

Developing the Reflective Sports Coach: a study exploring the processes of reflective practice within a higher education coaching programme

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ABSTRACT *The present paper offers a brief discussion of two procedural frameworks, action research and reflective practice, drawing on literature from the practical domains of teaching and nursing. Practically, this is demonstrated through a 5-staged process, using qualitative methodologies, which explored perceptions of the 'reflective episode', a reflective skills development programme and associated psychological skills of reflection. (Stages 1–4). A final stage explores the researchers' perceptions of this research process. Study participants (N = 8) were sports coaches engaged on a 60-hour placement scheme within a higher education programme. Periodic assessment of the coaches' level of reflection (Goodman, 1984; Mezirow, 1981) demonstrates a shift in reflection between early (Stage 2) and post-placement (Stage 4). Reflective skills, placement characteristics and confidence related factors are discussed in relation to these stage changes.*

Introduction

The wide range of professional practitioners who support sports performance can include teams of specialist coaches, trainers, medical practitioners and sports scientists. This specialist expertise is often acquired through a mixture of 'professional knowledge' based programmes (e.g. academic courses or coaching awards) and practical experience within the sports setting (through supervised experience or in/post-course placement). Professional knowledge can be associated with the application of theories and techniques which are embedded within the confines of scientific certainty (for a review see Schön, 1983, 1987). Schön (1983) argued that as well as professional knowledge, practitioners must also develop 'artistry' or 'knowledge in action'. This notion of artistry shares similar characteristics to 'craft knowledge' (Brown & McIntyre, 1986; McFee, 1993) and 'tacit knowledge'

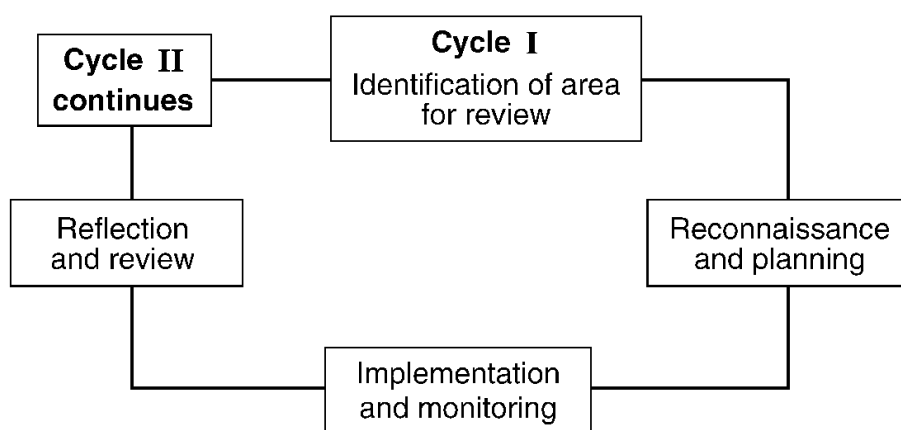


FIG. 1. The action research cycle.

(Polanyi, 1967). All these definitions perceive such knowledge as a characteristic of the competent practitioner and something that emerges from the experience of tackling the contextual and complicated realities of day-to-day practice.

The recognition that craft knowledge is an integral component of daily practice has stimulated inquiry into *how* it is acquired. For example, researchers in sports psychology (Anderson, 1998; Gilbourne, 1999; Gilbourne & Taylor, 1998; Martens, 1987) and coaching (Borrie & Knowles, 1998; Borrie *et al.*, 1999) have all discussed the role of craft knowledge within the development of the applied practitioner. These authors used qualitative to elicit craft knowledge from practitioners and document this information into a publishable format. A common protocol has emerged whereby, semi structured interviews are followed by analysis of transcript data through inductive content analysis. More recently, alternative forms of qualitative inquiry have become apparent in sport psychology methodology. As an example, Faulkner and Sparkes (1999) reported on an ethnographic inquiry into exercise effects on mental health. It is therefore suggested that both action research and reflective practice, popular within the 'educare' professions, e.g. teaching, nursing and social work, could be explored as a means through which to further investigate sport related practice knowledge. The following sections offer the authors understanding of conceptual viewpoints to 'set the scene' for the methodological location of the study.

Action Research

The roots of action research can be traced to the work of Lewin (1946) and are generally associated with changes in working practice (Castle, 1994). Carr and Kemmis (1986) describe action research as 'simply a form of self reflective inquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practice' (p. 162). In the simplest sense, the action research process is based around cyclical stages of reconnaissance, planning, observation and reflection (Elliott, 1991). A diagrammatic representation of this process is presented in Figure 1.

Action research literature has provided researchers with a complex array of procedures, approaches and definitions (Castle, 1994; Hart & Bond, 1995; McFee,

1993). However, common aims can be identified such as collaboration between researcher and practitioner; working towards the solution of practical problems within the workplace; a change in practice and development of context specific theory. According to McFee (1993), action research is research *into* action (values which hold our action in place in the practice) and *through* action (since the method of understanding may well involve changes to the practice). These contributors have all placed emphasis on 'action', 'practice' and 'understanding'.

Action researchers have consistently reported improvements in context specific work practices within the disciplines of health (e.g. Hart & Bond, 1995; Titchen & Binnie, 1993) and education (e.g. McFee, 1993; Tinning *et al.*, 1996; Waters-Adams, 1994). This emphasis on 'action' is also noted in sports psychology research where action research processes have been used to facilitate the application of psychological interventions within sports injury settings (Gilbourne *et al.*, 1996; Gilbourne & Taylor, 1998; Gilbourne, 1999; Evans *et al.*, 2000).

Reflection

Action researchers have argued that the 'process' of reflection upon practice is highlighted as an essential element within the procedural spiral. Furthermore, Elliott (1991) and McFee (1993) argued that the process of reflective practice is representative of the action research process itself. In contrast, Boud *et al.* (1985) and Gibbs (1988) hold that reflection *prepares* the practitioner for application with practical action ending the reflective processes. However, commentators locate reflection as a complex process as evidenced by the number of 'reflective typologies' that exist making a simple definition elusive (Ghaye & Lillyman, 2000; James & Clarke, 1994). In a general sense, reflection is thought to create a link between the application of professional knowledge and practice and to raise into consciousness intuitive knowledge or craft knowledge (Saylor, 1990). Kemmis (1985) proposed that reflection is:

A dialectical process: it looks inwards at our thoughts and thought processes and outward at the situation in which we find ourselves; when we consider the interaction of the internal and external, our reflection orients us for further thought and action. Reflection is thus 'meta thinking' (thinking about thinking) in which we consider the relationship between our thoughts and action in a particular context. (p. 141)

Encouraging practitioners to reflect upon practice is thought to create the opportunity for the exploration of good practice, the identification of areas for improvement and the formulation of ideas for change. Gibbs (1988) provides a diagrammatic representation of this dynamic, cyclical process (see Figure 2). These conceptions suggest that reflection might be viewed as a 'process' rather than a research paradigm, with the anticipated outcome being to prepare the practitioner for action.

The development of reflective techniques associated with reflection *on* action (the active processing of experiences after the event), and reflection *in* action, (or reflection which occurs whilst practicing and influences the decisions made and

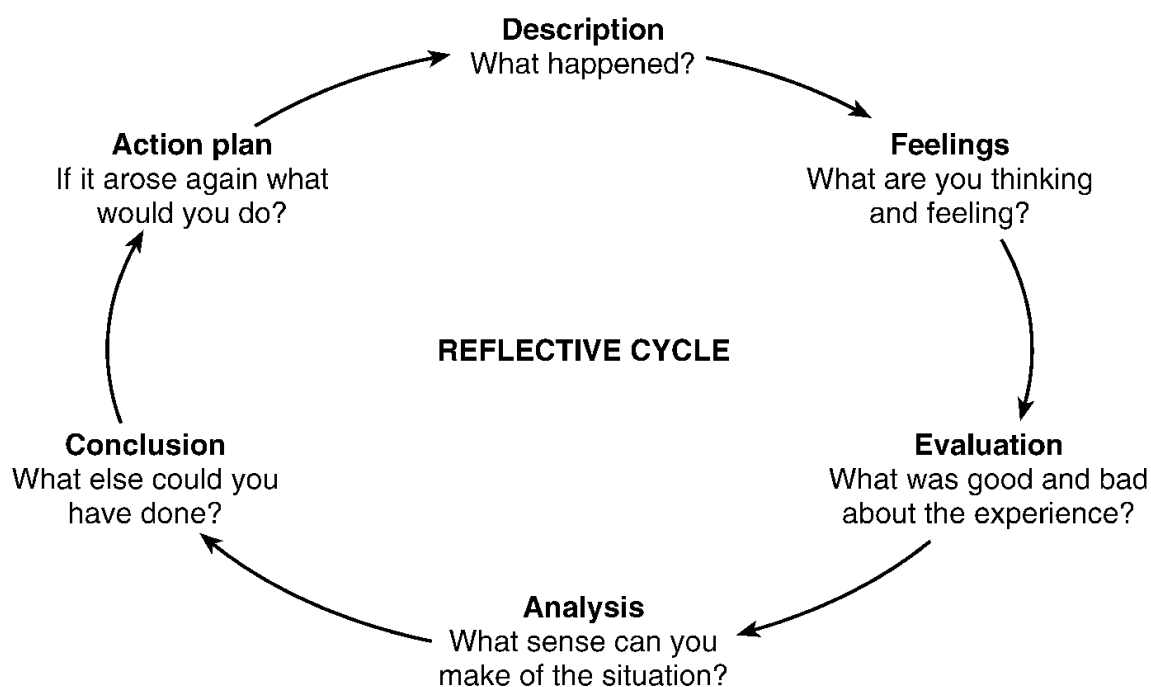


FIG. 2. The reflective cycle (Gibbs, 1988).

changes the nature of the experience) have been integrated into training programmes which aim to encourage the development of reflective practitioners (Schön, 1983, 1987). Within the fields of teaching and nursing, strategies to facilitate and evaluate reflection have emerged. Several authors have produced models that enable the practitioner to 'know' what it means to reflect. Ghaye and Lillyman (1997) categorise five types of guides/models as structured (e.g. Johns, 1994; Smyth, 1991); hierarchical (e.g. Goodman, 1984, see Table 2; Mezirow, 1981); iterative (e.g. Gibbs, 1988, see Figure 2; Murphy & Atkins, 1994); synthetic (e.g. Loudon, 1991) and holistic (e.g. Ghaye *et al.*, 1996). These guides can be used by practitioners to facilitate completion of a personal reflective journal (Bulman, 1994; Johns, 2000; Riley-Doucet & Wilson, 1997; Stapleton-Watson & Wilcox, 2000).

Personal reflection, as outlined above, is often thought to be limited by our own knowledge and understanding, therefore, sharing experiences with others can create a forum for facilitating an interchange of views. Several authors have reported that such 'action learning groups' force practitioners to consciously attend to their practice (Aspinall, 1990; Scanlon & Chernomas, 1997; Haddock, 1997). 'Craft' and 'professional knowledge' may also be scrutinised as practitioners are forced to verbalise their thinking and associate practice with differing conceptual positions (Scanlon & Chernomas, 1997). Within collaborative action research similar research procedures are seen to exist which feature moments of collective reflection. Investigators of reflective practice (Bulman, 1994; Scanlon & Chernomas, 1997) and action research (Meyer, 1993; Webb, 1989) have commented on sharing being facilitated further through informal discussions during a break in the working day with colleagues, with a family member/partner or through scheduled teaching seminars.

Reflection to enhance learning in pre-service teaching (Boud *et al.*, 1985; Kubler

La Boskey, 1994) and pre-registration nursing (Palmer *et al.*, 1994; Powell, 1989) have demonstrated how practitioners have reported perceived improvement their respective practices through the application of reflection. The assessment of reflection within taught academic programmes, however, continues to be a contentious point within the literature. 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).

Professional Development in Sports Coaching

Powell (1989) suggested that in order to understand reflective practice further in the healthcare setting it may be beneficial to investigate the development of reflective skills in other practically oriented disciplines. The status of coaching within the UK is such that it has not gained professional recognition in the same way as teaching or nursing. Sports coaching is predominantly a leisure time/voluntary activity (although there are anticipated changes to this with the introduction of National Lottery Funding). The educational development of sports coaches in the UK is complex and for many coaches necessitates pursuit of an individualised and, often, *ad hoc* learning pathway. At the core of this process are the national governing body coaching qualifications (e.g. Football Association Coaching Certificate, All England Netball Association level 1 award). These courses tend to occur in short blocks of time, usually several months if not years apart (Galvin, 1998). Typically, the awards consist of taught and examined elements including coaching and training principles, law/ethics and safety as well as sport specific training/coaching theory. This 'professional knowledge' (Schon, 1983, 1987) tends to be delivered through traditional lecture/seminar formats. In contrast, practical skills are taught through demonstration and supervised 'hands on' sessions with invited athletes in an unfamiliar context.

The moves in industry, teaching, nursing and allied professions towards competency-based assessments and work-based assessments began the shift towards identifying the importance of what a coach should be able to do rather than focusing on what they should know (Miles, 2001). One example of this within coach education programmes is the placement experience. This is completed either alongside or upon completion of 'taught' award programmes (with the exception of placements undertaken as part of a further/higher education). The placement experience emphasises rehearsal of practical skills through an informal checklist of activities completed before examination. Despite this, within the award programme rubric there is minimal development of underpinning skills which allow the individual to learn from practice

Methods which can help coaches to become more aware of and learn from practice and more effectively link theory to practice are thought to be beneficial (Borrie *et al.*, 1999). In this regard, reflective practice has been suggested as an important element in the education of UK elite sports coaches (Borrie & Knowles, 1998; Borrie *et al.*, 1999). However, the capacity of sports coaches to develop reflective skills has never been directly assessed in a coaching environment.

Purpose of the Study

Through this study the authors seek to develop and assess reflective skills through a structured development programme. To assess reflection a model, adapted from Mezirow (1981), Goodman (1984) and Powell (1989), has been incorporated into the protocol. The investigation highlights psychological processes that underpinned participant development of reflective skills, drawing upon the work of Gilbourne (1998, 1999) by synthesising elements of action research and reflective practice into an alternative form of qualitative inquiry. This protocol also emphasises the importance of the first author as facilitator and also recognises the importance of the researcher's own reflections using alternative forms of author representation through the 'confessional tale'.

Methodological rigor for the above is demonstrated through 'trustworthiness criteria'. Through trustworthiness criteria an investigator persuades other scientists including him/herself that the findings of inquiry are worthy of attention (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Hardy *et al.*, 1996). A number of criteria have been identified in the data analysis which are linked to credibility (qualitative equivalent of internal validity) transferability (external validity); dependability (reliability) and conceivability (objectivity).

A 5-staged protocol incorporating the above is presented in Table 1 with each stage systematically discussed in the following section.

Overview and Protocol of the Present Study

Study Participants

The participants in the study were BSc(Hons) coaching science students based at the Liverpool John Moores University Centre for Sport and Exercise Sciences, UK ($N = 8$). Four sports were represented in the group, tennis ($N = 1$); artistic gymnastics ($N = 1$); soccer ($N = 5$) and track and field athletics ($N = 1$).

Stage 1: Location and Organisation of the Module

Throughout the second academic year of the degree programme the curriculum core strand has an overall theme of developing reflective coaching. To facilitate this development students (coaches) attended theoretical lectures during semester one (September to December) which explored conceptual and practical issues associated with reflective practice. The researcher (author 1) presented an outline of the project for which eight coaches volunteered and the required voluntary participation agreement forms were completed.

By December 1997 all students were actively involved on coaching placements. The aim of the 60-hour coaching placements, in their chosen sport, was to develop reflective practice. This practice is supported through a reflective workshop programme (see Stage 3) conducted during semester two.

TABLE 1. Summary of study phases 1–5

Stage	1	2	3	4	5
Stage title	Preparation stage	Early placement data collection	Workshop programme	Post-placement data collection	Researcher reflections
Purpose	1. Develop understanding of reflective practice 2. Subject recruitment	Investigation of reflective processes at 30% of placement completion	Facilitate reflective practice through workshop programme	Investigation of reflective development at 100% of placement completion	Post-study reflection on the role of first author: Stages 2–4
Protocol and data collection	1. Lecture programme 2. Recruitment of subjects 3. Consent forms completed	Semi-structured interview	1.5 × 1hr sessions 2. Researcher notes 3. Interview data through Stage 4	1. Annual report 2. Semi-structured interview	‘Confessional tale’
Analysis	Discussed through Stages 4 & 5	1. Transcription 2. Content analysis 3. Level of reflection assessment	1. Transcription 2. Content analysis 3. Researcher reflections (Stage 5)	1. Transcription 2. Content analysis 3. Level of reflection assessment	
Timescale	Semester 1 (Sep–Dec)	Pre-semester 2 (Jan)	Semester 2 teaching weeks (Feb–April)	Semester 2 exam weeks (May)	Post-semester (June)

Stage 2: Early Placement

Data collection. Individual semi-structured interviews were undertaken when all coaches, except coach 6, had accumulated less than 30% of their anticipated placement/yearly coaching hours. Coaches were also expected to be completing reflective journal entries based on their practice in accordance with the guidelines given during Stage 1. The interviews sought to confirm demographic data and to investigate the coaches’ integration of reflection into their coaching practice. Coach 6’s reflection was not assessed as his placement hours did not reach the 30% completion criteria. A guide was used with each interview and the process lasted between 9 and 20 minutes.

The data was then transcribed verbatim. References to mentor coaches, placement venues and other persons not informed of the project were omitted from the transcript data. In line with Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) ‘trustworthiness’ criteria, this process represents referential adequacy. This is defined as a means of credibility through recording data so that others can check its accuracy.

TABLE 2. Assessment of reflection mark scheme for Stages 2 and 4 data based on adapted criteria of Mezirow (1981); Goodman (1984) and Powell 1989)

Level	State description	Criteria
1a	Reflectivity	Awareness, observation, description <i>Description of a short dribbling drill session with junior players</i>
1b	Affective reflectivity	Awareness of feelings (subjects) <i>1a followed by analysis of feelings, e.g. coach feeling happy/disappointed about session outcome</i>
2	Reflection to reach given objectives	Criterion for reflection are limited to issues of efficiency, effectiveness and accountability <i>1a, 1b and recognition of need for readjustment of skill level to achieve session aims</i>
3a	Reflection on the relationships between principles and practice	There is an assessment of the implications and consequences of actions and self beliefs/values as well as the underlying rationale for practice <i>1a, 1b, 2 and recognition another coaching style may be appropriate for session delivery</i>
3b	Wider reflection	Practitioner contributes towards discussion in practice with others regarding the nature of beliefs and moral issues <i>1a, 1b, 2, 3a, 3b and discussion with others/coach educators regarding culture of coaching in youth football</i>
4	Critical reflection	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 <i>As above and discussion as to whether view of teaching is commensurate with global issues in teaching children in other areas, policies and legislation</i>

Data analysis. The transcript data was reviewed for emergent themes from which quotes were extracted for illustration (see Stage 4). Level of reflection was assessed using an adapted model from Mezirow (1981), Goodman (1984) and Powell (1989). These criteria are shown in Table 2. Level analysis for Stage 2 is shown in Table 3 for comparison with Stage 4 data. Triangular consensus (a form of credibility within 'trustworthiness' criteria) was achieved for both procedures through consultation and agreement with both a BASES (British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences) accredited sports psychologist (author 2) and interdisciplinary sports scientist (author 3).

Stage 3: Reflective Workshops

Haddock (1997) defines an action learning group as:

An educational mechanism facilitated by a lecturer which provides a setting to encourage students to learn from and through experience. The group has the potential to facilitate reflective practice by enabling experiences to be shared, learning from each other and acting as a supporting structure. (p. 381)

TABLE 3. Development profiles of level of reflection assessment: Stages 2–4

Coach	Reflective level at Stage 2	Assessment level at Stage 4	Stage change
1	3a (Reflection: relationships between principles and practice)	2 (Reflection to reach given objectives)	– 1
2	3b (Wider reflection)	3b (Wider reflection)	0
3	1b (Affective reflectivity)	4 (Critical reflection)	+ 4
4	3a (Reflection: relationships between principles and practice)	3b (Wider reflection)	+ 1
5	2 (Reflection to reach given objectives)	4 (Critical reflection)	+ 3
6	Not actively reflecting	2 (Reflection to reach given objectives)	N/A
7	2 (Reflection to reach given objectives)	3b (Wider reflection)	+ 2
8	1b (Affective reflectivity)	2 (Reflection to reach given objectives)	+ 1

Note: Coach 6 was not actively reflecting at Stage 2.

The action learning group ‘reflective workshops’ were scheduled for one hour every two weeks during the semester two module programme. The initial interviews had highlighted potential areas for discussion that originated from practice, in particular the sharing of coaching experiences, developing reflective skills and confidence building. Five workshop sessions were held between February and May of the academic year. Session one focused on establishing a group confidentiality contract to allow safe disclosure of issues related to practice within the group. Topics considered during the five-week programme included teaching mixed ability athletes within a coaching session, managing parental involvement within sessions and managing the coach/manager relationship. The final session of the workshop programme concluded with an review and update by all group members of the topics they had presented.

The coaches’ perceptions of the reflective programme were gained by interviewing participants at Stage 4 of the research process. As workshop facilitator, researcher notes (author 1) were taken throughout the programme as a form of audit trail an aspect of conceivability within ‘trustworthiness’ criteria.

Stage 4: Post-placement

Stage 4 was initiated during the final week of the academic year. All coaches had completed their designated placement hours, accompanying reflective journal and had attended the reflective workshop programme.

Data collection. To assess reflective development the coaches were asked to complete an end of academic year (annual) report. The task was outlined as:

You should provide a summary of your development as a coach over the period Sept—May. You are expected to outline your: initial thinking (strengths and weaknesses); goals for the year and rationale; what you have learnt and from what source; how you revised your goals and why you revised goals; additional evidence used to stimulate reflection; where are you now in relation to your goals and strengths/weaknesses as a coach and how you have developed. (Level 2 module booklet, p. 4)

The reports were submitted in May and graded by the research team, as in Stage 2, based on the level of reflection criteria (see Table 2). The coaches were also re-interviewed at this stage to revisit the questions highlighted at Stage 2, focusing on reflective techniques and psychological processes, and explore changes in reflection between Stages 2 and 4.

Data analysis. The level of reflection analysis procedures deployed in Stage 2 was repeated for the Stage 4 data. Again, triangular consensus was achieved through the procedures.

Transcript data relating to the reflective workshop programme were subjected to content analysis based on the outlined protocol of Scanlon *et al.* (1989) and Gould *et al.* (1993a–d). Results are presented in Figure 3 with coach identification numbers. Triangular consensus was also achieved for this procedures through consultation and agreement within the research team who were all familiar with qualitative research techniques thus a high level of dependability (or reliability) was achieved. Researcher notes (author 1) taken throughout the programme and material from this source feature in Stage 5 of the study. Figure 3 presents themes related to the coaches' perceptions of reflective workshop programme. Level of reflection analysis is shown in Table 3 for comparison with Stage 2 data.

Stage 5: A 'Confessional Tale'

In contrast to the qualitative data analysis (Stages 2–4) this final stage highlights a dual analysis of the research journey that has been undertaken by author 1. First, a methodological analysis is presented and second a self-reflexive analysis which explores the 'tensions' experienced throughout the duration of the project. This final stage again represents an audit trail, an aspect of conceivability criteria.

Results and Discussion (Stages 1–4)

Introduction

The interview data at Stages 2 and 4 elicited several issues for discussion. First, the reflective workshop programme (Stage 3) is discussed. Second, the coaches'

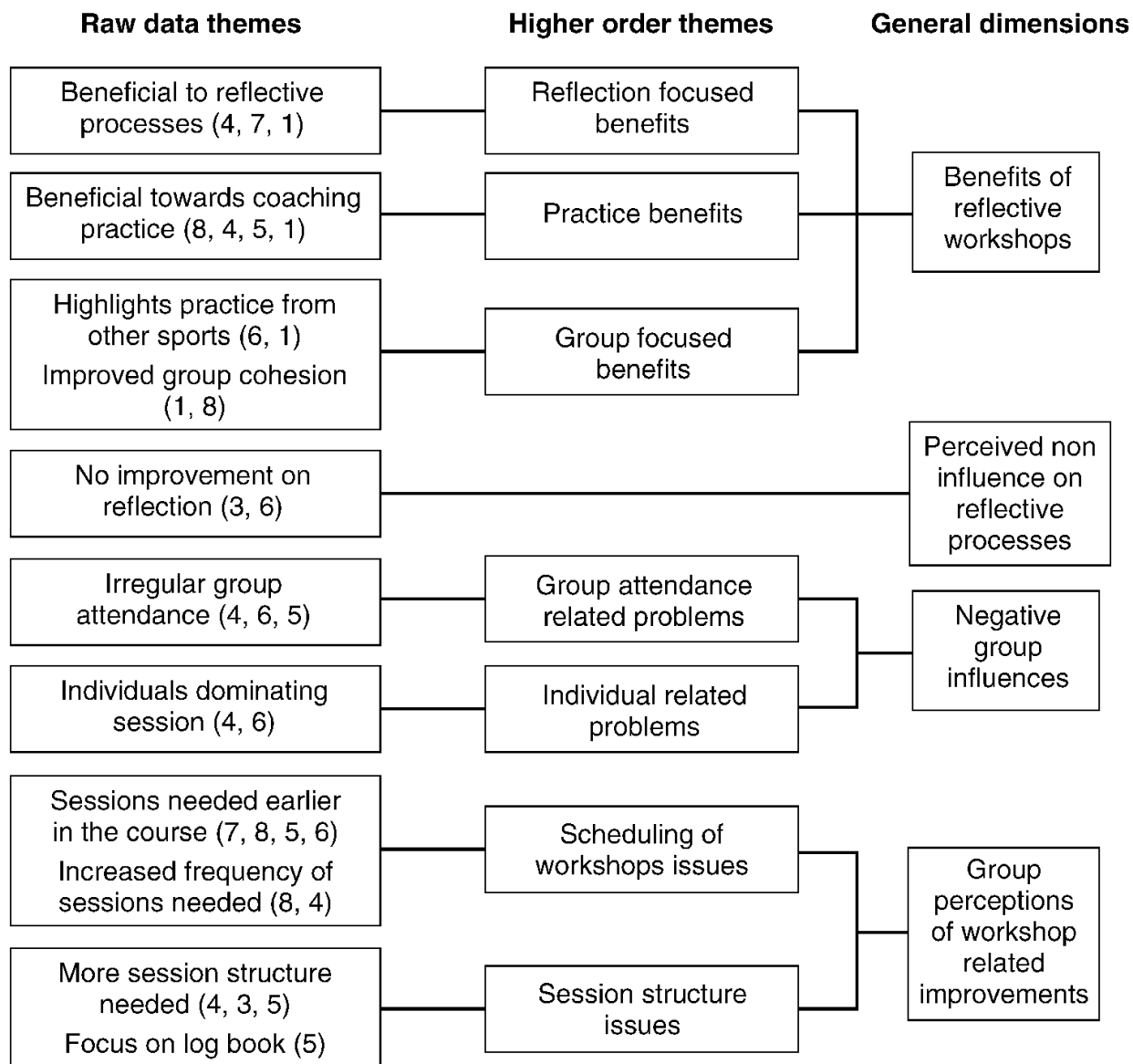


FIG. 3. Analysis of the coaches' perceptions of the reflective workshop sessions.

reflective processes and techniques at Stages 2 and 4 are then explored and an assessment of reflection is considered. Finally, a section which documents my own experiences of the process is presented.

Appraisal of the Reflective Programme: Stage 3

Coaches' appraisal of the reflective workshop programme. Generally the coaches felt that the workshop programme achieved, and in many cases surpassed, its intended aim to facilitate individual disclosure of incidents to the group, allow collective discussion and generate action plans. The group predominantly comprised soccer coaches, although other interesting perspectives and practice ideas from the coaches from individual sports (artistic gymnastics, track athletics, tennis) proved valuable in fuelling discussion and formulating action plans for the soccer coaches and vice versa. As a means of illustration coaches reported:

They (the sessions) helped me reflect a lot more on coaching and yourself and that helped by making us focus in I know that's when I started to reflect more because you were there doing it. (coach 4)

I liked the exchange ... they (the workshops) were productive. (coach 1)

It (the workshop) gave me an insight ... it was just interesting to hear what everyone else was doing ... it helped with the actual coaching to see how say (coach 3) had dealt with a particular problem. (coach 8)

On a more critical note, two coaches reported that they had felt the sessions had little impact on their reflective development.

We just talked in circles a bit ... we needed some clear headings and categories rather than just go round in circles not getting anywhere ... I know I didn't give it 100% by not attending but I don't like things like that I prefer to work alone. (coach 7)

I wouldn't say (the sessions) improved the reflection, to be honest (coach 3).

Proposals for the reflective workshop programme: Stage 3. Feedback from the coaches indicated that the workshops needed to be an integral part of the module from the onset of the placement scheme (see Figure 3). Several compulsory workshops followed by optional group sessions may have alleviated some of the attendance and session related concerns expressed by coaches who were disillusioned by the initial sessions. Many coaches, however, reflected on problematic incidents that had occurred during the early stages of their placement which both they and myself felt these issues may have benefited from earlier support.

Reflections on the workshop facilitator role: Author (1). The facilitator role was a difficult and multifaceted task requiring me to act as a notetaker, timekeeper, chairperson and practitioner. I felt it was also important to feel comfortable with this role and not project any anxieties I may have felt into the group. These anxieties arose from a combination of lack of teaching experience and general concerns relating to initiating a research study.

Alongside the workshop programme opportunities arose for personal disclosure through one-to-one discussions which, at times, resembled a counselling scenario. I sensed that in order to facilitate 'critical' or 'level 3' reflection issues may well need to be explored on a one-to-one basis which may in turn introduce a counselling or therapeutic element into the facilitation process. The research team noted that the practices do bring into question the nature of such interactions. For example, when might facilitation end and a counselling scenario begin? In considering these views I was constantly aware that my facilitation activities in this study needed to be confined by the limitations of my own professional training. There are conceptual similarities between the principles of critical research and counselling theories (Gilbourne, 1999). For example, critical notions of liberation can be associated with elements within person-centred therapy (Hough, 1996) which place great emphasis on people understanding the relationship between their experiences and their inner self. Gilbourne (1998) concludes that counselling competencies may be needed if researchers are to participate in criticalist ventures and suggests that the researcher

or consultant themselves 'should undertake some form of systematic study, contemplation or counselling to ensure that they are (themselves) enlightened and understand themselves before embarking on their research or applied words' (p. 324).

Exploring the Development of Reflective Skills: Stages 2–4

The initiation and preferred type of reflection. According to the coaches within this study, the initiation of 'reflective episodes' occurred spontaneously rather than as a systematic process. For example coach 3 stated that:

There are no specific times (when I reflect), its like you will be making a cup of tea and thinking about it, or whatever, sometimes its when I can't sleep. (Stage 4 interview).

Coaches also reported using a combination of reflection *in* and *on* action immediately or soon after the practice experience, and further analysis over a more extended time period between 1 day and 1 week later (coaches 1, 2, 3, 5, 6 & 8). This individual approach to reflective writing is characterised by an initial reflective session focusing on description and superficial reflective analysis, followed by a more comprehensive period of reflection stimulated by revisiting their initial thoughts or journal entries. The benefits of such time delay was highlighted by coach 7 and 8 as:

By the time I get home it's late and I don't feel like facing writing, I'm not up to it so I leave a day ... I get a different perspective on things then. (coach 7, Stage 4)

After a day or two I can see then what I should have done at the time ... I can't see it straight away. (coach 8, Stage 4)

Reflective journal writing. Reflective journal writing is documented as an established technique to facilitate reflective practice (Bulman, 1994; Emden, 1991; Riley-Doucet & Wilson, 1997). In this study reflective writing was introduced early in the course programme and was an integral component of the annual report writing. This process of journal writing was generally perceived by the coaches at both Stages 2 and 4 as 'time consuming' (coaches 1, 5, 7, 8) and 'needing more structure' (coaches 2, 5, 7), as a result, two participants adapted the technique to include note writing (coach 6) and dictation:

I tape (my thoughts) on a Dictaphone on the train on the way home ... then later I play the tape and write a few notes done within say half an hour after finishing ... I get the stuff down from the tape which acts as a catalyst and write reflection after the session plan ... sometimes it's a couple of days later (that I write up my notes) but the notes help me. (coach 8, stage 2)

A further review of reflection was prompted by the requirements of completing the annual report (coaches 1, 2, 3, 5, 6 & 8). These findings support and extend the

earlier work of Boud *et al.* (1985) and more recently Riley-Doucet and Wilson (1997) who have argued that to promote self-reflection a dual-staged analysis process should occur whereby both immediate and *delayed* reflection on action occurs.

The notion of spontaneous reflection and issues regarding reflective writing sessions suggests that in some cases we may be 'forcing' reflection through promotion of regular journal entries and report writing as demonstrated within this study. Facilitators might also make reflective practitioners aware of these episodes and encourage them to attend or make notes on relevant issues where possible for inclusion in the journals. Although the processes outlined above appeared inventive and helpful to those coaches who used them it is less clear how these adaptations of the writing process can be integrated into reflective writing submissions which constitute an assessment point within an academic course. The different reflective techniques may not necessarily fit neatly into a 'written format'. Alternative strategies for reporting reflective practice development through oral communication (for example within a governing body coaching examination) may be beneficial to this process.

The Psychological Processes and Perceived Barriers to Reflection

From the data common themes were elicited as regards the psychological processes of reflection. The use of self-directed questioning by the coaches are apparent from the data analysis. The work of Gibbs (1988) and Johns (1995) who, amongst others support guided/structured reflection, also feature prompting questions for example, what are you thinking and feeling, what have you learned from the situation? Coach 7 illustrates this self-directed questioning as a feature of his reflective process:

When I sit and write up (in journal) I ask myself, what did I want? What did I get? What worked? What didn't work? and most importantly why.
(coach 7, Stage 2)

However, questioning by some of the coaches in this study was directed to that of others, including athletes (coaches 2 and 4), other coaches (coaches 2, 4 and 5) and coaching situations (all coaches). As a result, the structured reflection guide may become less relevant to these practitioners who formulate their own 'reflective questions'. Without structure there may be a tendency to simply 'mull over' rather than systematically reflect.

Boud *et al.* (1985) and, more recently, Shields (1996) have identified imagery type processes as a prominent reflective skill. Imagery is a form of simulation similar to real sensory experience, for example seeing, feeling or hearing, but the entire process occurs in the mind (Weinberg & Gould, 1999). In this study, five coaches (1, 3, 4, 5 & 6) reported using imagery processes to assist reflection. They also highlight within this the emergence of physical feelings and emotions including anger, frus-

tration, disappointment and shame. For example, coach 5 reported using imagery to look back at the experience:

You can see it in your minds eye ... Its like a little voice inside me that goes through everything that went on ... like a commentary if you like ... there's times when I've really been annoyed at myself. (Stage 4)

In contrast, coach 3 used imagery to 'rehearse' changes in practice that have emerged from the reflective process.

I look back at what I did and then look at how I would change it in my head ... like then you act out the changes, what I'd do in the situation ... when it comes to doing it for real I'm prepared. (Stage 4)

Imagery is also extensively documented as a trainable psychological skill that can aid sports performance (e.g. Mahoney *et al.*, 1987; Murphy, 1994; Murphy & Jowdy, 1992; Orlick & Partington, 1988). Based on these findings one could suggest that reflective coaches could be taught how to use imagery effectively to provide them with a further skill to aid reflection.

As a final section to the investigation of psychological processes, coaches were asked to discuss any perceived barriers to reflection. At Stage 2, two coaches (3 and 5) reported barriers related to self-focus, similarly reported by Gilbourne (1998). These concerns of 'negative focus' and 'reducing self-confidence' were expressed again at Stage 4 by the same coaches along with coach 4, however, all these coaches demonstrated a positive shift in their reflection. Upon completion of the reflective programme the coaches also reported concerns as regards time constraints. These restrictions centred mainly on time pressures associated with coaching at unsociable hours (evenings/weekends) and external life stresses, and were perceived as affecting their reflection. Academic tutors/coach educators should be aware of the impact such pressures can have and discuss the implications with the practitioners. More practically, tutors could structure their courses to accommodate demands during blocked reflective practice, allow reflective workshop sessions within designated course contact time and, as mentioned previously, support alternative reflective techniques.

Exploring the Level of Reflection Assessment

The main focus of this assessment, as outlined in this study, was to use both verbal and written information to assess each coach's level of reflection. This process was validated through the collaborative procedures between academic staff using pre-determined criteria. If, as stated previously, we argue that individual techniques are a feature of reflective process, then as programme assessors we need to accommodate this variability within our assessment methods (e.g. taped evidence or a viva assessment). Practically, this comprehensive process requires a considerable investment of time and resources.

Gilbourne (1998) reflected upon his research journey and noted a shift in

reflective focus as his four research projects in the field of psychological rehabilitation from sports injury had progressed. Gilbourne depicts this as a shift from an internally focused 'self-critique' reflective style to a 'less concerned' approach which focused less on 'the self' and more on others. A comparison of Stage 2 and 4 data within this study indicates that some coaches had also perceived such a shift in reflective focus (see Table 3). From the data it is also apparent that coach 1 had not demonstrated this shift between Stages 2 and 4 of the study. In contrast, coach 3 and coach 5 shifted four and three levels of reflection respectively between Stages 2 and 4.

In exploring these shifts the authors conclude that the change in reflective focus demonstrated by coach 1 may be representative of the coach's choice of assessment topic. It is suggested that the selection of a different experience may have evoked different levels of reflection. Whilst this coach may not have demonstrated the expected shift in reflection it serves to highlight how reflective 'level' is topic dependant and may be more representative of differing 'types' of reflection. The explanation for these shifts in reflection may be related to factors arising from their practice situation.

Exploring Placement and Experience Related Factors in Stage Regression/Progression

In examining links with coaching experience, coaches 3 and 5 had a considerable amount of coaching experience in their chosen sport (see Table 2). Coach 1, however, had little experience as a coach or as a player. Coaches 3 and 5's coaching placements were weekly placement sessions, as per their level 1 placement, with the same mentor coach and athlete group. Coach 1, however, continued to have short, intensive blocked placements during vacation time with several mentor coaches and a changing group of athletes. She describes her placement as being:

Not really a year in a practical coaching sense ... lacking in hands on experience. (annual report)

Coaches 3 and 5 reflected more positively on their placements. Within their written reports they refer to the placements as being 'rich in experience' (coach 3) and 'positive to coaching development' (coach 5). The reports were also used by the coaches to reflect on their goal achievement. Coach 1 perceived her goals to be unattained. In contrast, coaches 3 and 5 perceived themselves as having moved closer to and eventually achieving their pre-determined goals.

Exploring the Confidence, Reflective Focus and Anxiety Debate in Reflective Practice

Collectively the factors outlined above could be linked with the coaches' perceptions of 'practice related confidence' which in turn may be a contributing factor with regard to a shift of reflective level. Both coaches 3 and 5 were highly confident within their placement experiences and engaged in a widening focus of reflection and

reported a positive shift in reflection. Coach 1, however, did not express this level of self-confidence and reported a narrowing, internal, self-reflective focus characterised by Stage 2 on the assessment model (see Table 2). The coaches' perceptions of narrowing reflective focus share similar characteristics with the concept of attentional style and attentional focus, in particular the work of Nideffer (1976). Nideffer's theory has proved useful in understanding the attentional demands on sports performers who need to execute skills in varying environmental situations. Nideffer proposed that attentional focus varies along two dimensions width, ranging from broad (focusing on a wide range of cues) to narrow (focusing on a limited range of cues); and direction, ranging from internal (focusing on one's own thoughts and feelings) to external (focusing on objects and events outside the body). Further research by the authors will continue to examine models that represent changes in 'reflective focus'.

Within the sports performance literature researchers have argued that a link exists between levels of self-confidence, perceptions of anxiety and attentional focus (see Hardy *et al.*, 1996 for a review). Typically, as anxiety levels increase perceptions of self-confidence decrease and there is a tendency for attentional focus to narrow and become more internal. These inter-linked theories may offer some further explanation as to the coaches' perceived shifts in reflective focus. For example, coach 1 expressed feelings of 'apprehension and shyness' (annual report) during the early stages in her placement and 'continuing concern over her coaching ability' (annual report) which represents a high anxiety/low self-confidence state which may result in an internal narrowing of reflective focus. In contrast, Gilbourne's (1998) perceptions of a widening in reflective focus was attributed to a perceived *increase* in confidence, and a decreasing level of anxiety as he became more secure in his professional and research roles.

Drawing on Gilbourne's (1998) perceptions of increasing self-confidence, it seems that within this study a confidence factor can be identified. Within this study, both coaches 3 and 5 demonstrated positive shifts in level of reflection. They reflected positively on their reflective techniques and perceived themselves to be comfortable with their reflective style and processes. Coach 1 did not perceive a shift in reflective level as stated previously and did not express this level of self-confidence factors related to her placement experience.

Stage 5: A 'Confessional Tale'

The emphasis in this section shifts to a personal account of my own protracted research journey. In a writing context, 'I' have faced what Sparkes (1995) associated with a 'crisis of representation'. The earlier account of the research results was presented in an author evacuated style. For example:

All the coaches felt that the workshop programme achieved, and in many cases surpassed, its intended aim to facilitate individual disclosure of reflective incidents to the group, allow collective discussion and generate action plans.

In presenting the qualitative analysis I, as first author, felt that the material portrayed the coaches and my role as facilitator as being (what Sparkes (1995) describes as) 'unidimensional highly stable and predictable characters'. This, however, was not my interpretation of things on the ground. In addressing these issues through this final stage, I felt it necessary to engage in a dual analysis of the research journey. First, a methodological analysis is presented and second, a self-reflexive analysis which highlights the 'tensions' I experienced on this research journey.

In the early days I envisaged the workshop programme would be closely monitored through two established qualitative techniques (semi-structured interview followed by triangulated content analysis and researcher notes) both associated with 'trustworthiness' criteria (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Hardy *et al.*, 1996). However, from the onset of these sessions I realised that data collection and content analysis would only provide snapshots of the 'swampy lowland' of 'action-reflection'. Additionally, these techniques would not allow me to articulate my own thoughts on the reflective research process. Reporting the richness of the research journey was, to my mind, restricted by the conventional routes of qualitative analysis and traditions of the realist tale (Van Maanen, 1991). This was a source of frustration as I was keen to document the unconventional manner of reflective discussion that arose within the workshops.

Within the nursing-based reflection literature it seems that studies have been undertaken by researchers who adopt a researcher-teacher role (Powell, 1989; Riley-Doucet & Wilson, 1997; Shields, 1996). Unlike these authors, however, I feel it necessary to address how these separate roles interacted throughout the workshop programme. For example, as the sessions were part of the teaching programme there were issues to consider regarding teaching quality. I was aware that the teaching programme was also being subjected to external review at the end of the academic year with student achievement and feedback being an integral part of the report. I began to question if the students were being subjected to a suitable learning experience with 50% of the semesters teaching programme based on reflective practice. In reaction to this, there was a tendency on my part to continually direct them towards sources of referenced, professional knowledge at the end of each session. If there was an added function (that of acquiring professional knowledge) then this, I reasoned, would justify the reflective nature of the workshop.

Focusing on craft knowledge in the workshops, such as devising action plans for omitting parents from training or teaching strategies for mixed ability groups, at times did not seem an appropriate activity within the rubric of an academic course. From a 'researcher' perspective, however, this was what I expected reflection to achieve. Rich, craft-based knowledge was being disseminated amongst the group and this allowed them to consistently tackle complicated and contextually challenging realities of practice (Brown & McIntyre, 1988). This dichotomy led me to feel that this research driven process may be conflicting with the academic demands of achieving a degree award. On a more positive note, the coaches perceived the writing of reflective journals indirectly assisted with the development of programme assignments from other sports science modules within their programme.

I also questioned whether the development of craft knowledge and processes of

reflective practice and change could be fully represented through the rubric of an academic essay. I felt from a coach's perspective this may be a detached almost unrealistic representation of the reflective processes and provide (instead) little more than the product of improved practice. As mentioned previously, this 'snapshot' may not be representative of the practitioners type/level of reflection and may simply have been chosen to demonstrate, for example, a positive aspect of practice. The workshop sessions had provided a limited opportunity to discuss action plans and report on changes in practice, however these sessions were not assessed. To portray the process fully I began to question whether, within my other roles as a researcher and academic tutor, I would need to explore these changes with the coaches *in practice*.

As an elite level coach working in what Schön (1983, 1987) might have seen as the 'swampy lowlands' of practice I began to appreciate this programme from a third perspective. My dual employment status as both an academic and coach made me feel that through this research project I could contribute to the workshops by offering insights from both my 'professional' and 'craft' knowledge base. The three roles of academic tutor, researcher and coach began to appear in reaction to situations within each session. As a result of such recurring and conflicting tensions I felt there was an increasing need to prioritise my roles and question my reasoning for the project. As I recollected incidents that had occurred throughout the programme it was difficult to prioritise from what seemed to be a collective role. I became increasingly aware of such 'tensions' and the frequency with which they were occurring but felt confined however to reporting only the research process for the single purpose of an academic award. This was particularly apparent in the researcher notes which did not refer to any peripheral developments. As an academic tutor, I considered that if the students failed to achieve acceptable grades this, in my mind, would reflect poor teaching quality. It was my duty to facilitate them to achieve an acceptable standard. As a researcher, however, I also perceived that low achievement standards across the programme could again reflect negatively on my research question. Poor academic achievement may have resulted from my lack of adherence to the course rubric and a bias towards eliciting quality reflection.

Away from the confines of the researcher notes I began to explore these concerns through my own reflective practice. Although this did not occur in a formalised manner there were spontaneous reflective 'episodes' during which I extensively questioned my practice from multiple positions. I also found invaluable and confidential support from my programme leader, research supervisor and coaching mentor. This was similar to that of my role in relation to the coaches and allowed me to explore concerns with regard to my roles and formulate action plans accordingly.

Conclusions

Future Programme Considerations

The findings from the present study have implications for programmes of study that include reflective practice as a teaching and learning strategy. At an organisational

level the placement experience can affect the development of reflective practice. Consideration must be given to the scheduling, relevance to practitioners' achievement goals, prior practice experience, the quality of mentor and their interaction with the students. Further inquiry is needed to address the links proposed between self-confidence, anxiety and reflective focus with regard to the development of reflective skills.

It is also suggested that practitioners may have a dominant or preferred reflective technique (narrow or broad etc.). As a result, this may affect the ability to use the various techniques which may in turn affect their quality of reflection and shift in reflective level. It has also been suggested that practitioners who are less comfortable with the practicalities of reflective writing and associated skills may be at a disadvantage as regards assessment processes. Linked with this, assessment of reflection using levels in the authors' opinion has proved difficult in a practical sense. It is suggested that these levels offer an insightful view into types of reflection but do not provide a substantial base for assessment purposes.

Programme tutors should also ensure that following the skill induction programme continued support is available either individually or within the workshop sessions. In order to facilitate 'critical' or level 3 reflection, issues may need to be explored further which in turn may introduce a personal one to one element into the facilitation process. Consideration should be given to the possibility of the facilitator having the capacity to deploy counselling skills, such as active listening and empathy.

Summary and Final Thoughts

The study described in this paper has considered the development of reflective practice in a sample of sports coaches. The study has illuminated distinctions and similarities between action research and reflection, demonstrated the potential effectiveness of reflective practice as a learning and development method in coach education and has extended previous research findings focusing on the psychological processes that underpin reflection. If one considers these findings from a coach education perspective then several conclusions can be drawn.

The data show a trend towards a shift in the level of reflection engaged in by this sample of coaches. If one assumes that this shift will facilitate the practical benefits of reflection outlined in the introduction then the reflective programme was a positive educational process for these coaches. Whilst one has to accept that with such a small cohort of coaches this can only be a tentative conclusion it warrants further in-depth investigation.

The data also highlight the complexity of the reflective process in the variability of the coaches' responses to a structured development programme. The interaction of issues such as practice confidence, reflective focus and counselling issues indicate that development of reflective skills is not a simplistic process even with structured support. Coach educators cannot therefore assume that development of reflective skills will be a naturally occurring phenomena that runs parallel to increasing coaching experience. There is benefit to be gained from post-course placement learning, however, the authors perceive that this experience currently varies

markedly due to the range of mentor skills, facilities, time and opportunities made available to these coaches. The data suggest that coach educators should consider carefully how reflective skill development can be initiated, supported and sustained within formal UK coach education procedures. Future investigations aim to develop effective protocols for higher education programme teams and coach education panels within governing bodies of sport through cross-discipline analysis (nursing, teaching etc.) and longitudinal study of reflective practitioners using emerging qualitative based methodologies.

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