



The BASES Expert Statement on Reflective Practice: the Key to Experimental Learning

Produced on behalf of the British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences by Emma Huntley, Prof Brendan Cropley FBASES, Prof Zoe Knowles FBASES and Dr Andy Miles FBASES.

Introduction

Reflective Practice (RP) has become firmly embedded in professional development and practice within the sport and exercise sciences over the past 15 years. For example, RP is a core aspect of the BASES Supervised Experience, Accreditation and Re-Accreditation processes. This is because the nature of applied practice in the sport and exercise sciences is underpinned by culture and context, laden with emotion, and requires human interaction. Consequently, the practice environment is seldom presented in easily definable and recognisable forms. Attempts to solve practice-based problems by applying theory and techniques derived from systematic, scientific knowledge alone, therefore, are unlikely to render practice as effective (Doncaster, 2018; Knowles *et al.*, 2014; Morton, 2014). This does not mean that the technical knowledge (scientifically-derived theory) valued within a discipline should be overlooked when attending to practice-based problems. Instead, sport and exercise science practitioners need to reconstruct this technical knowledge and develop a form of knowing that better facilitates professional practice by being responsive to individuals' needs - a way of *knowing-in-action* (Schön, 1983).

Knowing- or knowledge-in-action is made up of social norms, values, prejudices, experiences, technical knowledge, aesthetical knowledge, personal knowledge and ethical knowledge. Practice is constructed from both the union and interplay of these different sources of knowledge. Knowledge-in-action, developed through RP, is arguably the most essential form of knowledge as it allows practitioners to manage and adapt to the dynamic and context-specific nature of their work (Ghaye, 2010).

In spite of the potential benefits associated with RP for both personal and professional development, a number of issues concerning the integration of RP into practice remain. For example, it seems that RP is often aligned to the discipline of psychology more so than those favouring more positivistic frameworks for practice. RP is, however, a pedagogical and developmental approach that lies at the heart of applied practice

in all sport and exercise science disciplines. Further, professional applied practice is often dictated by a "hurry-up mentality" where practitioners are expected to be engaged in practical action rather than in critically reflective thought (Morton, 2014). The very nature of working in sport and exercise can, therefore, lead to a view that RP is more important and accessible during training and formal CPD rather than as an integral aspect of daily practice. The aim of this statement is to synthesise understandings elicited from RP research and practice to address some of the current issues within the sport and exercise sciences. We do this in an attempt to continue and further aid the development of RP for applied sport and exercise scientists, with relevance to practitioners working in all areas of the associated disciplines.

Background

In a review of the RP literature in sport, Huntley *et al.* (2014) found that of 179 manuscripts that focused explicitly on RP, only 68 adopted a conceptualisation accurate enough to be considered as RP. RP definitions are often accepted at face value making it difficult for practitioners to distinguish between this concept and that of other modes of thinking (e.g. evaluation). We propose that RP is:

"A purposeful and complex process that facilitates the examination of experience by questioning the whole self and our agency within the context of practice. This examination transforms experience into learning, which helps us to access, make sense of and develop our knowledge-in-action in order to better understand and/or improve practice and the situation in which it occurs" (Knowles *et al.*, 2014, p. 10).

Examination of the constituents of this definition is provided in a supplementary table, which can be accessed in the online version of this expert statement available at: www.bases.org.uk/BASES-Expert-Statements

The potential efficacy of RP, whilst more established within the sport psychology literature, has more recently been explored in other sport and exercise science disciplines, such as: physiology;

strength and conditioning; and performance analysis (e.g. Doncaster, 2018). Specifically, in relation to the value of RP for both personal and professional development, research within the sport and exercise sciences (e.g. Huntley *et al.*, 2014; Kuklick & Gearity, 2016; Morton, 2014) has indicated that RP:

- bridges the gap between theory and practice to allow individuals to develop their own theories for practice.
- helps practitioners to build on achievements. Too often RP occurs following negative outcomes or situations of concern. Reflecting on positive outcomes and situations of strength helps practitioners understand how to replicate and build on success.
- affords practitioners (including those under supervision) the opportunity to critically explore their practice and thus become creative in attending to the effectiveness of their practice.
- facilitates exploration of the congruence between values and behaviours, which can help to guide ethical practice and foster a sense of self-actualisation.
- is a key process in helping practitioners develop the coping strategies needed to manage the demands of their work, as well as being integral to self-care and in managing their well-being.

To achieve such outcomes, it is well-established that the skills (e.g. problem-solving, questioning the whole self) and characteristics (e.g. open-mindedness, whole-heartedness) required for critical RP need nurturing. It is still often the case, however, that RP is not formally taught on Higher Education programmes until Level 7. As RP is currently embedded within all aspects of the sport and exercise scientists' role, this situation is problematic as many neophytes (and professionals) are asked to engage in RP without the necessary understanding, skills or support to enable a positive and beneficial process. Other barriers to RP are often cited as: time to engage in the process; being misguided; fixated use of frameworks of RP; and too much focus within reflection on problems and/or weaknesses.

Conclusions and recommendations

In attempts to overcome the existing barriers associated with the perception and integration of RP into practice, and thus to move RP in the sport and exercise sciences forwards, we recommend the following:

1. RP should be seen as a way of thinking and acting that is embedded within a practitioner's philosophy and not that of a "must do" process.
2. Time should be built into the working week/academic study for RP. If done appropriately, RP is likely to support more efficient and meaningful practice. This will help RP to become a habit that is fully integrated into daily activities.
3. Whilst RP should be systematic, students and practitioners should be aware of the range of different approaches that may support RP (e.g. frameworks, technology, shared RP) and select the most appropriate mode given the situation and the purpose of reflection. Critical RP (e.g. emancipatory levels of cognition and the questioning of taken-for-granted practices rather than mere descriptive accounts of an event) is driven by the right questions (dictated by the purpose) rather than the right "model" *per se*.
4. RP should be about valuing what practitioners do. It should be appreciative in nature and afford practitioners the opportunity to explore their strengths and understand how these strengths might be utilised within their work more often.
5. Those responsible for the education, training and development of practitioners working in all aspects of the sport and exercise sciences (e.g. applied practice, Higher Education) must consider how RP is developed and nurtured from the start of the educational journey. Consequently, critical dialogue is required, that considers how pedagogically the necessary skills and attitudes required for effective experiential learning

through RP can be facilitated.

6. A wider and more encompassing evidence-base is needed that explores the development of context-specific knowledge, understanding and practice. This requires a commitment from sport and exercise sciences to outwardly value different forms of knowledge (and evidence) by supporting the growth of a body of literature that focuses on professional applied practice. This will provide a platform to support ongoing RP as part of the wider aspects of our roles.
7. Practitioners, neophytes and educators should embrace new and innovative approaches to RP that help to nurture learning and facilitate more lasting and consistent engagement. The value in an approach rests in the individual's preferences and the quality of the outcome of the process. Consequently, no one approach is more suitable than another. Consideration should be given to the development of a culture of RP through shared approaches (e.g. communities of practice) that support more critical insight and more meaningful learning. ■



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