highlighted that improvements in their knowledge and understanding of the reflective process enabled a greater focus on the ‘micro’ aspects of practice, which they suggested made their reflections more holistic. This participant commented, “Through the reflections being more holistic and not just bit-parts of an experience you’re getting a greater picture of the whole temporal nature of the session.” Another participant added, “The focus went from more ‘what am I doing and is it working?’ to ‘why is it working and what impact am I having, what involvement do I have in that success?’” This participant verified that this change in focus transpired from being able to continually ask probing questions about their practice, which was developed during the intervention. These comments were supported by the remaining participant who also remarked, “I looked less at the ‘what happened’ and the situation and more at the internal aspects of influence, so there was a definite shift in focus.” However, this participant attributed their increasing knowledge about reflective practice as the cause for this change.

Second, two participants reported that the process of reflection became ‘quicker’ and ‘easier’ due to the adoption of a more guiding structure and improved
knowledge about reflective practice and the processes involved. It was acknowledged that, “Given that additional knowledge and guidance and the more structure changed my perception of it (reflection) and I found it easier to do, it (reflection) was quicker and more relevant and more helpful to my practice.” Nevertheless, the remaining participant indicated that by enhancing their knowledge and understanding of reflective practice the process they engaged in became longer due to the depth they were now reflecting at. This participant recalled, “I think time was the biggest issue. Reflecting definitely helped but the process took a lot longer after the training because I was approaching it in a lot more depth.” The participant did, however, comment that taking the time to reflect in such depth actually helped them to become more successful in their practice.

Third, participants commented on the increase in the consistency of their reflections with regards to the depth in which they approached the process. One participant outlined that they now placed as much emphasis on reflecting critically on positive incidents as they did on negative incidents. For example, “If a situation didn’t go so well I probably would have reflected quite deeply on it naturally without the intervention. But I think now I ask more consistent questions whether it (ASP service delivery) worked well or not.” Another participant emphasised that they became less ‘lazy’ in their reflective practices in terms of exploring not just the ‘major things that happen in practice’ but also the minor aspects, making the reflections more holistic in nature. The remaining participant revealed that, “Without the development in reflective skills I wouldn’t be able to consistently reflect at the depth I achieved later on because I became far more questioning and open-minded to learning.”

Finally, participants suggested that they became more ‘able reflectors’ following the intervention, which allowed them to access more significant outcomes in
terms of reflective learning. For example, in response to being asked if they thought
they had become a more able reflector as a result of the intervention one participant
answered, “Definitely, yeah…my understanding of the whole reflective process is
better. Knowing what I should be reflecting on…helped me understand what I needed
to do to gain more information and increase my knowledge about the situation.”
Alternatively, one participant suggested that the development in their ability to reflect
on their experiences was manifested in the ability to provide a more honest appraisal
of the situation, allowing greater clarity to emanate from the reflections. Interestingly,
all participants verified that these changes to their reflective practice skills were a
direct result from engaging in the intervention. They also suggested that their
reflective practices may have improved with time but not to the extent that they had
during the period of this investigation and particularly not within the time frame that
they had improved during this study. Indeed, one participant acknowledged, “I’m quite
an analytical person but I dare say the changes wouldn’t have happened as quickly or
to the extent that they did.”

*Reflective practice skill development and effectiveness.* As a consequence of
participants developing their ability to engage in a process of reflective practice all
reported a range of specific benefits associated with developments in the effectiveness
of their service delivery. Certainly, one participant disclosed that developing their
reflective skills “definitely” enhanced the effectiveness of their practice because, “I
engaged in a higher level of thinking and that encouraged me to think more about the
situation and gather more information which seems to make the consultancy process
more effective.”

All participants revealed that improvements in their reflective skills helped to
enhance their self-awareness. This was personified by one participant gaining a greater
understanding of their emotions and the influence of those on service delivery. For example, “I became more aware of how my emotions were going up and down by being more knowledgeable and deep in my later reflections.” This participant progressed to explain how improvements in self-awareness influenced their effectiveness:

I became more aware of how I was feeling and how that influenced my reaction to what the client was saying. Understanding my feelings allowed me to use certain strategies to cope and remain neutral in situations which helped me to be more effective than if I hadn’t done that.

Similarly, one participant suggested, “If anything I would say I became more aware of how I was in sessions, I was able to sort of control my emotions so they didn’t have a negative impact on my effectiveness.” Alternatively, other participants indicated that they gained a greater understanding of their strengths and limitations as an ASP consultant, with one participant highlighting, “Through my later reflections I started to lean more about myself and verify what I already knew about myself.” Finally, the links between developing self-awareness and the value of the intervention is best summed up in the comments of one participant who stated, “That (self-awareness) wouldn’t have come unless I’d gone through this process with yourself (researcher) and gone through the reflective training.”

Linked to increases in self-awareness, participants also recalled that developing their skills in reflective practice resulted in a better understanding of their professional judgement and decision making. This related to participants becoming more aware of the decisions they were making in practice and on what basis they were being made, as well as considering the way in which they reacted and coped in certain consultancy situations. In relation to this one participant noted:
It (improved ability to reflect) made me understand the reason why I was making the decision I was making, not just whether the decision was the right one, and that made me much more aware of how I was during a session. Additionally, one participant reported, “After the training I felt more satisfied with reflecting, I felt I got more out of it in terms of helping me put into perspective what I was choosing to do and how I was choosing to do it.”

Participants also disclosed that by developing their knowledge and understanding of reflective practice and thus the depth they were reflecting at they were in a better position to comprehend, develop, and implement new approaches to service delivery that ultimately made them more effective as practitioners. One participant linked this to developments in self-awareness by stating, “The reflection between sessions equipped me better to handle some quite difficult information and implement my approach more effectively than if I hadn’t reflected because I became aware of my feelings and more comfortable with them.” When asked if they noticed a link between the development in reflective skills and a greater focus on the development of effective practice another participant answered, “Yeah, I would because you stop automatically thinking what you’re doing is right and consider alternatives… which made me become more client-centred and able to respond better to the client.” The remaining participant also considered improvements in their approach to service delivery as a result of the intervention:

The reflective process and training we went through, a lot of it was getting us to ask ourselves more effective questions about what we were doing, and in doing that it’s made me think more about the questions I ask to the client which has helped me to improve the way I try and implement a humanistic approach to my consultancy.
One other participant also commented on the notion of being able to develop their ability to ask ‘effective questions’ and the influence this had on their practice by identifying, “It (effective questioning) helps me tease more information out of the client which gives me a better understanding of the situation or the issue, which in effect means I can provide a better service.”

Another issue raised by all participants was the influence that enhanced reflective skills had in the achievement of session goals, a factor closely linked to effective practice. One participant described, “I’m gaining more information as a result of reflective training, it means I’m getting more from the athlete in order to give more rounded options and achieve the goal of improving their performance.” Another participant revealed that they achieved the main goal of support quite early on in the consultancy due to the very nature of the goal itself. However, this participant suggested that by reflecting in more depth they began to understand that the goals of practice needed to change in order to help the client develop a range of coping strategies to prevent similar problems occurring in the future. For example, the participant indicated:

I think she (client) would have been quite happy stopping after she gained control over her behaviour, but I realised that we needed to spend time understanding the reasons why she behaved in that way so if they happened again she could identify them before the behaviour came out.

The remaining participant reported, “Reflecting in depth allowed me to understand ways in which goals could be achieved. I learned that sometimes session goals can’t be achieved because the client may bring other issues with them and knowing this made me more flexible.”
It was also revealed that engaging in a more formal and structured reflective process, and approaching their reflections with greater clarity and critical depth encouraged participants to start reflecting-in-action by continuing to ask themselves reflective questions during practice. Indeed, it was acknowledged by one participant that, “I started thinking during sessions ‘how am I implementing what I’ve learned from the last consultation with this athlete?’ So I guess I started reflecting-in-action as well.” Another participant commented:

Even in the session itself I suppose you’re picking things out and the questions you ask yourself guide you to become more aware, therefore, you’re doing it (reflection) in the session thinking ‘what’s going on here? Why did that happen? How can I make it better?’

It was also suggested that ‘the reflection completed on practice helps consultants to feel more confident in reflecting during practice’ because of the effectiveness of the questions associated with formal processes of reflection.

When asked to comment on the way in which developments in their reflective skills may have impacted on certain consultant characteristics associated with effectiveness participants responded positively in all cases. Specifically, participants disclosed that becoming more skilled in reflecting helped them to develop their personable skills (e.g., ability to develop a rapport), communication skills, knowledge and understanding of sport psychology, professional skills (e.g., decision making skills), and practical skills (e.g., ability to apply theory to practice). For example, with regards to developing personable skills participants commented, “Because its (reflecting) encouraged me to be more open in my questioning it has been helpful for gaining information and developing that rapport. I think the ability to do that has come through the reflective training”, and, “Improving my reflections has made me more
aware of my feelings so I know not to let nerves have an impact on the information
that I give and that will help my effectiveness in that first meeting and creating a
rapport.” In relation to professional skills one participant commented, “I’m learning
now when to guide them (client) and when to say ‘try to work it out for yourself’ and
that’s come from reflecting more deeply because of the process we’ve (participant and
researcher) been through.” Further, participants suggested that through developing
their practical skills they were able to adopt more innovative approaches to the
problems they were faced with in practice. For example:

There’s such a gap between theory and practice, and there’s only so many
times you can do the same thing so that’s made me want to understand how I
can improve my practice, how I can provide something different to my
athletes, and if I wasn’t reflecting on that I would never make those changes.

Participants were in agreement that such developments in the aforementioned
characteristics were a direct result of being able to reflect more critically on their
experiences. Although participants mentioned that such changes may have occurred as
a natural consequence of practicing they suggested that the improvements would not
have happened as quickly or to the extent that they did through reflection.

Finally, the success of the intervention in helping participants to develop their
reflective skills and access experiential learning thought to enhance the effectiveness
of their practice was further substantiated by participants disclosing that following the
study they would make several changes to their reflective practices in attempts to
maintain the benefits acquired during their engagement in this study. For example, one
participant suggested that the ‘frequency’ that they reflected at would increase because
of how beneficial they found the process to aiding the quality of the service they
provided. Another participant indicated, “It (reflective practice) will change and I will
become more analytical than I used to be.” The remaining participant highlighted that they would reflect more consistently by engaging in the process throughout the support they were providing, “I definitely wouldn’t just reflect at the end, I will reflect after the first session, I think that’s quite and important one…because you get so much new information so it’s quite a crucial decision making point.” Further, one participant highlighted the potential impact of the intervention by explaining that the skills they had developed transferred to help develop the quality of their sports coaching practice as well as their ASP practice. The participant stated:

Even my coaching has changed because of it (intervention). After some negative feedback from the players I started questioning myself, but being aware of those feelings I told myself to immediately calm down, listen to what’s happening and not to make any snap judgements. I handled it (situation) so much better than I would normally.

Discussion

The present study investigated the effects of a multi-modal intervention programme on the development of reflective practice skills within ASP consultants in attempts to examine whether developments in such skills had a direct influence on levels of service delivery effectiveness. Previous research has indicated that despite the intuitive appeal of reflective practice as a mechanism for both personal and professional development little empirical evidence exists to provide valid information regarding the actual impact of reflective practice, particularly within ASP (Cropley et al., under review). In response to this, the findings of this investigation suggest that developing a practitioner’s ability to reflect on their practice has distinct benefits associated with improving the effectiveness of their ASP service delivery. Indeed, following administration of the intervention participants were able to engage in higher
levels of reflection, and quantitative measures of effectiveness demonstrated some improvement, although these effectiveness measures were equivocal. However, analysis of the participant’s reflections demonstrated clear improvements in reflective learning emanating from the post-intervention process. Subsequent social validation procedures provided substantial support for the notion that by developing reflective practice skills participants were able to generate practical and professional knowledge, improve their self-awareness, start to make sense of their approach to ASP, and begin to understand the impact of their judgements and decisions on practice. Consequently, participants reported that their levels of effectiveness increased placing them in a better position to achieve or reformulate the goals of service delivery.

Directly following the administration of the intervention, the level that practitioners were able to reflect at improved allowing them to make assessments of their decision making processes and whether additional learning was required from the situation, as well as, in some cases, begin to question habitual practices and common routines. The positive intervention effects for all of the participants is notable because Hrycaiko and Martin (1996) suggested greater confidence can be placed in the effectiveness of an intervention when improvements are replicated across individuals. Further, the influence of the intervention in helping participants to develop their reflective skills was corroborated consistently in the social validation interviews. Despite clear improvements in participant’s ability to reflect none of them were able to achieve level 6 reflections defined as critical reflection that focus on ‘issues of justice and emancipation through deliberation over the value of professional goals and practice’. It has been suggested that being critically self-aware is an acquired skill that comes with experience and great intellect (Moran & Dallat, 1995; Hockly, 2000), and this being the case, not every individual is necessarily capable of engaging in critical
reflection (Hobbs, 2007). Participants in this study touched upon critical levels of reflection by questioning the value of their approaches to ASP support and examining alternative approaches within the context of their consultancy. However, it was deemed through triangular analysis and member checking that such level of reflective thought was not consistent enough to be deemed as critical. It is permissible to presume, however, that given additional data collection time participants would have demonstrated the ability to achieve critical levels of reflection.

Improvements in participant’s ability to reflect at higher levels also resulted in shifts in the focus of the participant’s reflections from appraisal of the situation to greater emphasis on the self and the client. This shift is in contrast to the one experienced by Gilbourne (1998) who, by reflecting on his research journey, noted a shift in reflective focus from an internal ‘self-critique’ to a ‘less concerned’ reflective style with less focus on the self and more on others. In agreement with Knowles et al. (2001), however, the shift in participant’s reflective focus in this study may have been due to the very nature of the consultancy they were engaged in as well as the stage of professional development they were in at the time of the study. Indeed, participants were aware that the reflections completed as part of the study could be used as evidence to meet the requirements of the BASES Supervised Experience and professional development programmes they were engaged in. Therefore, in attempts to demonstrate their accountability to themselves, their clients, and their profession the self-focused reflective style prevailed (cf. Anderson, Knowles, et al., 2004). In addition, it has been suggested that increasing levels of reflection involve higher forms of cognition, moving from issues of practicality to values and beliefs (Jay, 2003). Thus, by engaging in higher levels of reflection the participants naturally altered focus
to the self, their values and beliefs and the potential implications of these on the quality of the provision of ASP support.

In agreement with Knowles et al. (2001) who suggested that higher levels of reflection would augment learning and have a greater impact on the effectiveness of practice, content analysis of reflections and reports from participants in the social validation interviews verified that by engaging in the intervention and developing their reflective abilities the learning outcomes participants experienced enabled them to engage in processes that enhanced the effectiveness of their practice. In support of the ideas of Evans (2002), as a result of their participation the ASP consultants in this study developed along two dimensions: *attitudinal development* (modification of practitioner’s attitude to their work) and *functional development* (improvements in the processes of ASP practice). From an attitudinal perspective participants reported that they were able to gain better access to and make greater sense of their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours in the specific environments in which they found themselves as a result of improving their knowledge of reflective practice and engaging in a deeper, more questioning reflective process. Such benefits support those that have been outlined in anecdotal accounts of ASP practitioners engaging in reflective practice (e.g., Anderson, Knowles, et al., 2004; Woodcock et al., 2008). Attitudinal developments experienced by the participants in this study were reported to have been linked to developing a greater self-awareness which supports the implications derived from the work of Holt and Strean (2001) and Tonn and Harmison (2004) that propose reflecting-on-practice helps to increase the self-awareness of a practitioner and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses arising from the initiation of a consultation. The importance of fostering self-awareness has been suggested as a crucial step in the development of practitioner expertise (Simons & Andersen, 1995). Importantly, the
findings of this study indicate that self-awareness was augmented in participants in the post-intervention phase as they had started to develop their ability to examine their practices in-depth and therefore links between the development of reflective skills and increases in effectiveness are further corroborated. In terms of functional developments, participants commonly reported that reflective learning outcomes focused on gaining knowledge and understanding of what actually works in practice in the form of appraising approaches to ASP and the psychological interventions they administered. This again supports the suggestions of a range of researchers who believe that reflective practice allows people to make sense of and learn relevant knowledge-in-action that contributes to developing personal theories about the most effective methods of practicing in a specific context (e.g., Anderson, Knowles, et al., 2004; Johns, 1995; Schön, 1987). Participants also reported that understanding their knowledge-in-action enabled them to make appropriate changes to practice in attempts to enhance the effectiveness of the support they were providing. For example, one participant acknowledged that through reflecting they learnt that they talked too much during the session and provided the client with solutions to all of the problems they were faced with. However, the participant learnt that this might not have been the most effective way of designing, administering, and enhancing client adherence to a specific intervention. Therefore, the participant adapted their consultancy style by employing active listening strategies (cf. Rogers, 1974) and a more questioning approach. Indeed, all participants revealed that by gaining clarity on the reflective process and engaging in a structured approach to reflection learning outcomes were easier to identify and therefore implement into practice.

Further evidence to support the notion that the ability to engage in higher levels of reflection positively influences the effectiveness of ASP practice was demonstrated
through participants confirming during the social validation procedure that the intervention enabled them to examine and develop in a range of personal characteristics associated with effective ASP practice (e.g., personable skills, communication skills, practical service skills, professional skills, knowledge and experience of sport psychology; see Anderson, Miles, et al., 2004). Changes in these characteristics were also demonstrated through review of the participant’s performance profiles in which improvements to some characteristics appeared as a direct result of the intervention. Similar findings have been reported by Cropley et al. (2007) who found that by engaging in a process of reflective practice over a longitudinal period practitioners are able to consider and enhance their consultant characteristics associated with effective practice. Also linked to the findings of Cropley et al. it was apparent in this study that the development of reflective skills enabled participants to consider in greater detail the professional framework they employed as consultants. Specifically, all participants revealed that they were able to better understand the value of more humanistic, person-centred approaches to practice following the intervention due to increased self-awareness. Such developments support the comments of Richardson and Maltby (1995) who argued that reflection offers a path towards a humanising, person-centred approach to care. Moreover, Anderson, Knowles et al. (2004) contended that reflective practice offers an approach to practice that will help sport psychologists ultimately enhance their effectiveness in providing a humanistic athlete-centred service. Indeed, it is becoming widely recognised in the sport ASP literature that humanistic approaches are associated with effective practice (e.g., Holt & Strean, 2001). Encouraging practitioners to systematically reflect on their practice would therefore appear to be a method for the natural progression of ASP consultants towards approaches that may have a more beneficial affect on service delivery.
Participants in this study linked a range of benefits to the use of a structured approach to reflective practice introduced to them during the intervention and adopted in the post-intervention reflections. Particular emphasis was placed on the value of the guiding reflective questions developed as part of the intervention. This supports the findings of Knowles et al. (2001) and the work of Gibbs (1988) and Johns (1995) who advocate that the reflective process can be guided through the use of appropriate reflective questions such as ‘what were you thinking and feeling?’, and ‘why did you react in that way?’ However, it should be recognised that such an approach to reflection is but one method with alternative, less formal approaches also having weight within the literature. Indeed, practitioners have warned of the limitations of structuring the process of reflection as a pre-determined structure may censor alternative ways of approaching reflection, as well as binding the reflective practitioner to a certain way of thinking (Shoffner, 2008). Nevertheless, similar structured approaches have been reported to have been successfully integrated into ASP practice (e.g., Anderson, 1999; Cropley et al., 2007) and under the premises that they enable the practitioner to examine their experiences in detail rather than simply mulling them over (cf. Knowles et al., 2001), planned reflection may be more useful in ensuring that reflection is incorporated into practice (cf. Scanlan & Chernomas, 1997), and guided approaches can fashion practitioner interpretations in ways that can encourage deeper reflection and consequently provide tools for professional development (cf. Husu et al. 2008) a structured approach was adopted in this study. As a result, participants identified that they gained clarity over the reflective process and were able to incorporate the reflective questions into all aspects of their professional practice. For instance, participants suggested that by being more effective in their questioning they were able to make better sense of their professional judgement and
decision making by not only understanding the outcome of certain decisions but
exploring the reasons concerning why certain decisions had been made and the
potential impact of those decisions on the effectiveness of service delivery. This is
linked to the ideas of Martindale and Collins (2007) who suggested that the
examination of judgements and decisions being made in practice through reflection
may be one way of gaining an understanding of the effectiveness of an ASP
consultant. Thus, the interaction between higher levels of reflection and the
consideration of decision making further establishes the relationship between
reflective practice and the development of effectiveness. Although additional evidence
is required to establish the specificities of practitioners developing effective decision
making skills the findings of this study help to elucidate the processes concerned with
knowledge generation that aid and inform practitioners in the decisions they make.

Interestingly, participants in this study acknowledged that through becoming
more questioning and developing their understanding of reflective practice they were
able to adopt thoughtful practices during their actual consultancy and consequently
engage in activities indicative of reflection-in-action (cf. Schön, 1987). Reflection-in-
action refers to practitioners thinking as they act and displaying intuitive action and is
related to ‘thinking on your feet’ and ‘learning by doing’ (Edwards, 1999). For Schön,
being able to reflect-in-action presents the ideal professional state, representing a
critical awareness and powerful exercise of judgement. Indeed, if practitioners are able
to demonstrate an awareness of the environment and the situation as it is happening
and then able to process such information with a view to altering or maintaining
certain behaviours thought to influence the effectiveness of that situation they are
more likely to engage in practice that is ultimately more successful (cf. Ghaye &
Lillyman, 2000). Schön argued that the process of reflection-in-action may not be
conscious, making it less amenable to being taught in the more conventional modes of professional education. Participants in this study appeared to develop their ability to reflect-in-action by acquiring greater knowledge, skills, and experience in reflection-on-practice. As a consequence of becoming more familiar with reflective questions and gaining a greater understanding of their knowledge-in-action it appears that they were able to influence service provision as it was happening by reflecting during the session. Thus, support for the value of developing reflective practice skills as a precursor to practitioners being able to engage in activities and processes thought to enhance the effectiveness of practice is further established.

The benefits associated with the development of reflective practice skills mentioned above were reported to have been gained by the participants as a direct consequence of their engagement in the intervention. It must be recognised that such benefits may not be gained by blindly attempting to reflect-on-practice. Certainly, reflective practice is a highly skilled and complex process that can be affected by a learner’s cognitive ability (cf. Andrews et al., 1998; James & Clarke, 1996). It would appear imperative then that reflective practice skills are taught and nurtured to ensure practitioners reflect on their experiences rather than engage in other modes of thinking, a problem commonly reported in the reflective practice literature (Scanlan & Chernomas, 1997). Indeed, prior to the intervention being administered participants in this investigation reported that the process was ‘time consuming’ and ‘frustrating’ with one participant commenting that they ‘begrudged’ reflecting. Consequently, participant’s reflections were characterised by a lack of depth, which had a negative impact of the level of reflective learning participants were able to access. These findings emulate Bolton’s (2005) suggestion that people only learn and develop from reflective practice when they enjoy the process and benefit personally from it. By
becoming more aware of the reflective process, gaining clarity on issues associated
with the implementation of reflective practice, and enhancing understanding of the
potential significance of reflective learning through the intervention in this study,
participants reported that reflecting became easier, more enjoyable, and more relevant.
Consequently, reflective learning was augmented making reflective practice more
facilitative in the development of effectiveness. The impact of this was also
demonstrated through participants suggesting that the frequency they reflect at will
increase as a result of their participation in this study. In accord with the findings of
Riley-Doucet and Wilson (1997) the strength of reflective practice may lay in the
practitioner’s motivation to participate in a process of learning. Certainly, motivation
can be improved if practitioners are able to access the benefits associated with the
process. Conversely, motivation is likely to decrease if practitioners feel that they are
spending a lot of time reflecting for minimal gain. This idea offers insight into possible
explanations as to why reflective practice may currently be uncommon within ASP.
For example, the apparent lack of training and guidance on reflective practice may
inhibit the improvement of reflective skills, yet neophyte practitioners must engage in
the process to fulfil professional development requirements (cf. BASES, 2007).
Forcing reflection in such a way can lead to, as in the case of the participants in the
baseline phase of this study, practitioners begrudging having to engage in reflective
practice. Indeed, Haddock (1997) argued that reflective practice is influenced by a
person’s willingness to engage in the process. Thus, facilitating reflection through a
carefully planned and administered intervention, that provides a safe and supportive
environment, maybe the most prominent way of orienting ASP practitioners towards
There are a number of factors that must be considered with regards to implementing reflective practice training programmes and thus with the intervention administered in this investigation. First, researchers have raised concerns over reflective practice as it is a strategy reliant on memory (Wallace, 1996). Moreover, Newell (1992) highlighted the uncertainties with accuracy and recall of events making reflection a fundamentally flawed activity. In attempts to counter this problem the current intervention employed a diary that participants were instructed to complete immediately post-incident so that they could frame their experiences and use that information to produce more accurate and reliable reflections at a later date. This process was thought to reduce hindsight bias (cf. Jones, 1996) and encourage practitioners to examine unpleasant realities and feelings of discomfort rather than avoiding them by misrepresenting what actually happened. In fact, two participants acknowledged the impact of this resource as it was suggested to enhance the ‘honesty’ and ‘detail’ of reflections allowing a more in-depth insight into their experiences to occur. Second, even with interventions designed specifically to enhance reflective practice many attempts fail (Larrivee, 2008). It is therefore important to extend training beyond traditional educational tutorials and workshops to include support such as feedback and mentoring. This was particularly true on the instance of this investigation where participants were asked to engage in reflective writing, which has been reported to be a viable method in attempts to structure reflection and develop the process as a habit (Yost & Sentner, 2000). In line with the proposals of Griffin (2003) guided mentoring of the writing process was thought to enhance reflection by helping participants develop internal reflective dialogue. Findings from this investigation would support this as all participants reported that by engaging in reflective writing, receiving feedback on the process, and engaging in guided mentoring they were able
to better understand reflective processes allowing them to achieve higher levels of thinking. Indeed, participants were able to introduce such modes of thinking into their professional practice suggesting that reflective processes were becoming a habit within the duration of this study. Finally, the role of the educator must be acknowledged as fundamental to the process. It has been suggested that in order to teach reflection the educator needs to be skilled in reflecting (Andrews et al., 1998; Scanlan & Chernomas, 1997). It is proposed that the ability to facilitate reflection in others will help to establish credibility with learners and thus enhance their commitment to the intervention. Participants in this study commented on how the knowledge, skills, and experience of the educator enabled them to reinforce, gain clarity, and develop understanding of the reflective process as well as engage them in higher levels of in-depth thought. Organisations seeking to introduce reflective practice training programmes must therefore carefully consider the suitability of the educator and not just the content if such programmes are to be successful.

Despite the apparent success of the intervention in having an experimental impact on participant’s levels of reflection and subsequent levels of effectiveness, as reported by the participants in the social validation interviews, the quantitative measures of effective practice were somewhat questionable. For example, the psychological skills use of the participant’s clients fluctuated across data collection points and client feedback (ACE instrument) reported minimal changes in participant effectiveness post-intervention. Both of these measures represent effectiveness indicators as outlined by Anderson et al. (2002) but were not consistent with analysis of the participant’s reflections or the social validation interviews. In evaluating the value of such measures in the case of this study the nature of the consultancy work conducted by the participants must be considered. Participants reported working with
clients on specific issues not directly related to sports performance, such as eating disorders and physical illness. Such support follows recent trends in the professional practice of ASP that propose movements away from problem-centred approaches focusing on mental skills training to more humanistic approaches based on counselling (cf. Andersen, 2009; Anderson, Knowles et al., 2004). Consequently, the interventions applied by the participants did not follow straight-forward processes commonly associated with ASP practice. Hence, it is difficult to use the measurement of psychological skills as a determinant of effective practice as it does not evaluate the breadth and depth of such varied practice (Martindale & Collins, 2007). In addition, the use of a standardised feedback instrument in the form of the ACE in order to assess client views of the quality of the support is also problematic. For example, issues of social desirability must be considered as the relationship between practitioner and client may lead the client to responding in a way deemed favourable by others. In attempts to reduce these effects the ACE form employed in this study was modified to incorporate both qualitative and quantitative feedback and the clients were instructed to complete the form in their own time, away from the consultancy environment, and to return the completed form directly to the researcher to avoid practitioner bias. These findings would suggest that further research into the development of more holistic measures of effective practice is required in order to account for the ever changing nature of the service provided by ASP practitioners. It should also be recognised that if valid and reliable assessments are to be conducted practitioners must make informed decisions about approaches to evaluation based on the current context of their work rather than simply measuring Anderson et al.’s effectiveness indicators alone.

In relation to issues of measurement it must also be acknowledged that a number of practitioners have expressed concerns over the assessment of reflective
practice as it may inhibit the process and reduce its value (Bolton, 2005). First, participants may alter their way of thinking in attempts to ‘cover-up’ examples of poor practice and reflect in a way motivated by self-presentation and social desirability. Second, an assessed formal learning context can only too readily lead to instrumental rule-following strategies (Bolton, 2005). Finally, Beveridge (1997) maintained that there is danger that creating assessment criteria will have the effect of, “killing off the spontaneity and individuality of the process” (p. 41). However, the assessment criteria and process adopted in this study was developed from the extant literature which has reported the successful implementation of such an approach (e.g., Knowles et al., 2001). Additionally, participants were not notified of the formal assessment procedure, or divulged with the assessment criteria until after completion of the study in attempts to reduce the aforementioned problems. Researchers and educators must therefore be careful when adding assessment to training programmes to ensure that the reflective process is not compromised. One approach that may help to do this is presented by Moon (1999) who suggested that decisions must be made as to whether the participant is being assessed on content, the process of the writing, or the product of the learning.

**Summary and Future Research**

In agreement with Husu et al. (2008) the findings of this investigation support the notion that reflective practice is a genuine way of fostering change in practitioner’s professional action. Specifically, the intervention administered in this study had a positive experimental impact on the levels participants were able to reflect at and this consequently had a positive influence on the effectiveness of participant’s practice. The relationship between higher levels of reflection and effectiveness was demonstrated, in part, through quantitative measures of effectiveness. However, these were deemed as inconclusive due to the suitability of the measures given the nature of
the ASP support being provided by the participants. Nevertheless, social validation procedures provided significant support for the relationship and the findings of this investigation are therefore in agreement with Johns (1995) who suggested that guided reflection provides a route towards more effective practice.

The findings of this study provide substantial support for the claims made in anecdotal reports of the value of ASP practitioners reflecting on their practice. For example, in agreement with Holt and Strean (2001), Tonn and Harmison (2004), and Woodcock et al. (2008) participants in this study reported that higher levels of reflection resulted in greater self-awareness. As a result of becoming self-aware participants highlighted a range of additional benefits, such as: access to and understanding of knowledge-in-action; the development of coping strategies to reduce the negative impact of consultant emotions experienced during a session; and the facilitation of self-evaluation. A host of additional benefits commonly related with effective practitioners also emanated from participant’s engagement in the intervention. For example, developing the ability to reflect-in-action and adopting more humanistic, person-centred approaches to practice. Consequently, consistent with other work (e.g., Anderson, 1999; Woodcock et al.) the process of reflection significantly augmented learning and should therefore be considered good practice for professional development.

The value of specific approaches to the training of reflective practice has also been highlighted in this investigation and thus provides a resource for organisations (e.g., BASES) to consider in the pursuit of enhancing their professional training and development programmes. The impact of this intervention has recently been validated through transfer into the field of sports coaching. Specifically, Cropley, Rainer, and Adams (in preparation) have administered an intervention based on the one reported in
this study to UKCC Level 2 sports coaches in attempts to develop their ability to reflect in and on practice and consequently improve decision making processes. It is therefore suggested that with context-specific amendments the intervention reported in this study may lend itself to transfer across a range of professions.

Despite the clear benefits emanating from this investigation a number of concerns must be considered. First, participants recognised the extensive time and effort required to engage in higher levels of reflective practice. Andrews et al. (1998) warned that effective reflection requires considerable investment of time, supported by the participants in Knowles et al. ’s (2001) study who suggested that the process was particularly time consuming. However, in agreement with Holt and Strean (2001), there is no substitute for taking the time to think through important issues and therefore practitioners should afford specific time for reflection when planning a period of ASP support. Second, although participants reported some benefit from merely being asked to reflect on their practice during the baseline phase they also reported frustration and annoyance as a result of a lack of understanding over the concept of reflective practice. Therefore, practitioners need to be provided with opportunities for formal education in order to develop understanding, convince them of the value and worth of reflection, and encourage them to pay more than lip-service to the concept (cf. Andrews et al., 1998). Finally, the structured approach to reflection adopted in this study as well as the content and delivery of the intervention will not be lucrative for every practitioner and organisation. This study does not profess to have answered the many conundrums associated with reflective practice and the development of the reflective practitioner. However, the study does provide initial empirical support for the potency of reflective practice as a tool for both personal and professional development and has opened avenues for future research. For example,
more in-depth examination of the impact of reflective practice on professional judgment and decision making is required to elucidate the developmental processes associated with reflection-in-action. Further, the value of mentoring outlined in this study should be considered in greater detail to examine the potential of mentors in not only aiding the process of reflection but in helping neophyte practitioners develop the professional ASP knowledge and tacit knowledge required to meet the demands of the dynamic service delivery environment. Given the magnitude of the potential impact of reflection on the quality of ASP service delivery such areas are thought worthy of explicit attention.
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CHAPTER 6

GENERAL DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

“Education begins the gentleman, but reading, good company, and reflection must finish him.”

John Locke
(English Philosopher)
Introduction

The purpose of the final thesis chapter is to draw together the findings and present the implications of this programme of research. The chapter is organised into six sections that provide: (a) a summary of the aims and key findings of each study; (b) a discussion of the conceptual issues that emanated from each study and overall thesis; (c) the practical implications derived from this programme of research; (d) the strengths and limitations; (e) future research directions; and finally (f) a conclusion that links together the fundamental tenets of the thesis.

Summary

The central purpose of this thesis was to examine in detail the role of reflective practice in the development of effective Applied Sport Psychology (ASP) support. At the point of embarking upon this programme of research the available literature focusing on reflective practice and ASP support services was dominated by anecdotal accounts that appeared to follow the trend demonstrated in other fields (e.g., education, nursing) of “jumping on the bandwagon” of the concept of reflection as a mechanism for personal and professional development (cf. Ghaye & Lillyman, 2000). Consequently, in order to better understand the potential impact of reflective practice on the development of ASP practice it was necessary to develop a research programme that initiated an evidence-base to empirically support the systematic integration of reflection into professional training and development activities. To achieve this overall aim, the present programme sought to: (a) examine the potential links between reflective practice and the development of consultant characteristics associated with effectiveness (Study 1); (b) generate a more holistic understanding of effective practice in ASP and the role of reflection within the concept of effectiveness (Study 2); (c) examine how reflective practice can be taught (Study 3); and (d) investigate the
effects of developing skills in reflective practice on the effectiveness of ASP support (Study 3). The following sections provide a recap of the three studies that comprise this thesis.

Study 1: Improving the delivery of applied sport psychology support through reflective practice. With the field of ASP placing greater emphasis on the processes and factors that influence the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the delivery of sport psychology support (Holt & Strean, 2001), and in attempts to provide support for the findings of anecdotal reports available in the sport psychology literature, Study 1 endeavoured to investigate the potential impact of reflective practice on the development of ASP consultant characteristics associated with effectiveness. In light of calls for reports that draw upon authors’ highly personalised experiential accounts to extend our knowledge and understanding of specific phenomena, alternative methods of research have become more widely advocated (Sparkes, 2000). Consequently, reflections-on-practice, completed using a modified version of Johns’s (1994) structured model (see Anderson, Knowles, & Gilbourne, 2004) over a full year of applied practice by a British Association of Sport and Exercise Science (BASES) trainee sport psychologist (the author), were content analysed using themes emanating from the literature regarding the characteristics of effective service providers. The findings substantiated the notion that reflection improves self-awareness and generates an awareness and understanding of knowledge-in-action that can enhance the delivery of ASP support. It was also highlighted that reflection is intrinsically linked with the development of specific consultant characteristics associated with effectiveness as reflection was thought to present a method to access, make sense of, and learn through experience. Support was therefore generated for more systematic inclusion of reflective practice into professional training programmes, particularly as a
consequence of the highlighted difficulties associated with reflecting-on-practice, such as the complexity of the process involved. By accepting reflective practice more explicitly, governing bodies will therefore encourage applied practitioners to develop the knowledge and skills required to provide ASP support as well as equipping their practitioners with the skills necessary for self-evaluation, which will ultimately influence consultant effectiveness. These findings provided the basis for Study 2 by explicating the need for a more in-depth and holistic examination of the suggested links between reflective practice and effective ASP service delivery.

**Study 2: Exploring the relationship between effective and reflective practice in applied sport psychology.** Although Study 1 explicated links between reflective practice and consultant characteristics associated with effective practice, understanding of the more general concept of effectiveness within ASP remained equivocal and consequently only a limited appreciation of the relationship between reflection and effectiveness was available. In attempts to address these limitations Study 2 utilised two focus groups, both consisting of three BASES sport psychologists (Accredited practitioners and neophyte Supervised Experience candidates) in order to: (a) develop a more encompassing definition of effective practice, and (b) examine the concept of effectiveness development through a focus on practicing sport psychologists’ knowledge, beliefs, and practices of reflection. Utilising both inductive and deductive procedures, the data analysis protocol revealed a definition that encapsulated a multi-dimensional process of meeting client needs through the development of a working alliance, goal setting and goal achievement, and reflection-on-action. Initial support for the definition was gained through consensus validation procedures involving BASES Accredited Sport Psychologists ($n = 34$). Importantly, reflective practice emerged as a vital component in the concept and development of
effectiveness, with participants also highlighting the seminal role of reflection in experiential learning. These findings were suggested to present a preliminary framework to help guide and develop the effectiveness of a practitioner’s ASP service delivery. Further, the findings helped to elucidate the relationship between reflective and effective practice and thus have helped to remove some of the confusion concerning the integration of reflection into ASP practice.

Several issues emanated from the findings concerning potential problems with the use of reflective practice (e.g., a lack of understanding of the reflective process; the potential for reflective learning; the level of honesty in reflections submitted for assessment). The findings of Study 2 therefore provided critical insight into the development of an intervention programme that could be used to empirically examine the influence of reflection on effective practice and additionally outline the ways in which reflective practice could be successfully integrated into ASP training and development programmes (i.e., Study 3).

*Study 3: Developing the effectiveness of applied sport psychology service delivery: A reflective practice intervention.* This study, underpinned by the findings of Studies 1 and 2, as well as the extant literature concerning the development of reflective practice skills (e.g., Knowles, Gilbourne, Borrie, & Neville, 2001; Rhine & Bryant, 2007; Russell, 2005), aimed to: (a) examine the effectiveness of a context-specific training programme in developing reflective skills; (b) reveal whether a development in reflective skills directly influences the effectiveness of practice; and (c) explore how the content and potency of learning alters as practitioners developed their reflective skills. Two BASES Supervised Experience candidates and one BASES Accredited practitioner were purposively selected to participate in a staggered single-subject multiple-baseline intervention lasting 14 weeks. Specifically, participants
completed weekly reflections on consultancy sessions for 12 weeks and engaged in a two week intensive intervention (training) period delivered individually to participants after different baseline data collection periods (at week six, seven, and eight respectively).

Pre-intervention reflections were generally characterised by a lack of critical depth with particular focus placed on the context and environment of the consultancy session. Subsequent learning emanating from the reflections was therefore inhibited leading to realisations rather than revelations that had the potential to impact on the effectiveness of practice. Following the intervention all participants reported improvements in the level they were able to reflect at, with a greater reflective focus being placed on the practitioner and the interactive relationships with their clients. Participants consequently revealed an augmentation in reflective learning. Although both objective and subjective measures of the effectiveness of consultant service delivery demonstrated inconclusive improvements following the administration of the intervention, social validation procedures, using in-depth interviews, substantiated links between the development of reflective skills and increases in the effectiveness of participants’ practice. Specifically, participants’ reports supported the notion that by developing skills in reflective practice they were able to generate practical and professional knowledge, improve their self-awareness, start to make sense of their approach to ASP, and begin to understand the impact of their judgements and decisions on practice. These findings express the value of reflective practice training activities on the development of reflective skills as well as supporting the concept of reflective practice as a mechanism for the enhancement of effective ASP practice. Finally, the findings offer an insight into the potential development of ASP
professional practice training programmes through more systematic integration of reflective practice.

**Conceptual Issues**

This section provides an overview of the conceptual issues emanating from this thesis. Specifically, issues that related to the value of reflective practice for the development of consultant characteristics associated with effectiveness within Study 1, the definition of effectiveness and links between reflective and effective practice in Study 2, and the impact of developing reflective skills on the effectiveness of ASP service delivery in Study 3.

The review of the literature concerning effective and reflective practice within ASP contained in Chapter 2 highlighted the professionalisation of the field of sport psychology and the ensuing increase in the accountability of consultants to the quality of their practice. As a consequence of this, a greater focus has been placed, in both the theory and practice of ASP, on the evaluation and development of the effectiveness of service delivery. One concept that has been consistently linked with such processes is that of reflective practice (Anderson, Knowels, et al., 2004; Holt & Strean, 2001). However, the review of literature in this thesis revealed a number of conceptual issues concerning the utility and value of reflection in ASP as well as its proposed relationship with effective practice. First, the majority of studies in the literature were based on anecdotal evidence (e.g., Bull, 1995; Tammen, 2000; Tonn & Harmison, 2005) rather than on empirical investigations which aimed to uncover the intricacies of the concept within ASP. Second, as a result of these anecdotal reports there has been an almost universal acceptance of reflective practice within the field of sport psychology despite conceptual confusion and a lack of an evidence-base with reference to definitions, processes, and benefits associated with engagement in
reflection. Third, regardless of consistent links being made between reflective and effective practice a lack of scientific evidence that expounded such a relationship existed, which may have in part been due to the lack of conceptual clarity concerning a holistic understanding of the constituents of effective practice within ASP. Finally, although professional accrediting organisations (e.g., BASES; BPS) had integrated reflective practice into their training and development programmes a distinct dearth of guidance and support for the training of reflective skills was evident.

The lack of conceptual clarity regarding the concept of effectiveness in ASP and its links with reflective practice, as well as the unsubstantial evidence-base supporting the systematic integration of reflection into professional training and development activities resulted in a research programme, presented in this thesis, designed to examine these issues in detail.

**Study 1.** Study 1 of this thesis was the first to consider potential links between reflective practice and the development of consultant characteristics associated with effectiveness in ASP. Indeed, the process of engaging in structured reflection-on-practice (cf. Schön, 1987) during the Supervised Experience period of BASES Accreditation (see BASES, 2009) provided a unique insight into the relationship between reflective and effective practice. Specifically, content analysis of reflective narratives revealed a focus on a range of characteristics commonly associated with effective sport psychology practitioners such as: approach to ASP; communication skills; being personable; and professional skills (cf. Anderson, Miles, Robinson, & Mahoney, 2004). This reflective focus resulted in a variety of learning outcomes that facilitated the development of the quality of the practitioner’s service. Support was therefore provided for the anecdotal accounts in the literature that advocate the utility
of reflective practice for professional development (e.g., Lindsay, Breckon, Thomas, & Maynard, 2007; Tonn & Harmison, 2005).

In the instance of Study 1 a common theme emanating from the reflections that aided the consideration and development of characteristics associated with effectiveness was the notion that reflecting on consultancy work resulted in an improved self-awareness. Similarly, a number of authors have reported that by examining practice and considering the ‘self’ as an influencing factor of the quality of a consultancy session, the practitioner becomes more aware of their strengths, limitations, values and beliefs (e.g., Anderson, 1999; Anderson, Knowles, et al., 2004; Ghaye, 2001; Holt & Strean, 2001; Petitpas, Giges, & Danish,1999). Such awareness is proposed to afford practitioners the opportunity to also consider the impact of their thoughts, feelings, decisions and related behaviours on practice. Once this awareness is achieved the practitioner is thought to be in a better position to make informed decisions about how to maintain or alter practice in attempts to improve service delivery through consideration of their own characteristics (e.g., ability to apply theory to practice; professional skills). Indeed, Poczwardowski, Sherman, and Henschen (1998) emphasised the importance of managing the self as an intervention instrument in practice. They suggested that by paying attention to the self, thoughtfully analysing consultations, and being aware of limitations, self-interests, prejudices, and frustrations, practitioners will be in a better position to manage themselves and their practice effectively. Further, Morrison (1996) suggested that enhancing self-awareness can result in practitioners becoming empowered to take responsibility for their own development. This was the case for the practitioner in Study 1 as becoming more aware resulted in changes to the approach to ASP, the implementation of counselling
skills into practice, the development of theoretical knowledge, and a desire to uncover solutions to practice-based problems.

Another prominent issue arising from the reflective narrative in Study 1 was that engaging in reflection-on-action helped the practitioner to develop confidence in a number of areas. For example, confidence was reported to have increased in the application of a range of professional skills (e.g., providing encouragement, perceptiveness, being able to demonstrate personal mental skills). Consequently, the practitioner became more willing to try different approaches and activities and thus be innovative and dynamic to meet the needs of the given consultancy context. Cox (2005) indicated that reflective practice can be used to successfully increase levels of confidence by forming a bridge between theory, practice and experience. In support of this, the practitioner in Study 1 suggested that improved confidence, gained through reflective learning, facilitated creativity in practice and subsequently allowed more individualised support to be provided to the client(s). Reflective practice may therefore be considered as a process that encourages practitioners to have the confidence to remove themselves from their comfort zones and away from ‘one-size-fits-all’ support packages to a service designed to meet the needs of the specific client, which would potentially enhance the effectiveness of the ASP support (Tod & Andersen, 2005).

A final factor arising from Study 1 was the relationship between reflective practice and the generation and understanding of knowledge-in-action (cf. Schön, 1987). Knowledge-in-action is thought to represent a base of knowledge that is generated through reflection on our own experiences, which in turn presents practitioners with an understanding of how best to work in a given situation (cf. Ghaye & Lillyman, 2000). In essence, such knowledge is thought to be made up of social norms, values, prejudices, experiences, and different sources of knowledge (e.g.,
theory, aesthetics, personal, ethical) (Carr, 1989). When considered in light of the current problem or practice situation knowledge-in-action allows practitioners to be in a more informed position to act effectively than they would be through blind application of theory to practice. The practitioner in Study 1 suggested that through reflection-on-practice they were able to develop and make sense of this knowledge-in-action and thus become more successful in meeting the needs of the constantly evolving practice environment in which applied sport psychologists work.

Study 2. With prominent links being made between reflective practice and the development of characteristics associated with effectiveness in Study 1, Study 2 of this thesis attempted to examine the phenomena of effective practice in more detail by considering the creation of a holistic definition of the concept within ASP. Further, attempts to explore the relationship between reflection and this more general conceptualisation of effective practice were made to explain effective processes more distinctly.

Inherent within the emerging definition was the notion that effective practice is a multidimensional process focused on meeting the needs of the client. The definition was thought to embrace an athlete-centred approach to service delivery, which is indicative of current calls within the professional practice literature that advocate the use of athlete-centred, humanistic approaches to consultancy (Holt & Strean, 2001; Lloyd & Trudel, 1999) and demonstrates a movement away from problem-centred approaches to practice (Anderson, Knowles, et al., 2004). In light of this, the definition highlights the importance of developing a working alliance (cf. Tod & Andersen, 2005) and establishing, achieving and/or reformulating mutually agreed goals. The centrality of the role of the practitioner in facilitating successful practice was therefore determined. For example, the ability of the consultant to develop a rapport as well as
to develop and implement evidence-based interventions was recognised. It is proposed that the definition presented in Study 2 should therefore be used in conjunction with the literature that outlines the characteristics of effective practitioners (e.g., Anderson, Miles, et al., 2004). Indeed, the definition is thought to represent a process that may result in effective practice, while consultant characteristics reflect the attributes required to engage in the process successfully.

The definition also embraced the concept of reflective practice as a mechanism to reflect on the completed ‘effectiveness’ process and thus provide a framework from which practitioners could learn from their experiences. Including such an element further substantiates links between reflective and effective practice. It must be noted, however, that the definition outlines that reflection should be honest to ensure appropriate learning outcomes that are representative of the practitioner’s situation. This notion has particular ramifications for the way in which reflection is introduced, taught, and assessed. Certainly, encouraging practitioners to use reflective practice as a way of demonstrating evidence for professional training and development programmes may lead to those consultants fabricating detail in a socially desirable manner, a problem that has previously been witnesses in nurse education (Mackintosh, 1998).

With reflective practice being identified as an integral aspect of the multidimensional process of effectiveness, the ensuing discussion in the focus groups in Study 2 raised two main conceptual issues. First, it was outlined that ASP practitioners work in an environment that is constantly changing and in agreement with the finding of Study 1, it was suggested that practitioners must draw upon an integrated knowledge-in-action approach to ASP in attempts to cope with such demands. These thoughts echo the ideas of both Schön (1987) and Anderson, Knowles, et al. (2004) who suggested that such an approach aids practitioners in
dealing with complex practical situations that cannot be managed through simple application of theory to practice. With movements in the practice of ASP to a greater focus on counselling models of practice that require practitioners to work on a more reactive basis and make in-vivo decisions about the best courses of action (Holt & Strean, 2001; Sanders, 2002) it is proposed that methods that allow practitioners to learn through experience should be embraced alongside traditional positivistic frameworks of knowledge generation.

Second, support emanated for the way in which professional organisations (e.g., BASES; BPS) have integrated reflection into their training and development programmes. The support focused on the way in which this integration had increased the number of practitioners being exposed to and employing reflective practices. However, it also became apparent that these organisations provided little guidance or support for the use of reflective practice, which was thought to have had a number of adverse effects. For example, it is likely that a lack of understanding of the concept, derived from little guidance, resulted in practitioners engaging in processes not indicative of reflective practice (cf. Andrews, Gidman, & Humphries, 1998). Consequently, practitioners may not achieve substantial reflective learning outcomes as purported in the literature and therefore may lose motivation to engage in the process both at the time and for future Continuing Professional Development (CPD). Further, with respect to the previous point, reflective practice appears to have been accepted with little exploration over its successful integration into ASP practice. Practitioners from a number of related fields have warned against becoming ‘swept along’ with trends in reflective practice without questioning its value (Ghaye & Lillyman, 2004). Thus, there appears to be a need to develop the evidence-base that can inform the reflective practices of sport psychologists.
Study 3. In attempts to initiate the progression of an evidence-base concerning the value of reflective practice for the development of effective service delivery in ASP, Study 3 sought to examine: (a) how reflective practice could be taught; (b) the influence of improved reflective skills on the effectiveness of ASP practice; and (c) how reflective learning may alter as a result of practitioners engaging in a reflective practice training programme. Findings of Study 3 suggested that developing a practitioners’ ability to reflect on their practice (judged by practitioners’ reflections meeting higher order criteria; cf. Knowles et al., 2001) augmented significant reflective learning, and thus had distinct benefits associated with the improvement in the effectiveness of their service delivery.

When considering developments in practitioners’ ability to reflect at higher levels (e.g., conceptual, theoretical, critical) the findings of Study 3 clearly demonstrated improvements directly following the administration of the intervention. However, none of the participants were able to reflect consistently at a level representative of critical reflection. This is in contrast to the findings of Knowles et al. (2001) whose participants demonstrated improvements in the level of their reflections up to a critical level over the course of a Higher Education (HE) degree programme. Nevertheless, it is proposed that as Knowles and her colleagues were working with sports coaches the actual content of their experiences may have enabled a more consistent critical focus on the links between coaching practice and the broader social structures that may contribute to ethical decision making in practice. Further, it has been proposed that being critically self-aware is an acquired skill that comes with great experience (Hockly, 2000). Consequently, given that participants in Study 3 were able to touch upon critical levels it is permissible to presume that a greater data collection period would have resulted in more consistent levels of reflection. Indeed, Knowles et
al. collected data over a six month period allowing their participants the opportunity to
develop substantially more experience in reflective practice. Importantly, these
findings would also suggest that the purpose of the reflection should therefore be
considered when attempting to assess it based on reflective levels. For example,
reflections-on-practice that have the purpose of fulfilling a technical role, and thus
used to increase the practitioner’s accountability to their client, wouldn’t have to
achieve a critical level in order to be successful in attaining its goal. This is because
the reflection could focus on examining and justifying practice to increase confidence
that the practitioner was providing the best service possible (Anderson, Knowles, et
al., 2004). Reflecting in a technical manner would therefore allow the practitioner to
consider standards, competencies, and the development of mechanical aspects of
practice and achieve this need (James & Clarke, 1996). Nonetheless, in agreement
with Knowles et al., practitioners must strive to examine their experiences at a critical
level in most circumstances as higher levels of reflection are thought to augment
learning and have a greater impact on the effectiveness of practice.

Analysis of participants’ reflections in Study 3 demonstrated significant
developments in the content and learning following the intervention. Moreover, the
increase in reflective skills resulted in a shift in reflective focus from emphasis on
appraisal of the situation to an increased emphasis on the client and the self. Such a
shift supports the notion that by increasing levels of reflection higher order forms of
cognition are encouraged, moving reflections from issues of practicality to values and
beliefs (Jay, 2003). These findings appear to offer some guidance for ASP consultants
who are considering reflecting on their applied work and subsequently help to answer
the concerns of Martindale and Collins (2007) regarding what practitioners should
actually be reflecting on.
Reflective learning, which was clearly augmented in the post-intervention reflections, indicating the value of the training programme delivered, could be categorised along the dimensions of *attitudinal* and *functional* development (cf. Evans, 2002). From an attitudinal perspective, participants reported that they were able to gain better access to and make greater sense of their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours as a result of them engaging in a deeper, more questioning process. In support of the findings of Studies 1 and 2, participants linked this process to an increased self-awareness that enabled them to consider how they could best use themselves as an instrument to enhance the effective of their practice. This was particularly manifested through participants being able to consider their professional framework and develop more humanistic approaches to practice. This compliments the model of sport psychology service delivery proposed by Poczwardowski et al. (1998) by outlining the central role practitioners play in managing themselves and their practice. From a functional perspective participants suggested that developing their reflective practice skills led to them gaining knowledge and understanding of what actually works in practice. Again, in agreement with the findings of Studies 1 and 2, as well as the comments of both Andersen (2000) and Anderson, Knowles, et al. (2004) this indicates that through reflective practice sport psychology practitioners can access and learn from the relevant knowledge-in-action that contributes to actually “doing sport psychology.” Additionally, the more questioning approach participants developed following the intervention revealed a greater understanding of the judgements and decisions being made in practice. Participants revealed that they were able to make sense of the underlying factors leading to the decision as well as the impact of it on practice. Martindale and Collins (2007) suggested that awareness of such professional judgement and decision making processes had the potential to enhance the
effectiveness of service delivery, thus further clarifying the relationship between reflective and effective practice.

A final developmental aspect of participants enhancing their reflective skills, linked to the adoption of a more questioning approach, was that participants reported becoming more reflective actually in-action (cf. Schön, 1987). Indeed, Johns (1998) suggested that reflection-on can promote reflection-in-action and in the case of Study 3, participants were able to start making informed decisions and ‘think on their feet’ during practice. Participants were able to associate these developments with improvements in their understanding of and ability to use reflective practice as well as the expansion of learning associated with these improvements. It was proposed, therefore, that reflective practice offers a genuine way of fostering change in practitioners’ professional actions towards more effective service delivery.

The value of the training programme (intervention) administered in Study 3 must be recognised. Certainly, participants were explicit about the problems they faced with reflective practice prior to the training activities. For example, participants conceded that reflective practice requires considerable investment of time and effort, which may further be enhanced through a lack of understanding of reflective processes. Also, participants reported becoming frustrated and de-motivated with reflection and started to begrudge the process as a result of this lack of understanding leading to them spending a lot of time reflecting for minimal reflective learning gain. It would therefore appear imperative that reflective practice skills are taught and nurtured to help practitioners overcome such problems. This training and support should be provided in a safe and supportive environment that doesn’t attempt to force reflection but facilitates its adoption by practitioners (Hobbs, 2007).
Two final conceptual issues arising from Study 3 concerned the assessment of both reflective practice and effectiveness within ASP. First, a number of researchers have expressed concerns over the assessment of reflective practice as it: (a) may inhibit the process and reduce its value; (b) encourage socially desirable responses; (c) result in instrumental rule-following writing strategies; and (d) ‘kill off’ the creativity and spontaneity of the reflective process (Beveridge, 1997; Bolton, 2005). Similar concerns were outlined in Study 2 where formal assessment of reflection was thought to increase the likelihood of socially desirable reflections. Although measures were taken in attempts to overcome such issues, future investigations must consider the potential impact of formal assessment and take appropriate steps to negate the possible adverse effects. Second, some scepticism emerged with regards to the value and validity of proposed measures of effective practice. For example, the effectiveness indicators outlined by Anderson, Miles, Mahoney, and Robinson (2002) provide a case study approach to the evaluation of effectiveness within ASP. However, as a result of recent changes in ASP practice that represent movements away from traditional mental skills training approaches to practice (e.g., Thomas, 1990) several of the effectiveness indicators may not be applicable measures and thus unreliable views of the quality of the service are obtained. Such problems were evident in Study 3 where participants were providing counselling based support meaning that quantitative assessments of mental skills development and athlete (client) feedback were not accurate in representing the nature of the effectiveness of practice. Further, standardised qualitative feedback forms completed by the client on their practitioner are likely to be influenced by social desirability, thus skewing the accuracy of the feedback. These findings support the calls of Martindale and Collins (2007) who have suggested that future research must consider more valid and reliable measures of effectiveness.
Summary of conceptual issues in thesis. This programme of research emanated from the need to improve conceptual clarity regarding the concept of effectiveness in ASP and its links with reflective practice. The evidence-base supporting the systematic integration of reflection into ASP professional training and development activities was unsubstantial, with the literature being dominated by anecdotal accounts concerning the use of reflective practice as an aspect of neophyte training and development. As a result, little support or guidance had been provided to neophytes and professional practitioners alike regarding the assimilation of reflective practice into their applied work, as well as the potential impact of reflective practice on ASP service delivery. Accordingly, through in-depth examination, this thesis has provided substantial links between reflection and the development of effective service delivery. Specifically, through investigation of a holistic definition of effectiveness in ASP, reflective practice emerged as an essential aspect of the multi-dimensional effectiveness process, and as a mechanism for the development of consultant characteristics associated with effective practice. The findings also provide support for anecdotal accounts that profess the potential benefits to individuals and organisations likely to be uncovered through engagement in reflective practice. However, this thesis has indicated that without appropriate training and support for reflective practice a range of issues may arise from practitioners attempting to engage in the process, which detract from potential benefits (e.g., decreased motivation due to a lack of understanding of the concept). Consequently, the development of ASP consultants’ skills in reflective practice, which was found in this thesis to enhance their ability to provide more effective support to their clients, must be considered.

Practical Implications
A number of practical implications emerged from this programme of research that may be of use to both ASP practitioners and professional sport psychology organisations (e.g., BASES; BPS). These implications relate to the definition of effective practice, the development of reflective skills, and methods of engaging in reflective practice.

Definition of effective practice. The definition offers an insight into the process of effective practice and is therefore thought to offer a guide for practitioners when providing ASP support. Contained within the definition are five distinct phases that can be considered by practitioners when conceptualising, designing and administering psychological interventions. For example, practice can be directed by the notion that the success of service delivery is underpinned by the development of a working alliance and that the goals of practice should be mutually agreed by all stakeholders to ensure that the support being provided is designed to meet the specific needs of the client. The definition also emphasises the need for both the gaining of feedback from the client and the engagement in reflective practice as a framework for experiential learning. Practitioners must make informed decisions about the most appropriate method of receiving client feedback in attempts to elicit honest and sincere information that has the potential to influence future practice. Dishonest feedback, which may be delivered in a socially desirable manner, may result in the practitioner making unnecessary changes to practice or maintaining particular behaviours that actually have an adverse effect on the quality of the service. In agreement with Tod and Andersen (2005), the state of the working alliance may influence a practitioner’s ability to obtain honest feedback due to the quality of the rapport between consultant and client. It is important then that practitioners consider, through their reflective practices, their own characteristics that may influence their ability to engage in the
process and uncover not only areas for improvement but also particular strengths that can enhance confidence from and be built upon. Consequently, it is proposed that the definition offers practitioners information on which they can initiate their reflections when specifically examining the effectiveness of their service delivery and thus allows access to a more in-depth understanding of the measurement and evaluation of effective practice.

*Development of reflective skills: Integrating reflective practice into applied training programmes.* It is widely recognised, due to the complex process involved, that reflective practice is a highly skilled activity and must therefore be nurtured and developed within practitioners (cf. Gelter, 2003; Kuiper & Pesut, 2004). Despite this view, current professional training and development programmes within sport psychology (e.g., BASES Accreditation and Supervised Experience; BPS Chartered Status) offer little guidance, support or training to practitioners yet expect them to engage in, and provide evidence of, reflection-on-practice. This situation is similar to that previously experienced in the fields of nursing and education where reflective practice was accepted as a mechanism for both personal and professional development with little question over its value or integration into practice, resulting in these fields being accused of ‘jumping on the bandwagon’ (cf. Ghaye & Lillyman, 2000). However, in order for reflective learning and reflective practice to have any prospect of reaching their asserted potential, there is a need for organisational structures that support it rather than pay lip-service to it (O’Conner & Hyde, 2007). Indeed, reflective practice as a method for accessing, making sense of, and learning through experience fits well with the practicum framework of BASES’s Supervised Experience programme (see BASES, 2009) nonetheless it is proposed that this scheme is yet to
unlock the full possibility of reflective practice as a method for professional
devvelopment.

The intervention administered in Study 3 of this thesis is thought to provide
professional organisations with specific insight into approaches to the teaching of
reflective practice skills. In order to dispel the myths that surround reflective practice
and to enhance conceptual clarity over what reflective practice actually is,
practitioners need to be provided with basic understandings of the concept and how it
differs from other modes of cognition. Certainly, despite some agreement that critical
reflection consists of a process that can be taught to adults, without clarity on what
reflective practice is, it is difficult to decide on teaching and learning strategies (cf.
Russell, 2005). Additionally, reflective practice training programmes must be multi-
modal if they are to be effective. The intervention in this thesis was successful due to
the integration of workshops, applied training tasks, feedback, mentoring, and the use
of a structured reflective model with associated reflective diary. Professional
organisations have the resources to implement such training activities. For example,
interactive workshops that introduce neophytes and professionals to not only the
concept of reflection but also the practice of reflection would help to develop
practitioners’ understanding, confidence, and motivation to engage in reflective
practice. Moreover, mentoring may come in the form of ‘regional sport psychology
network’ meetings where practitioners are given the opportunity to reflect with their
colleagues. However, structures need to be implemented to ensure such activities are
symptomatic of action learning groups driven by a reflective framework.

Participants in Studies 1 and 3 advocated the value of a multi-modal
intervention by indicating that problems they had experienced with reflective practice
were either reduced or removed completely following the training. Practitioners and
organisations must be aware that without specific guidance or support it is unlikely that the benefits of reflective practice (reflective learning) will be obtained as readily. Additionally, practitioners must allow time for reflection on their practices when planning a period of support. For example, time should be factored in for preparation, service provision, collection of feedback, and structured reflection. A number of researchers have professed of the considerable investment of time required to engage in reflection but suggest that if practitioners are committed to lifelong learning and professional development then taking time to fully engage in reflective practices will be worthwhile (Andrews et al., 1998; Holt & Strean, 2001).

Finally, despite support emanating from this thesis for the systematic integration of reflective practice into ASP training and development programmes, organisations must be careful about the way in which they assess or ask for evidence of reflective practice. Findings of the studies in this thesis support the notion that formal assessment may inhibit the process of reflective practice, and also raise concerns over sharing reflections with an organisation which will ultimately decide whether you become professionally qualified or not. Heeding the calls of Moon (1999) therefore, organisations must make explicit what is expected of the practitioner in terms of whether their reflections are being assessed on content, the process of the writing, or the product of the learning. In any case, professional organisations must value the opportunity for neophyte and professional practitioners to examine and learn from experiences, and thus embrace the product of reflections submitted as evidence.

Methods for engaging in reflective practice. Considerable research, spanning a variety of fields, has considered the value of different approaches to reflective practice (e.g., Anderson, Knowles, et al., 2004; Johns, 1994; Moon, 1999). However, it is the author’s belief that all methods of engaging in reflection are equally beneficial as long
as they are used for a purpose and the process results in reflective learning. The specific methods adopted in this study represent one approach that has been successful in helping practitioners to better understand the concept of reflective practice and improve their ability to engage in the process of reflection. This approach was developed from the comments of Knowles et al. (2001) who acknowledged that structured methods of reflection allow practitioners to examine their experiences in detail rather than simply mulling them over. It is suggested therefore, that neophytes, at the start of their professional training, adopt such a structured approach to reflection in order for them to become familiar with the process, understand different forms of reflective questioning, and access the necessary information required to reflect effectively on their initial consulting experiences. Such procedures have been advocated in anecdotal reports of neophyte practitioners engaging in ASP service provision (e.g., Woodcock, Richards, & Mugford, 2008) and are supported by comments from participants throughout this thesis. For example, participants revealed that more structured reflective models encourage deeper levels of reflection as well as increasing clarity over the reflective process.

It is important to note that researchers have raised concerns over reflective practice as it is a strategy reliant on memory (Wallace, 1996). Moreover, Newell (1992) highlighted the uncertainties with accuracy and recall of events making reflection a fundamentally flawed activity. In attempts to counter this problem it is advised that practitioners make use of a reflective diary in which they are able to record specific experiences immediately after they occur. This diary can then be revisited at a later date when the practitioner finds an appropriate time to reflect more thoroughly. Participants in Study 3 of the thesis suggested that such a process enabled them to incorporate greater amounts of detail into their reflections, which had a
positive effect on the learning outcomes obtained. Participants were therefore able to consider a host of factors that may have influenced the quality of a consultancy session that may have otherwise been overlooked or forgotten.

*Strengths and Limitations*

A number of strengths and limitations exist in the present research project. Primarily, it is imperative to highlight the originality of this programme of research, in both theoretical and methodological terms, as a strength of this thesis. For example, the immersion of the researcher in Study 1 as the neophyte practitioner afforded the opportunity for first-hand experience of reflection-on-practice and the engagement in a year-long reflective practice training period. Such an approach supported recent calls in the sport psychology literature for the acceptance and use of alternative forms of enquiry to enhance our understanding of phenomena pertinent to the practice of ASP (Sparkes, 2002). This process additionally prepared the author to be able to deliver the reflective practice intervention in Study 3. Indeed, it has been suggested that in order to teach reflective practice the educator must be both currently reflecting on their practice and skilled in reflection (Andrews et al., 1998). Consequently, the design and structure of the research programme afforded the investigator the opportunity to empirically examine the concepts of reflective and effective practice, and is thought to have enhanced the credibility of the researcher in this endeavour.

With the close proximity of the researcher to the data in Studies 1 and 3 issues over the trustworthiness of data may be raised. Certainly, any credible research strategy requires that the investigator adopt a stance of neutrality with regard to the phenomenon under study (Patton, 2002). Being immersed as the practitioner (Study 1) and the educator (Study 3) may call into question the ability of the researcher to maintain such neutrality. However, in line with the suggestions of Lincoln and Guba
(1985) that qualitative investigations should be judged on the basis on trustworthiness
(e.g., credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability) the present research
programme employed a number of rigorous procedures in attempts to overcome any
potential issues. For example, credibility, concerned with demonstrating that the data
reported matches the constructed realities of the respondents, was increased through
peer-debriefing, member checking, and triangulation. Transferability, concerned with
whether the findings of the study transfer to other settings, was increased through thick
description of the methodology and findings to allow others to make judgements about
the transferability of the research to their own situations (cf. Anderson, Miles, et al.,
2004). Dependability, concerned with the consistency of the findings, was enhanced,
particularly in Study 3, by the employment of a staggered single-subject multiple-
baseline intervention. With this protocol if a change in behaviour occurs immediately
post-intervention it is implied, with confidence, that the independent variable and not
the passage of time of some extraneous factor caused the observed change (Mellalieu,
Hanton, & Thomas, 2009). Finally, confirmability is concerned with demonstrating
that the findings are rooted in the data and not just a figment of the researcher’s
imagination (Anderson, Miles, et al., 2004). In this thesis confirmability was increased
through data analysis procedures involving verbatim transcription of all interviews
allowing emergent themes to be traced back to the raw data, triangulation, peer-
debriefing, and member checking.

One particular limitation concerns the number of participants utilised in
Studies 2 and 3. For example, the use of only two focus groups each containing three
participants in Study 2 and only three participants in Study 3 may bring into question
the depth and value of the data gathered. However, in the case of Study 2, a similar
protocol to that advocated and employed by Jones, Hanton, and Connaughton (2002)
was utilised, and the depth and quality of the data emanating from this procedure was thought to outweigh any potential limitation caused by small sample size. Additionally, support for smaller focus groups is evident, with Edmunds (1999) suggesting that they generate a greater participant interaction and discussion, allowing issues to be investigated in greater depth. In the case of Study 3, the very nature of the intensive intervention and data collection periods meant that the researcher could only effectively manage up to four participants. Further, the strict sampling criteria employed significantly reduced the size of the population the researcher was able to draw participants from, and with two participants dropping out of the study after starting the protocol the researcher had limited options in attempts to replace them.

Due to the exploratory nature of Study 3 and the depth and complexity of the methodological procedures involved, it is appropriate to consider several strengths and limitations specific to this investigation. First, the adoption of a multi-faceted intervention grounded in theory strengthened the likelihood of achieving positive changes to participants’ behaviours. Second, the type of ASP support provided by the participant could not be controlled and therefore the selected qualitative measures of effectiveness were not entirely appropriate. In attempts to overcome this and substantiate links between reflective and effective practice, in-depth social validation interviews were employed. These provided the researcher with the opportunity to examine the underlying mechanisms of the changes in behaviour experienced by the participants and represent a progression in intervention procedures that utilise more rigorous validation procedures. Finally, Study 3 may have been limited by the failure to interview the participants’ clients. Such procedures would have enabled a triangulation of experiences and corroborated the reports of the participants with regards to the development of the effectiveness of their service delivery. Nevertheless,
as a result of the nature of the support being provided to the clients and the potential impact it may have had on the rapport between the client and practitioner, it was deemed inappropriate to conduct client interviews.

Future Research Directions

As a result of this research project, a number of recommendations are considered salient for future research. First, the definition of effective practice emanating from Study 2 offers an avenue for continued investigation into the concept of effectiveness within ASP. Potential research should consider the measurement and development of effective practice more holistically. Indeed, researchers have commented that the current understandings of what to measure and how to measure it do not represent all factors that are intrinsically linked with effective practice (Martindale & Collins, 2007). For example, consideration of how to access and make sense of professional judgement and decision making as an aspect of effective practice should be made. Such research would add to the current knowledge of evaluative practices and provide practitioners with methods of assessment indicative of modern approaches to ASP service delivery.

Second, participants in Studies 2 and 3 revealed that through reflecting-on-action they were able to develop a questioning approach to practice and engage in activities representative of reflection-in-action. It is suggested that this developmental process is examined more closely in future research in attempts to uncover the specific mechanisms underpinning such significant behavioural changes. This research would potentially uncover valuable information that could be used to guide training programmes and encourage practitioners to develop in-vivo decision and judgement making skills that have been closely linked to effective practice (Petitpas et al., 1999). In addition, this research could possibly highlight developmental stages in neophyte
training with regards to their ability to incorporate reflective learning into practice through an integrated knowledge-in-action approach to ASP consultancy.

Third, the value of engaging in solitary reflection and in shared reflection is well documented within the literature (e.g., Anderson, Knowles, et al., 2004; Ghaye & Lillyman, 2000; Johns, 1994). Nevertheless, in agreement with Woodcock and colleagues (2008), future research should consider the implications of shared reflection versus private reflection and their impact on features surrounding professional development. Some researchers have outlined concerns over the limitations of solitary reflective practice, particularly for students who may not have access to a body of professional knowledge that would allow for successful reflective practices (Moon, 1999). Further, learning through a socially constructed, shared process, symptomatic of an action learning approach, is becoming more popular within the literature (Ghaye & Lillyman, 2000; Knowles, Gilbourne, Tomlinson, & Anderson, 2007; Thorpe, Taylor, & Elliott, 1997). Findings of this research would have the potential to improve understanding of the most effective methods of engaging in reflective practice and clarify further beneficial processes for professional training and development in ASP.

Finally, related to the previous point, future research should examine the developmental processes associated with practitioners becoming eligible to act as mentors for reflective practice. Study 3 outlined the value of the mentoring process in helping neophytes to better understand reflective practice and subsequently aid the development of their reflective skills. However, little evidence of criteria exists that would help define the ‘expert’ reflector and consequently someone who is suitable to act as a mentor. This would potentially lead to the development of mentor training programmes and ensure consistency and quality across mentoring schemes.
Due to the potential impact that reflective and effective practice may have on the professional status of ASP it is suggested that all lines of enquiry deserve attention.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this thesis was to conduct an in-depth examination of the role of reflective practice in the development of effective ASP support. The programme of research has resulted in substantial support being generated for the relationship between reflective and effective practice within ASP. Indeed, the findings of this thesis are thought to have initiated an evidence-base that: (a) confirms reflective practice as a process allowing consultants to develop a range of characteristics associated with effectiveness in ASP; (b) identifies reflective practice as a framework for experiential learning and thus an integral aspect of the process of a holistic conceptualisation of effectiveness; (c) exemplifies the need for practitioners to engage in reflective practice training and be supported in their continued use of reflection; and (d) supports the notion that enhancing reflective skills results in the improvement of service delivery effectiveness. Additionally, the thesis provides insight into some of the problems associated with reflective practice, as well as detailed support for the practical application of training methods, which are thought to begin to dispel some of the myths currently surrounding the concept and negate the professed issues concerning the value of reflection. Finally, the author believes that this thesis has contributed to the empirical investigation of both professional and reflective practice in ASP. The thesis has therefore provided conceptual and practical implications for consultants and professional organisations alike in the understanding, development, and systematic integration of reflection into ASP practice, training and development programmes.
References


REFLECTIVE EPILOGUE

“If you will call your troubles experiences, and remember that every experience develops some latent force within you, you will grow vigorous and happy, however adverse your circumstances may seem to be.”

John Heywood
(English Playwright and Poet)
Epilogue

The five year process of completing the programme of research reported in this thesis has encapsulated a journey of learning through experience on a number of different levels, as an Applied Sport Psychology (ASP) practitioner, researcher, and lecturer. In fact the period of time I have been engaged in this research project has been a particularly challenging one but ultimately enlightening. Indeed, the very nature and aims of the research contained within this thesis required me to become immersed within the roles of practitioner, researcher, and educator forcing me to sink or swim in environments characterised by professional practice and a seemingly fundamental need to be ‘effective’. Nevertheless, I believe, and I hope many would agree, that I have developed as both a person and as a professional academic, and although these developments cannot entirely be attributed to my commitment to reflective practice it has certainly been a major factor.

The following narrative considers this journey and more specifically my current situation, knowledge, values, and beliefs that have altered since the commencement of this Ph.D. programme of research. Engaging in such self-narrative forms of writing is not proposed to be a narcissistic endeavour but is thought to provide the reader with a greater insight into factors that have been pertinent to my development (cf. Gilbourne, 2002). Certainly, it has been acknowledged that by drawing upon the highly personalised accounts of the experiences of the author/researcher we are able to extend our knowledge and understanding of specific phenomena (Sparkes, 2000). Thus, the narrative is designed to encourage discussion and allow readers to consider for themselves the transferability of my experiences to their own practice situations.
Being introduced to reflective practice and invited to engage in an extended period of investigation involving the concept has been seminal in my personal and professional development and encouraged me to seek out, analyse, and reflect on experiences that have allowed me to access knowledge through experiential learning. As a consequence, my disposition as both a person and as an academic has been transformed. It has altered as a result of me being *introduced to myself* and becoming *aware of myself* through reflective practice. Indeed, Orlick (2000) outlined that in the “pursuit of excellence” the person must first understand themselves. This academic journey has engaged me in a process that has facilitated such self-examination, and whilst at times I may have resisted against such intrusion, afraid to uncover the truth, to expose the weaknesses and shortcomings of my knowledge and practice, to reveal the true extent of the relationships developed in areas of my life pertinent to this thesis, ultimately I have established that committing to the process of reflection empowers people to become more comfortable in self-assessment and subsequently uncover ways to be more effective in their behaviours.

Commitment to reflection has been signified, in my case, by a continued willingness to plan time to allow for in-depth reflective practice, and although I do not profess to reflect in a systematic and structured manner as often as I did when I started this journey I ensure that all experiences that I consider as personally significant or critical are afforded reflective attention. Importantly, *critical incidents* are not always those defining moments, those divine revelations that are easy to identify and learn from, but are manifested by informal conversation, chance meetings, directed reading, and everyday experience as both a researcher and applied practitioner. Certainly, as I have progressed over this research programme, gaining Accredited status (cf. British Association of Sport & Exercise Sciences, BASES, 2009) as a sport psychologist three
years into the journey, defining moments in practice have become less frequent. As a result, it would have been easy to place myself on a perch and consider my training as a practitioner and researcher complete but reflective practice is about learning from experience (cf. Ghaye & Lillyman, 2000), and is a disposition of dedication to life-long learning and development. This notion is supported through the cyclical conceptualisations of experiential learning and reflective practice (e.g., Gibbs, 1988; Kolb, 1984) that represent continued action, experience, reflection, and learning. Consequently, my desire for continued development and improvement in all areas of my professional life continues to fuel my reflective practices and progression as a reflective practitioner.

As a naïve neophyte practitioner embarking upon a journey of professional training and Supervised Experience (cf. BASES, 2009) as well as a programme of research intrinsically linked to reflective practice, my limited knowledge of reflection resulted in an initial theoretical understanding of the concept that considered it as a framework for the examination of practice-based problems. Whilst this was indicative of the suggestions of a number of authors (e.g., Barnett & O’Mahoney, 2006) who outlined that the reflective process is initiated when individuals become aware of or concerned with an incident or problem, gaining greater experience of reflective practice and an understanding of the processes involved has resulted in a gradual change in perspective and reflective focus. I am in no doubt that when practitioners have a particularly negative experience they find the process of reflective practice easier, which may be due to their willingness and motivation to engage in more systematic approaches in attempts to learn from the experience so that they can attempt to stop similar situations occurring in the future. In fact this would clearly represent an approach to learning and professional development that would help
practitioners uncover important practice-based knowledge and thus enhance their ability to offer an effective service. Nevertheless, although reflecting on problems is important I am in agreement with the notion that problem-focused reflection should not be done at the expense of reflecting on other aspects of our working lives, such as reflecting on experiences where behaviour has been effective (Loughran, 2006). This change in perspective was initiated when I became exposed to the philosophy of Sir Clive Woodward. Specifically, in summing up the logic of his England rugby team, Woodward (2003) revealed:

You learn far more from success than you do from failure. Most people, when they win a match or seal a big business deal, go out and celebrate. If they lose, it’s the eight o’clock Monday morning meeting. For me it’s the other way around. When you win it’s the early meeting to find out why you've won, to build on the success. When you lose, then go out and have a few drinks (http://www.telegraph.co.uk).

Clearly, it is not recommend to overlook all situations that are not successful. Certainly, when faced with such experiences practitioners must uncover the underlying reasons behind the failing practice in attempts to rectify it. However, in these circumstances it is easy to let negative emotion associated with the situation cloud thought and judgement and before long thoughts and feelings can become consumed with self-victimisation. This was symptomatic of my thought processes following initial forays into ASP service delivery and without the support and guidance of my professional practice supervisor such thoughts may have resulted in the decision to ‘drop-out’ of the professional training programme I was involved in. Therefore, the philosophy, which is in agreement with several authors (e.g., Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998) who propose that reflective practices should equally focus on positive aspects of
practice and on the reflector’s strengths, provided me with a balanced view of reflecting that afforded consideration of the improvements of limiting aspects of practice as well as the development of awareness and maintenance of my strengths as a consultant.

It is important to recognise the impact that a year-long intensive training period had on my ability to understand and utilise reflective practice. It would be false of me to outline the ways in which reflection has helped me to develop as a professional and in turn become more effective in my practices without making specific reference to some of the problems, and the complexity of the processes associated with reflection. First, in the early stages of my development I was reflecting-on-practice with a distinct lack of professional and theoretical knowledge and as a result of the solitary process I adopted I found it difficult to understand what sorts of information I should be attending to from a particular experience as well as being able to develop appropriate courses of action following reflection. I particularly remember the frustration this caused as I was unable to access the benefits of reflection-on-practice that I had read adamantly about. Second, the investment of time required for in-depth reflection-on-practice must be considered. In the early stages, I spent long periods of time thinking about the method of reflection that I was using and probably less time on examining, understanding and reflecting on the incident itself. With time and experience I began to realise that the structured method I used was just the vehicle for my reflection. It stimulated, directed, and facilitated my thinking so that I was able to reach a reflective learning outcome. Once this outcome had been obtained it signified an end to the experience I had been reflecting on and prompted the integration of learning from that experience into my practice, so that when I acted again I could do so in a more informed manner. In honesty I have to acknowledge that in some, but not all, instances
this process of in-depth reflective practice does require practitioners to devote extended periods of time. Reflection is a complex process, the quality of which determined somewhat by a person’s cognitive ability. Therefore, practitioners must be dedicated to the process and account for this investment of resources so that they are able to engage in the reflection fully and not just attempt to throw reflection-on-practice in as an afterthought. Finally, I have found it difficult at times to learn from the experiences I have had despite attempting to engage in processes representative of reflective practice. I have found it difficult to access the objectivity in thinking that is sometimes required to view an experience honestly due to the emotion that has been involved. In attempts to overcome such issues and gain enough distance from the situation in order to understand it and learn from it I have tried a number of things such as talking to ‘disinterested’ others and leaving greater periods of time in between the actual experience and my formal reflection. However, I find it difficult to identify one particular instance or method that has resulted in this becoming less of an issue over the years. I suppose just the experience of reflecting became the catalyst to understanding that whilst those emotions play an extremely important role in mapping the canvas of the experience, and consequently need to be examined and understood, they form but one aspect of experience and must therefore be considered in the holistic context of what happened.

The period of training I engaged in has enabled the removal of a number of the recurring problems that I have experienced as a reflective practitioner. Yes there is still the issue of time, and as academics multi-faceted roles become ever burdened with the need for greater amounts of research, teaching, administration, and third mission activities (applied practice) it becomes more difficult to dedicate time for reflection. But, if practitioners are dedicated to learning and improvement then time for reflection
will be found and will form an integral aspect of professional practice. Undeniably, my developments as a reflective practitioner didn’t occur overnight. I had to trust the process, embrace the training and accept that I would develop reflective skills with experience. In doing so I was able to become more critical in my reflections and subsequently develop in a number of ways as a practitioner. For example, the development of a critical awareness of myself allowed me to uncover specific personal and professional weaknesses, which eventually made me stronger, and certain strengths that gave me confidence to be innovative and dynamic in my approach to ASP backed by this understanding of what I was particularly good at and motivation to improve those factors that may have limited my service delivery. This was also supported by a supervisory team who empowered me to make decisions about the direction of my practice and provided access to experts who were also encouraging of collaborative reflective practices. Such support has enabled me to develop my approach to ASP from problem-based, mental skills training forms of support, to a more humanistic, counselling approach. Additionally, it has spurred changes in my approaches to reflection. In the initial stages of this research programme and my training as a neophyte practitioner I was firmly rooted in a personal and structured approach to reflection, and although I received feedback on the structure and content of my reflective writing, as well as have both formal and informal conversations with my professional practice supervisor about my experiences, my involvement in reflective practice was a solitary one. As I became more comfortable with myself in the position of a trainee applied sport psychologist and Ph.D. student I began to embrace other ways to engage in reflective practice such as engaging in action learning groups and collaborative reflections with my supervisors. These approaches were particularly enlightening as I was able to access other opinions, other knowledge,
other modes of thinking and thus new ways of understanding and learning from my experiences. In doing this I became aware that although significant benefits can be elicited from individual reflection you are somewhat caged by your own knowledge, understandings, and opinions and as a result I made sure that I engaged in a combination of reflective practices to enhance the quality of the process.

What is most pleasing for me is that through my experiences and the research conducted as part of this thesis I have been able to generate evidence that has the potential to facilitate change within the professional training and practice of ASP. The importance of training as an approach to developing practitioners’ knowledge and understanding of reflective practice and their ability to engage in reflection is clear. Further, the influence that such training has on practitioners’ abilities to uncover learning through reflection and make it more habitual as an aspect of practice demonstrates a need for reform in such professional practice training programmes. Currently, there are few support structures in place to guide and facilitate the reflective practices of neophyte sport psychologists and as a result it is likely that many of the problems that I experienced are also being experienced by others. I am a firm believer, a belief that has been born out of my personal experiences, that if we are to utilise the findings of both empirical and anecdotal research to their maximum potential in terms of helping practitioners to develop the skills required to access the potentially transformational outcomes of reflective learning, then training and development structures must be embraced and integrated into professional training.

The culmination of this period of research and professional development is an encouraging one. I feel as though I have been lucky to be offered the opportunities that I have had and gain such experience in a variety of different academic roles (e.g., practitioner, researcher, lecturer). I also feel that I have worked extremely hard in
attempts to make the most of these opportunities and ensure that learning was obtained from each one. The journey thus far has been a difficult one, particularly at the beginning when my knowledge and understanding of reflective practice, as well as my motivation to engage in reflective processes, resulted in it being perceived as something I had to do rather than something that I wanted to do. Overcoming these problems through intensive, longitudinal training and effective supervision caused reflection to become a disposition, a habitual practice, perceived in my opinion as seminal for practitioners engaging in professional practice. In fact it is true that my training and development has resulted in reflective practice not being something I ‘do’ but something I ‘am’, a consistent approach to applied practice, teaching, and research that has made me questioning, open-minded, willing and able to make in-vivo decisions to improve practice as it is happening, and, based on the feedback I have received over the duration of this journey, more effective.

I do not see this as the end of the journey; I see this as the beginning. The five year research programme, professional training, and development has resulted in a wealth of knowledge, skill, and experience that can be used to make a difference. It can be used to help professional organisations develop their training programmes to embrace activities that have the potential to enhance the effectiveness of neophyte practice as well as giving them the motivation and desire to engage in life-long learning. Finally, it can be used to further develop my own practices as a consultant, to enhance the effectiveness of the service I provide, and as a researcher, to ensure that continued research within the area of reflective and effective practice adds to our current knowledge and practice base helping the field of sport psychology to grow as a profession.
References


