The Self-Practice of Sport Psychologists: Do We Practice What We Preach?

Abstract

Besides reflective practice the maturation processes of applied sport psychologists have received little research attention despite practitioners and trainees often reporting challenging circumstances. Within the clinical psychology literature the self-practice of cognitive techniques has been advocated as a means of addressing such circumstances, and as a significant source of experiential learning. This study details the self-practice of UK-based practitioners. Semi-structured interviews (n = 12), with accredited and trainee sport psychologists, were conducted in order to identify self-practices, and why these were engaged in. All participants reporting engaging in self-practice for a variety of reason such as managing the self, negotiating a perceived divide between theory and practice, enhancing empathic accuracy, and legitimising cognitive intervention. Some also reported difficulties with self-practice such as lack of time and contextualisation. We conclude that self-practice might provide a means of better understanding self-as-person and self-as-practioner, and the interplay between both, and is therefore recommended as part of practitioner maturation.

Tod (2007) highlighted the growing number of individuals seeking to undertake education and training as a sport psychologist. However, it has long been argued that there is relatively little guidance for the neophyte/trainee in relation to training processes and supervision (Silva, Conroy, & Zizzi, 1999; Holt & Strean, 2001; Tonn & Harmison, 2004), and therefore there is a need to further understand the processes of practitioner maturation in order that professional development might be enhanced (Wylleman, Harwood, Elbe, Reints, & de Caluwé, 2009; Tod, Andersen, & Marchant, 2011). Accordingly, Tonn and Harmison (2004) described the neophyte experience as akin to being 'thrown to the wolves' as a result of unexpected and difficult challenges that arose during a practicum. Furthermore, Holt and Strean (2001) described difficulties (also reported by a neophyte practitioner) associated with determining the focus of applied work (i.e. technical problem-solving versus professional-alliance development), a felt need to provide solutions, appropriate use of non-verbal communication, being able to transfer techniques from the classroom to the real-world, 'selling' their services to athletes, and dealing with their own resulting internal tensions. Stambulova and Johnson (2010) described particular internal barriers (e.g.,, self-doubt regarding the accuracy of assessing and understanding client needs, a perceived lack of skills, and difficulties in remaining emotionally detached from client experiences), and external pressures (e.g.,, lack of time, and clients' cancellation of sessions) experienced by trainees. Also, Tod, Andersen, and Marchant (2009, 2011) reported that trainees highlighted their lack of experience as being related to initial self-doubt regarding their ability to work competently and effectively. Therefore, it might be concluded that trainees often describe a sense of personal and professional exposure, and therefore vulnerability, during the early stages of their career (Woodcock, Richards, & Mugford, 2008).

However, trainees have also reported coping in a variety of ways through, for example, supervision sessions, communication within student-peer groups, and by maintaining confidence by rationalising their current position (Stambulova & Johnson, 2011). Also, Tonn and Harmison (2004) highlighted much learning following particular angst-ridden moments (e.g., presenting to a group for the first time, coping with self-presentation anxiety, and doubts regarding development of the professional-alliance) during a practicum. Tod et al. (2009, 2011) argued that such anxieties are to be expected, especially in consideration that trainees appear to initially adopt the relatively rigid role of 'expert problem-solver', and try "to fit the athlete into their service delivery approaches" (Tod et al., 2009, p. S7). Accordingly, from this perspective, the trainee/practitioner is the expert and so the onus of responsibility for client-change lies with the trainee/practitioner.

However, as trainees mature as practitioners during supervision they often experience a shift toward a more client-led, collaborative, and negotiated style of delivery. Here, a combination of the trainee's education, supervision, openness to new ideas, self-reflection, and a trial-and-error approach might lead to their 'survival' and increasing competence (Tod et al., 2009). Thus, as Van Raalte and Andersen (2001) suggested, a period of supervised practice enables trainees to hone their skills, further develop self-awareness, and establish how they might work with clients more effectively. Tod et al. (2009) also highlighted the importance of role-modelling that 'professional elders' might play within supervision. This suggests that supervisors and experienced practitioners should be engaging in practices which enable them to maintain competent and effective delivery of services. Also, of particular note, is that Woodcock et al. (2008) pointed out that trainees should already know a number of strategies (taught to clients) that they might equally use to facilitate their performance as a practitioner. In other words, sport psychologists should be able to 'practise what they preach'.

In addition to the limited guidance for trainees, there is also relatively little guidance for experienced practitioners. For example, little has been documented regarding the learning processes, and underpinning mechanisms, used and experienced by sport psychologists whilst seeking expertise. Instead, the focus of research has tended to be upon the outcomes of professional practice (Andersen, 2000). Therefore, relatively little is known regarding how contextualised 'expertise' might be striven for, and indeed what it constitutes. On this, Brown, Gould, and Foster (2005) highlighted the importance of understanding context, such as; "knowing what works with which persons in which situations", and "it is more than knowing what to do; it is knowing how to get it done" (p. 51). This conceptualisation appears to be a recurrent difficulty within professional practice (particularly for trainees). Thus, contextual intelligence is associated with contextualised practical knowledge, and is considered as a strong predictor of real-world success in professional practice (Wagner & Sternberg, 1985). With reference to Sternberg's (1985) Triarchic model of intelligence, Brown et al. (2005) outline how contextual intelligence comprises social and practical intelligence, and how the latter is related to the nature of tacit knowledge "that is never explicitly taught and in many instances never even verbalised" (p. 53). This comment echoes some of Schön's (1992) thoughts on professional artistry, or the ability to cope with "indeterminate zones of practice" (p. 51). Schön sought to illuminate the difficulties posed when working in unfamiliar 'territory' (i.e. the 'swampy lowland'), when having to adopt diverse roles, and when there is little or no guidance available. Within the swamp "problems are therefore messy and confusing and incapable of technical solution" (p. 54). Furthermore, Schön (1992) argued that there is a "high hard ground" which represents a place of 'safety' for a practitioner and where "manageable problems lend themselves to solution through the use of research-based theory and technique" (p. 54). As a 'solution' to the difficulties presented within the swamp, Schön suggested that professional artistry provides a source of knowledge that provides a key to successful practice, and therefore a potential bridge between the swamp and the hard ground.

However, Schön (1992) argued that many practitioners are able to cope with the indeterminacy of the swamp, but are often unable to explain how and therefore artistry often remains tacit.

Therefore, particular challenges to maturing sport psychologists might centre upon a constant renegotiation of 'where' to practice (i.e. the hard high ground, the swamp, or both), why, and when. As Schön (1992) also pointed out, dependent upon the outcome of this choice, there is a risk that practice is viewed as non-rigorous. Accordingly, "the swampy lowlands"' of practice (i.e. everyday practice) are messy, unpredictable, complex, challenging and stressful (Schön, 1992). But, once descended to the swamp it might be that practitioners are able to develop experience of working with more complex issues, and create a more effective intervention. From reports of sport psychology trainee/practitioners' experiences (e.g., Holt & Strean, 1991; Tonn & Harmison, 2004; Woodcock et al., 2008; Tod et al., 2009; Stambulova & Johnson, 2010; Tod et al., 2011) it might indeed be argued that much consultation occurs within the 'swamp'; perhaps regardless of maturation stage. Therefore, in relation to examining the development of sport psychologists, it would seem prudent to explore the nature of contextual intelligence, professional artistry, and how these constructs might be developed. Consequently, literature regarding how trainees, and indeed more experienced practitioners, might deal with these perhaps ongoing issues would be useful (Tod et al., 2009). Thus, Tod (2007) proposed that sport psychologists might learn important lessons from other psychology disciplines, as part of their development, highlighting that practitioners might share similar theory and processes. This paper therefore proposes that one possible solution (grounded within clinical psychology) might be for practitioners that work from a cognitive-behavioural perspective to engage in the self-practice of cognitive techniques i.e. 'practising what they preach'.

Indeed, Ravizza (1995) suggested that the most fundamental action trainees might take is to "work on yourself. You should never be taking a group through any activity, exercise, or technique that you really haven't gone through yourself" (cited in Simons & Andersen, 2000, p. 463). Yet, there

appears to have been little subsequent discussion of this notion. In contrast, within the clinical psychology context researchers (e.g., Bennett-Levy, Turner, Beaty, Smith, Paterson, & Farmer, 2001; Bennett-Levy, Lee, Travers, Pohlman, & Hamernik, 2003; Bennet-Levy & Beedie, 2007; Bennett-Levy, McManus, Westling, & Fennell, 2009) have long advocated the self-practice (SP) of cognitive skills as a focused training technique. It has also been suggested in therapeutic literature (e.g., Beck, 1995; Padesky & Greenberger, 1995) that there is strong reasoning for SP in that it permits 'road-testing' of skills and therefore opportunity to identify and correct problems in application (Padesky, 1996), and also enhance personal wisdom allowing for more adaptive consultancy processes (Bennett-Levy et al., 2003).

Trainee clinical psychologists have reported that SP offers a deeper sense of knowing (in comparison to didactic learning or role-play training methods) with regard to cognitive therapy practices, increased understanding and refinement of the therapist's role and change processes, an increased sensitivity and understanding in effective application of therapy skills, and improvements in being able to communicate the cognitive therapy conceptual framework (Bennett-Levy et al., 2001). Additionally, trainees felt better able to understand things from a client's perspective, and reported an increased perception of self as an agent of effective therapy having experienced its effects personally (Bennett-Levy et al., 2001). Of note is that the benefits of SP related especially to the personal and emotional nature of experience, in addition to the actual doing/experiencing quality. In contrast, reflecting on experience focused upon the application of cognitive strategies, which acted to externalise and objectify experience, enhance the depth of processing, and aid development of contextually relevant 'when/then' rules. Consequently, Bennett-Levy et al. (2001) suggested that SP affords a sense of knowing through two modes of processing; "a personal / emotional / experiential mode while practicing the techniques, and b) an objective, detached, analytic mode, involving persistent self-questioning while reflecting on the experience" (p. 12). Thus, the first point of impact of

SP was upon therapeutic understandings, rather than upon actual practice, and that over time these understandings impacted on therapist skills and subsequent changes in therapist self-concept.

A number of papers (i.e. Bennett-Levy et al., 2001, 2003, 2009; Bennet-Levy & Beedie, 2007) have detailed further potential benefits reported by trainees who engaged with SP as a formal component of training. For example, it was noted that SP facilitated the consultation process in moving from a structured interview approach to more flexible helpful two-way conversations which followed clients' agenda more closely. In contrast, as noted earlier, trainee sport psychologists have frequently identified the difficulties associated with an initial rigid problem-focused approach (Tod et al., 2009, 2011). On this, an increased attention to the therapeutic relationship following SP was also reported by Bennett-Levy et al. (2001, 2003), together with enhanced empathic attunement (e.g., greater sensitivity to clients' readiness to change). Furthermore, SP has been proposed as a method of avoiding deterioration of interpersonal skills (Bennett-Levy & Beedie, 2007).

Whilst there are a number of excellent recent papers (e.g., Anderson, Knowles, & Gilbourne, 2004; Cropley, Miles, Hanton, & Niven, 2007; Cropley, Hanton, Miles, & Niven, 2010) relating to the incorporation of reflective practice (RP) as a crucial component of effective and competent sport psychology consultation, to date, SP has not been viewed explicitly as a component in the training and/or practice of sport psychologists. Tod et al. (2011) suggested that there is a need to continue the examination of the competencies required for professional practice, and how they might be acquired, to assist future (and current) practitioners. Also, whilst sport psychologists might not engage in a therapeutic role with clients, there is considerable similarity between roles in terms of tasks and processes. Therefore, following the arguments outlined in support of SP, it might be argued that sport psychologists may also benefit. However, rather than simply making this assumption, the purpose of the current study was to explore the extent of sport psychologists current use of SP, whether SP was

considered useful and how so, and whether practitioners considered SP should be part of formal training.

Method

Participants

125 sport psychologists, either accredited (or seeking to gain accreditation) by the British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences (BASES), and/or who possessed Chartered Psychologist status with the British Psychological Society (BPS), were contacted via email to ascertain interest in participation. 18 individuals (12 males; 6 females) responded, and 12 subsequently participated in the study (10 males; 2 females). The majority of participants were full-time employed academics who were providing sport psychology support as part of their job-role. Participants' experience ranged from having provided sport psychology support for 23 to 4 years.

Procedures

Interviews

Following receipt of institutional ethical approval, each participant was sent a research briefing document that outlined the purposes of the research, potential risks of participation and corresponding safeguards, and an invitation to participate. Following institutional protocol each participant was deemed to have given consent by way of their participation in a semi-structured interview, which was conducted via telephone to allow more flexibility in interview dates and times, and to ease the inconvenience of travelling. To reduce interruption and error whilst interviewing and transcribing precautions were taken to minimise environmental and equipment hazards (e.g., each process was conducted in a private office).

Interview Guide

The interview guide was informed by Bennett-Levy et al. (2001, 2003, 2007, 2009) and Schön (1992), and focused initially upon participants' educational background in order to ascertain how participants might have been introduced to SP as a formal process, or whether they had engaged in SP as an emergent process. Participants were also asked about the type of work they typically engaged in with clients, their perspectives on professional artistry and SP, and what their recommendations for professional practice might be.

Data analysis and Presentation

Throughout the research Patton's (2002) guidelines were followed in order to create a structure for interview questions, data preparation, description, and interpretation. The first step involved listening to each interview recording, verbatim transcription, and then reading and re-reading the transcript whilst listening to the audio-recording. Thematic analysis was selected as the method of data interpretation, as it allows for identification and analysis of latent and manifest patterns in data (Patton, 2002; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Data analysis involved an iterative process of moving between the complete transcript, paragraphs, and sentences (within and between each participant) in order to construct emerging themes in detail (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Also following Patton (2002) and Braun and Clarke (2006), five further steps were involved in data analysis: a) generation of initial codes (sub-theme), b) searching for themes, c) reviewing themes, d) defining and naming themes, and e) constructing a report. The writings of Bennett-Levy et al. (2001, 2003, 2007, 2009) and Schön (1992) were used to guide the thematic analysis; in addition themes were permitted to emerge. Therefore, whilst participants' own perspectives were sought, a pragmatic combination of deductive and inductive analysis was used as it was considered impossible to begin the analysis without taking into account existing literature (Meyer & Wenger, 1998; Patton, 2002) and potential researcher bias. Examples of

initial codes included: ‘Uncertain empirical grounding’, and ‘Stepping outside the box’. Subsequently, each initial code was further categorised, and linked to others in an iterative manner (Patton, 2002), in order to develop higher order themes. For example, the initial code ‘Stepping outside the box’ was subsumed under the higher order theme of ‘Artistry’.

Trustworthiness and Authenticity

Guba and Lincoln (1982) proposed that the trustworthiness of qualitative research might be judged by its credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability. Also, Lincoln and Guba (1986) proposed a number of criteria by which authenticity might be established including: a) fairness, b) educative authenticity, and c) catalytic authenticity. Trustworthiness and authenticity are considered to be complimentary concepts (Tobin & Begley, 2004; Schwandt, Lincoln, & Guba, 2007), and so a number of these criteria were addressed. To offer a sense of fairness participants were provided with a research briefing document, a time-burden estimate, details regarding data protection, and the researchers’ contact details. Throughout the research process an audit trail (e.g., Yin, 1989) was kept relating to the procedures and data analysis, thus allowing the coherency, confirmability, credibility and dependency of argument to be examined (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). Adding further to the credibility of the study was the appropriateness of the participant sample, and the saturation of data evident during analysis. With regard to educative authenticity, several participants mentioned not having considered SP explicitly prior to the interview. For example, one participant said: “*I think taking part in this study, in the interview has helped me reflect further on what I do, and y’know I think that’s why I wanted to take part as well to invoke further thought*”, and another participant said; “*I haven’t really thought about it (SP) that much although I kinda know I do it*”. With regard to catalytic authenticity, several participants commented on their future use of SP, for example: “*Y’know I will take that on board and maybe employ it should a situation allow it*”. Interpretation of the data was triangulated between the authors, several colleagues, and postgraduate sport and exercise psychology students. The

resulting feedback led to reinterpretation of the links between several themes, for example: the inclusion of further data, and the repositioning of verbatim quotes amongst particular themes. Also, several of the participants were sent drafts of these interpretations for comment with respect to whether these fairly and accurately represented their perspectives and practices.

Results

Four major themes emerged from the analysis and are presented together with representative verbatim quotes: a) The Swamp, b) Artistry, c) Purposes of SP, and d) Difficulties with SP.

The Swamp

Participants discussed their experiences of professional practice, particular difficulties and uncertainties encountered (the 'swamp'), and how their professional development had enabled them to deal with the 'swamp'. One issue which often arose was the necessity, and desirability, of developing an evidence-based approach despite limited guidance regarding how such an approach might be developed. Furthermore, the rigour of research caused concern, and led some to doubt the basis of their practice. One participant in particular expressed disappointment that the potential lessons to be learned from practioners' (normalising) lived experiences often remain 'hidden':

> It challenges you, personally rather than professionally, the more you really see for yourself how you are, hold up the mirror to you, that can be quite shocking, but I don't think we have that explicitly in sport psychology practice (P17, 42).

This participant suggested that there was no apparent divide between 'self-as-person' and 'self-as-practitioner', and consequently the emotive struggles to bridge perceived gaps in literature exposed this individual to both professional and personal angst. However, despite these criticisms participants

clearly positioned themselves as distinct from those not engaging in rigorous evidence-based practice, with this distinction being formulated upon the existence of a ‘bridge’ between literature and practice:

> If we were to label them cowboys that’s maybe unfair, but those people are on the other side and jumping to whatever material there is to use, coming from an academic background we’re probably stuck on the other side, we travel across every now and then, but we’re certainly on one side or the other and I think the distinction is where do you find yourself, y’know, are you on the bridge, are you on either side (P14, 56).

This participant continued their attempt to normalise their struggles as a defining characteristic of rigorous practice and of the self:

> There is a difference between having knowledge, a conceptual knowledge, and then applied knowledge based on that concept, and I think this work (SP) helps us to get there (P14, 65).

But, despite some participants’ having occasionally ‘crossed the bridge’, they remained (even following considerable reflection) unsure of exactly how they had done so:

> Application of your knowledge is a key thing, I think it’s very hard to describe as well to be honest, I’ve done things that’ve been really good or effective or quality whatever you wanna call it, but I’m, even with reflection, I’m still unsure as to what exactly I did that was effective (P10, 22).

> In some instances that application it’s difficult to put your finger on why, or how, it turned out to be a good result, I’ve had cases before where I’ve thought it hasn’t turned out so well but the client has actually found it very productive (P1, 56).

Thus, participants did not view themselves as ‘all-knowing-experts’. Such knowing (or lack of knowing) has yet to be explored in the sport psychology literature, and therefore a potentially

significant obstacle to practitioner maturation exists (Higgs & Titchen, 2001). However, whilst some described a perceived gap between theory and practice, and not knowing how this gap had been bridged, others alluded to further difficulties relating within their training processes. For example:

> My feeling is, for a large part of the community our training is quite poor, compared with other psychology disciplines, the thoroughness of our training is certainly not as strong, that's my view, I think when I came through a lot of the sport psychology literature and research was based on a cognitive-behavioural perspective, and the supervision I had at the time was from that perspective although they never really spelled that out to me, it's only as I began to make sense of it over time that I realised those were the techniques they were using it wasn't this thorough, right now you do this and this you were, just thrown a load of techniques and actually as you get to know the subject you realise oh, so that's where it fits (P10, 23).

Consequently, many of the participants described having been left wanting in terms of guidance, and so had often arrived at their current position via leaps of faith.

Artistry

Therefore, most indicated that the training and supervision of sport psychologists in the UK, until relatively recently, has lacked rigour resulting in a potential lack of understanding relating to psychological approaches and the positioning of psychologists within particular frameworks. However, some described a further source of knowledge, that was difficult to articulate for some, but which enabled them to be fluid with regard to intervention. The terms 'trial-and-error', 'craft', and 'artistry' emerged (i.e. Schön, 1987; Higgs & Titchen, 2001; Paterson, Higgs, & Wilcox, 2005), and it appeared it was these constructs that enabled the 'crossing of bridges':

It's, a kind of, mixture of your philosophy, and then your actual practice, how your philosophy translates into actual practice, and at the same time, how you're evolving as a practitioner so where your philosophy and actual practice are leading into, not that there's an end goal apart from always to be improving as a practitioner, and trying to make the most of your experience (P16, 43).

Thus, several participants described craft knowledge / artistry as providing them with a means of doing something different, of crossing the bridge between theory and practice, and so as a further source of knowledge:

I'm not sure how you develop the artistry, what I did is maybe from my own reflection and I started to feel that often the sport psychology literature and workshops were throwing out the same tired old stuff, I thought that's not getting me anywhere, I know that stuff (P9, 37).

I'm really interested in the craft side of it because I think that would be what separates the more experienced, I can look back on my own career and think well what was I doing at the start, how kind of ABC it was, I felt a lot of sport psychology workshops or conferences offered me very little as a consultant, it was more, it was about delivery skills, how could I work more effectively with people, and I guess the sense of when you become qualified, and when you work with people in supervision they're very clear on I want to learn ABC, and how d'you do goal-setting, and actually you quickly move beyond that and realise that's actually very stale and it just, I think someone once said to me, it's like you're, here's this box, I feed you this information, and you do it, and you're just this kind of passive person who gets reeled off these techniques and actually what you realise is that it's a much more fluid process, for some people, I might y'know talk about goal-setting and it might be completely non-text book in terms of it might end up being very vague, but I've got a feeling in myself that's all that needs to be done, and they can fill in the bits and pieces, and if you actually talk them through, and said we're kinda gonna do an ABC, actually they'd probably find that a little bit patronising (P9, 45).

For this participant, the ongoing development of craft knowledge / artistry afforded greater appreciation of client experiences and issues, and fore-grounded the role of the self in applied work. Thus, craft knowledge and artistry represented a form of experiential learning and knowledge associated with enhanced delivery skills. However, the differentiation between professional practice driven by research literature and by artistry led one participant to speculate about the nature of competence from both perspectives:

I don't think this is artistry this is just pure competence, is knowing what stuff you bring to it, and teasing out what stuff is helpful, to that process, and what stuff is unhelpful, and not making the assumption they're doing it the same way so you're checking things out, not making the assumption they'd experience it in the same way, that's competence rather than artistry, and I think it does help in terms of your wider sense of people, and the sort of experiences people may have, that you can bring, and also not bringing your own needs to it, y'know and I'm still aware of that now I can be needy from a financial sense, you like to feel wanted, you like to feel needed, and you've gotta keep those things at bay, as much as you can, and not let that interfere with the process, sometimes it doesn't at all but you know with some of the cases it can, and I've found in things like, texting people, and keeping contact with people I've gotta be mindful about who am I doing this for am I doing it for them or am I doing it for me (P13, 26).

Here, considerable experiential learning was apparent, but this time in relation to developing an intuitive understanding of a client's needs and reaching appropriate ways of facilitating these needs:

The artistry side of it, things like the story-telling side of it, is to come at it through different ways, and I think that's artistry, because y'know people say about evidence-based practice, and yes there is evidence, but if you look at most evidence-based practice it's done in a sterile kind of setting, and it doesn't often account for individual differences, so I think artistry is about saying well here's the

evidence-based practice, I know I'm working from that framework but what does this person really need, and how am I gonna approach it with them is it gonna be slow, or is it gonna be very quick, am I very dynamic am I gonna be action I could be up walking round the room, I could be taking them out to do something, that's the bit which is about the artistry and I'm thinking of, ways that, most suit their needs, and I think of how are you gonna have an impact on this person (P13, 33).

Tod et al. (2011) highlighted that "given the relatively controlled classroom environment in which teaching typically occurs, it can be difficult to prepare students for the challenges and feelings that arise during and around client interactions" (p. 99). Therefore, it is likely that the necessary applied experiences for developing effectiveness and competency can only be gained in the 'field'. This was the case for most participants:

I read a lot, y'know in the sport world for example, there are a lot of magazines, what current thoughts, what athletes are saying, and sometimes the artistry side of it is about coming out with a key example, at a time which demonstrates there might be very much a parallel with that particular person you're working with, and it's a great example from somebody they might aspire to be, it shows, well they might be in the same predicament as you, I think that's what artistry is, the kind of, the competence stuff is about look I've got these qualifications I've done these courses, I know the methods, the artistry side of it for me is how do you kind of shape those methods for that individual person, and how d'you choose whether to do that particular thing with one person or not, or the next person (P13, 36).

Consequently, the more experienced practitioners increasingly sought, through the artistic application of knowledge, to inhabit the world of their clients.

Purposes of SP

All participants spoke of engaging in SP in some manner or other, and also actively reflected upon a wide range of purposes for these practices. For example, several spoke of the need to proactively 'sell' sport psychology to clients by disclosing their own use of, and attitude toward, the strategies they advocated:

If we use them as practitioners there's probably something in there saying either they're valuable or not, I'd like to know whether psychologists are not using them but are advocating their value, I tell you to think positively but I'm not doing it myself (P17, 62).

I just think the old cliché y'know, do as I do not as I say no, do as I say not as I do (laughs), it's very easy to say to people do something without doing it ourselves, but we need to be active within that as well, I think clients see us as being quite transparent, they'll be able to tell if we don't believe in something (P18, 73).

In some circumstances self-disclosure of SP appeared to be beneficial, and perhaps inevitable, not only in conveying an attitude toward particular strategies, but also in terms of illuminating various possibilities to clients and how these possibilities might occur:

I think if we're trying to help somebody believe their value our own personal experience at least shines a little bit of light on how they might work (P17, 64).

Thus, lived experiences of SP offered a means for understanding how, and why, particular strategies might work best and in turn this knowledge was used to convey this enhanced understanding to clients. This benefit has also been described in the clinical context (e.g., Bennett-Levy et al., 2001, 2003). Some participants also described how their lived experiences, and those of others, served to 'bring-things-alive' for clients suggesting that they are better able to relate to, and compare, the lived experiences of others as a source of evidence for the efficacy of sport psychology:

You might know the literature well but your own experience gives the life that other people see and those self-referenced stories are good as people attach their own experience to yours, it's a good way of getting your point across. People cannot easily apply theoretical issues to themself, they need practical real-life examples of application (P17, 87).

Disclosure of SP also represented an important element in the development of the working-alliance via an enhanced establishment of trust:

You have that intimate exposure, you know me a little bit better and therefore I trust you and if I trust you we'll have a relationship, if we don't, there's nothing there, nothing worthwhile (P11, 92).

Besides increasing transparency of practice, and providing an effective means of demonstrating the use of sport psychology, some participants suggested that self-disclosure also afforded a sense of genuineness and personal-professional congruence:

What I've found as a strength is being able to reflect on my own personal practices, because that really adds an element of authenticity to what you're doing, with an athlete (P4, 108).

I was just looking at why I wanted to do this interview, and I kinda had a little think about my philosophy and y'know I've said before I like to work on myself as a person, and I think one facet of it is this philosophy of wanting to improve and be your best (P15, 52).

Of note is that several participants also described managing their self-talk in specific contexts – mainly sport-related:

I use self-talk quite a lot while I'm out running from a number of perspectives, one to improve my technique, so when I notice there's something particularly sloppy about my technique, I'll use some kind of instruction to modify it, I also use a great deal of visualisation (P4, 75).

Another participant described how they use SP as a means of coping with personal demands that impact upon their consultancy performance; in this instance they spoke about managing self-talk in order to reduce performance anxiety relating to applied work:

You're aware of that inner dialogue more, and the dialogue doesn't tend to trouble you as much, you recognise there's gonna be some of that, and so I think some of your own skills you've learnt, in a way because you've been educated about them and you're kinda aware of what processes are going on so the dialogue doesn't tend to have that same impact cos you kinda say well here I go again there's that voice so what, and you just get on with it, it's not to say it doesn't trouble you, but it doesn't trouble you for as long or with the same intensity (P9,51).

Bennett-Levy et al. (2009) found that SP/SR was crucial to the development of professional artistry, and the enabling of a fine-tuning of skills that led to enhanced expertise. One participant spoke about expertise and the subsequent potential 'cost' of caring for clients, and described how SP also provided a means of addressing a blurring of their personal and professional life in order to remain functional in both:

I'm a very empathic person, that I have to say has been my greatest challenge, being able to be the best psychologist I can be, and have empathy, but not allowing myself to be drained, and, y'know, I don't think it has any impact on my practice it just affects me at the end of the day, and I think that's something I know I've got to work on, I just try and take time out, if it's something very particular about a client, then I will contact a colleague either by email or phone, and discuss the content of it, so the situation is more resolved, but if it's just because I've had a very long day seeing client after client, then I see that as something quite normal and I'm actually listening to my body and my brain that I am tired, and I'm going to be tired because the situation is tiring, and I just switch off and do something to

sort of unwind, and then, sort of move on for the next day, I'm quite good at listening to myself and I think maybe that's why I acknowledge it (P13, 24).

Thus, it seemed that SP provided both direct and indirect means of enhancing both personal and professional development. Moreover, it was clear that participants had, to varying extents, adapted cognitive strategies in terms of both how these were taught to clients and in terms of the content of this support. Therefore, these findings mirror those from the clinical context (e.g., Bennett-Levy et al., 2009; Lairieter & Willutzki, 2003). Thus, it appeared that fluidity in the application of intervention facilitated the 'crossing-of-various-bridges' leading to the development of personal and professional expertise and artistry:

I'm tending to do less obvious interventions, it's not really that I've done them myself and realised that they don't do what they're supposed to do, it's more that I see the results and sometimes they work and sometimes they don't and I've just adapted and refined over time, so I suppose it's more I've adapted my interventions through experience mostly, but not of me doing them (P16, 22).

Despite a wide range of purposes discussed for SP, some participants mentioned potential difficulties with engaging in SP. For example:

I couldn't possibly write it down and do reflective cycles, because it just takes too long, for the work that I do if I've got eight people to see in a day an hour each it's just not possible, I suppose that's where I must try to work on the SP because given the situation a lot of us are in where we're kind of seeing them on the hour every hour, it's very difficult not to go in, right, imagery, let's just talk about this, let's sort this out, and y'know into, kind of, very cognitive-behavioural like let's do it here's a worksheet right you're done next (P15, 45).

I can see an argument for, why experiencing it would be a good thing but also how experiencing it ourselves would still be different to how clients experience it, I kind of view both sides in that (P12, 36).

Thus, empathic accuracy might remain questionable given the individual nature of SP and client experiences. It seemed that some participants automatically associated SP with their own sport-related lived experiences, which appeared to present difficulty in being able to align with clients' experiences, but in other cases potentially enabled SP such that it would be likely to lead to greater empathic attunement. However, whilst viewed as an important process some participants stated that they simply did not have scope within their schedule to commit to SP, and therefore opted for alternatives:

I do think, that obviously as you learn new techniques or develop new techniques it's useful to have a go at actually, using them within your own sport setting if you can, and if it's appropriate, concentration skills training all that or self-confidence, or, goal-setting, all those sort of areas, I would say that I have attempted to use them in my own sport, and to see how effective they can be, and I think that is important, where possible you do attempt to do that, but, y'know you might get an email from a particular client and within a week you're meeting with them discussing their particular situation and then you're going into their training environment to deal with them straight away, so the time-line which you have to work with a client doesn't always enable you the time to be able to practise them necessarily, in your own sporting situation, or to be able to run by them, what I try to do if I'm working with a client and working on a new area or intervention that I'm adopting I'd run it by a couple of my colleagues who are also sport psychologists and run through the situation that I'm gonna be finding myself in and use them as a sounding board to ask questions to critique, to give me a little bit more confidence that what I'm adopting or planning to adopt is an appropriate and useful intervention to initiate, so whilst I might not practice it in a sporting sense, in other words practising it

myself I will run it by other colleagues to make sure that they feel it's sensible and appropriate (P2, 68).

General Discussion

This study set out to explore the SP of UK-based sport psychologists due to a current lack of research regarding processes relating to practitioner maturation. It was clear that each participant had experienced significant challenges and change throughout their career, and so in support of Bennett-Levy and Beedie (2007) their perceptions of effective and competent practice had evolved over time through a process of gradual refinement of knowledge and skill. For example, all had discussed a belief in adhering to an evidence-based approach to service delivery, and also recognised an increasing inclusion of the self within this process. Bennett-Levy and Beedie (2007) proposed that some aspects of professional practice might improve more than others, and that there is considerable variation in perception of competence over time dependent upon the learning opportunities available, the cognitive impact of practice, and the emotional states associated with practice. It is therefore possible to distinguish between different forms of knowledge appropriate to different aspects of applied work, as indeed some of the current participants recognised. Bennett-Levy and Beedie (2007) also discussed how particular forms of knowledge might be developed through various modes of learning. For example, professional artistry might be enhanced through SP. Similarly, in the OT context, Higgs and Titchen (2001) suggested that propositional, craft, and personal knowledge each interact to influence applied work. They also suggested that a perceived divide between certain types of knowledge might be influenced by the positioning of scientific knowledge as dominant due to its credibility and position within professional competency-based models, an inability to make other forms of knowledge expressible, and accountability within the medical-model of professional practice. In support and extension of existing literature within the clinical psychology context, the current participants described how SP enabled them to negotiate a felt divide between theory and practice, legitimate their

work with clients, facilitate self-management, and also facilitate a greater understanding of 'self-as-practitioner' and 'self-as-person'. Both the 'professional-self' and 'personal-self' are involved in creating an effective therapeutic relationship by facilitating professional judgement artistry: "here we see the importance in judgement artistry of creating a therapeutic but also self-involved relationship as part of clinical decision making and action/interaction" (Paterson et al., 2005, p. 413). It was perhaps this consequence of SP that had the greatest impact on the current participants. Haarhoff, Gibson, and Flett (2011) argued), as was also apparent in the current study, that a combination of RP and SP might serve to facilitate even greater understanding, and effectiveness, of practice.

As indicated by Katz and Hemmings (2009), within sport psychology there appears to be a shift toward client-centred approaches, and so away from a medical-model approach and a re-positioning of certain forms of knowledge (Higgs & Titchen, 2001). Here, a greater emphasis is necessarily placed upon craft and personal knowledge, and the blending of these with the subsequent informed application of technique (Higgs & Titchen, 2001). In the OT context there has been a trend toward exploring and embracing the value of professional artistry (e.g., Eraut, 1994; Titchen, 2000; Beeston & Higgs, 2001; Higgs & Titchen, 2001; Paterson et al., 2007) as a potential bridge between knowledge and its application. Fish and Coles (1998) suggested that professional artistry enables practitioners to make judgements, and improvise, in "uncertain and messy situations, where neither ends nor specific means can be pre-specified" (cited in Higgs & Titchen, 2001, p. 528). Despite helping them to negotiate particular challenges SP and artistry were perceived by the current participants as 'slippery' constructs, in part due to the necessity of having to move beyond the comfort-zone provided by research literature, but also in that the (subjective) self was heavily influential. Poczwardowski, Sherman, and Henschen (1998) highlighted the importance of analysing the self in order to develop a heightened awareness of potential barriers and limitations within the consultancy process. Therefore, continual development of self-awareness is a crucial step in the refining of practitioner expertise

(Petitpas, Giges, & Danish, 1999; Lindsay, Breckon, & Thomas, 2007), and so strategies for self-management should be used in order that the self might form an intervention instrument (Poczwardowski et al., 1988). According to Mearns and Thorne (2007) in order to use the self as an effective tool, an understanding and acceptance of the self must be in place first. Certainly some participants in the current study described SP as a means of self-management and self-acceptance (e.g., managing detrimental self-talk, and fatigue). Similarly, Tod et al. (2011) described how practitioners managed the self (e.g., anxiety experienced during applied work) via verbal persuasion. In the clinical psychology context reference has also been made to the necessity of identifying and managing one's own schemas in developing the therapeutic alliance (Bennett-Levy et al., 2001; Lairieter & Willutzki, 2003). Otherwise, a lack of self-awareness might impinge upon a practitioner's effectiveness (Leahy, 2008).

Also, literature from the clinical context suggests that a further advantage to SP is that practitioners might illuminate and further develop attributes that contribute directly to constructing an effective professional-alliance. Indeed, Lazarus (1992) suggested that "the client-therapist relationship is the soil that enables the techniques of the therapist to take root" (cited in Holt & Strean p. 190). It has long been recognised that the quality of the consultant-client relationship has a significant impact upon therapeutic outcomes (e.g., Sexton & Whiston, 1994; Martin, Garske, & Davis, 2000; Elvins & Green, 2007). Given the increasing acknowledgement of the importance of the professional-alliance in sport psychology (e.g., Andersen, 2000; Petitpas et al., 1999; Tod & Andersen, 2005; Katz & Hemmings, 2009) this would seem a particularly important aspect of practitioner maturation. Indeed, SP enabled some of the participants to enhance contextual intelligence, to position the use of sport psychology in a manner that demonstrated credibility and authenticity, and that provided a sense of normalisation through an enhanced empathic ability. It has similarly been reported that cognitive therapy practitioners developed greater empathy toward clients by experiencing first-hand some of the

potential barriers experienced by the clients (Bennett-Levy et al., 2003; Sutton, Townend, & Wright, 2007). Lairieter and Willutzki (2003) also highlighted that SP led to improvements in practitioners' communication skills and empathic ability. Schön (1987) placed emphasis on practitioners living out their roles, a philosophy which centres upon an embedded quest for lifelong learning spanning various forms of knowledge- and meaning-making. Bennett-Levy et al. (2001) reported that trainees who actively engaged in SP and SR developed a more 'lived' theory of cognitive therapy, as also reported by participants in the current study, affording a deeper sense of knowing and meaning-making. Therefore, further research examining the lived experiences of consultant development would seem beneficial in, for example, creating contextually intelligent sport psychologists.

With regards to the structure of SP, it is possible to take lead from Bennett-Levy et al. (2009) who sought to answer Schacht's (1984) question: which kind of training/supervision strategies are most effective in acquiring/refining which kinds of knowledge or skill? Also, what should practitioners focus upon during SP (e.g., perceptual skills, relational skills, therapist attitude, and/or cognitive therapy skills)? For example, it was found that trainees considered reading and lectures/talks as the most effective strategies for learning declarative knowledge and conceptual knowledge/skills, but relatively poor strategies for learning procedural skills, particularly in the interpersonal domain (Bennett-Levy et al., 2009). In addition, modelling was highly rated for both declarative and procedural learning, and for conceptual and technical knowledge/skills acquisition. Role-play was most strongly associated with procedural skills learning, and RP and self-experiential work (SP) demonstrated a similar pattern of perceived effectiveness. Both were considered as being effective in enhancing the procedural and reflective systems, particularly for the learning of interpersonal skills. Therefore, Bennett-Levy et al. (2009) suggested that a combination of SP and RP impacts at a conceptual level on knowledge and understanding, at a practical level on therapist skills, and at an attitudinal level on therapist self-concept. Consequently, the psychologist plays a number of roles:

598 "both therapists and clients, the givers and recipients of cognitive therapy, more or less at the same
599 time when practising on themselves" (p. 13). Therefore, they have "the chance to encode their
600 experience from both perspectives" (p. 14).

601 In terms of which techniques might form the basis for SP, following Lairieter and Fiedler
602 (1996) the aims of SP in sport psychology might be: a) facilitating management of the professional-
603 alliance, and enhancing personal and interpersonal skills, b) enhancing self-insight, c) reducing a
604 potential negative impact of the psychologist on the process, d) acquisition of counseling skills, e)
605 highlighting subtle processes of the skills being taught, and f) learning how psychological skills might
606 'work for the client'. Certainly, for sport psychologists, the aims and techniques might be different to
607 those in the clinical context wherein the self-application of therapeutic methods and techniques, such
608 as completing behaviour or thought records, behavioural experiments, assertiveness practices,
609 cognitive methods, or in some cases whole treatment manuals has been recommended (Lairieter &
610 Willutzki, 2003). Furthermore, differences in educational and training background, and professional
611 philosophy, might lead to different practitioner maturation journeys and associated focal points for SP.
612 Therefore, SP should be related to the development of specific professional competencies (Lairieter &
613 Willutzki, 2003), and so sport psychologists should be encouraged to use the skills and methods they
614 use with clients.

615 It must be noted however that SP is not without criticism. For example, Bennett-Levy et al.
616 (2009) argued that, whilst the inclusion of SP might be beneficial, concerns regarding its validity must
617 be considered. In particular, it was suggested that complete reliance upon the self-reporting of
618 practitioners, as opposed to objective performance measures, places doubt upon the integrity of SP. In
619 turn, debates exist regarding whether SP leads to real or perceived improvements in practice. It has
620 also been argued that, in the clinical context, there might be contra-indications to SP such as a previous
621 history of psychological disturbance, current major life stressors, and absence of outside social

support. Whilst these issues might not all be pertinent in the sport psychology context, clearly the current study has highlighted potential difficulties experienced by practitioners engaged in SP.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has highlighted that SP presents possibilities for developing 'professional artistry' through experiential learning; that is, the application of tacit knowledge (e.g., Schön, 1987). Therefore, there is a need for independent growth and careful supervision to avoid a 'piece-meal' approach to practice. Indeed, recent research has supported this notion in highlighting the importance of the supervision process suggesting that supervisors might follow professional development models from counseling psychology (e.g., Tod et al., 2007a; Tod et al., 2009). Stambulova and Johnson (2001) suggested that the process of practitioner maturation tends to follow a relatively defined path leading from understanding and delivering the 'toolbox' of psychological skills, to developing the professional relationship, to continuous learning, to developing and refining. The current participants described having followed such a development path and the increasing recognition of the benefits of SP. This mirrors observations within clinical contexts (Safran & Segal, 1990) (cited in Bennett-Levy et al., 2003, p. 144). In the clinical context, Bennett-Levy et al. (2003) concluded that "the kinds of changes reported by participants" undertaking SP are "those that research studies have identified as central to the development of competent and effective therapists" (p. 154). Within OT, Higgs and Titchen (2001) highlighted that a rapidly changing postmodern world presents many challenges at both local and global levels. Therefore, sole reliance upon research evidence, with the expectation of producing "certainty in an uncertain world" is naive (Higgs & Titchen, 2001, p. 527). Indeed, it was apparent that the current participants were often making complex decisions, perhaps within uncertain conditions, and so further research is needed to understand these processes as a means of developing a context specific model of learning and decision-making in sport psychology. Naturally the question arose during the interviews as to whether SP should form an integral (and compulsory)

element of training in sport psychology; all agreed that SP might be beneficial with one participant commenting: *"if you're not prepared to work at it yourself you can't expect other people to get involved, you can't expect to have that message that goes through to the people"* (P1, 36).

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