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Becoming an Applied Sport and Exercise Psychologist - A Phenomenological Study of Supervised Experience

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"A sportsman cannot be best unless he is deeply competitive. He must be consumed by the desire to win in order to motivate himself."

compulsion to triumph that impels him out of bed on freezing January mornings and through the onerous hours of training." Three time Olympic Gold medalist, Matthew Pinsent (as cited in Daily Mail, 2002).

It is widely accepted that psychological elements, such as motivation and team cohesion, are integral parts of sporting success. In order to provide athletes with psychological support neophyte practitioners must undergo a period of supervised experience (SE). The proposed project (outlined below) aims to explore the challenges of SE.

What does it take to become an Applied Sport and Exercise Psychologist?

"What's the critical difference between athletes who succeed and those who go home empty-handed? Those who succeed have blended mental aspects necessary for success into their physical training program." Chris Carmichael, coach of Lance Armstrong - seven time Tour De France winner.



"Athletes who underperformed in the Atlanta, Nagano, and Sydney Olympics reported that more mental training and access to sport psychologists would have made the greatest difference in their Olympic experience." U.S. Olympic Committee report on athlete performance.



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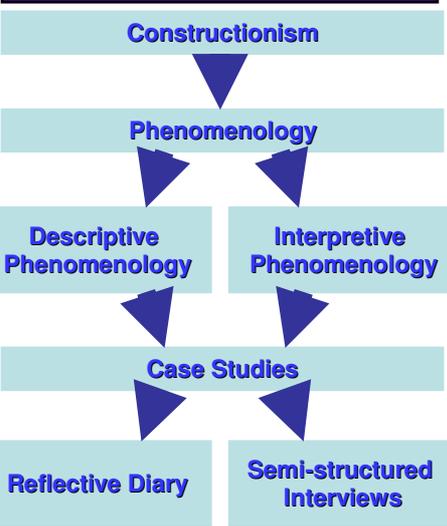
"(winning) not about skills. It's about attitude and the effect on the team. One wrong team player can sap all the energy from the group." Former England rugby union coach, Sir Clive Woodward.



AIMS

The main purpose of the proposed investigation is (1) to explore the lived experience of becoming an Applied Sport and Exercise Psychologist, and (2) to develop an in-depth understanding of key issues within supervised experience.

THE RESEARCH PROCESS



METHOD (Cont...)

Data from the descriptive analysis will be used in combination with contemporary literature to create a semi-structured interview schedule. The interviews will be analysed interpretively, based on the work of Max van Manen (1990). Van Manen (1990) follows the work of Gadamer (1975) in that they avoid restrictive methods that may prematurely foreclose possible interpretations of the data (Langdridge, 2007).



I have selected an interpretive approach to the interview phases, as I feel that it will be important to use my own experiences to further explore those of the participants, both during the interview and analysis. Adopting hermeneutic phenomenology provides greater flexibility than the more prescriptive interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA), for example.

The third data collection point (semi-structured interviews) will be towards the end of the participant's third and final year of SE. Adaptations to the content of the interviews will be influenced by the analysis of previous data collected from the participants.

Reflexivity will run throughout the proposed project. It will be important that I reflect on how my own experiences of the SE process influence different aspects of the study, such as interview questions and data analysis (Langdridge, 2007). Finlay & Gough (2003) suggest two forms of reflexivity that will be highly relevant to this study. Firstly introspection will enable self-awareness about preconceptions I may have due to the experience of SE, and provide a platform from which to form explicit experiences of the participants. Additionally the use of intersubjective reflection will require consideration of how my experiences will influence the participants involved in the study.

INTRODUCTION

Literature within sport psychology and exercise psychology has only recently begun to explore the necessity of effective practice in applied settings (Cropley et al. 2007). In order to try and achieve a baseline of practitioner competence within applied settings, neophyte practitioners are highly recommended to undergo supervised experience (SE). This would normally be completed through the British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences (BASES). It should be noted that due to an insurgence in academic status and public recognition the BPS now offer a route to chartered status. BASES supervised experience runs for a period of 2-3 years and requires supervision from an accredited practitioner. There is a lack of research exploring this imperative transitional phase of becoming an Applied Sport and Exercise Psychologist. The following sections outline the proposed research process to explore supervised experience.

METHOD

The proposed study will explore the lived experience of neophyte practitioners' SE. Due to the specific nature of the study purposive sampling will be used for participant recruitment. Case studies will consist of three data collection points. Participants will be required to complete a reflective journal throughout the first year of SE reflecting on their experiences. A Husserlian phenomenology approach based on the work of Giorgi (1985) and Colaizzi (1973) will be used to explore the reflective journals. Husserlian phenomenology requires analysis to be completed in the context of epoche, which requires bracketing one's preconceptions of the topic. I feel it is important to include this initial descriptive method in order to prevent an overly subjective, self-indulgent study from developing due to my own experiences of SE. The extent to which an individual can fully adhere to bracketing is a contentious issue within phenomenology, but it is important that I approach the text with an objective inexperience (Langdridge, 2007). The analysis will then draw on the work of Colaizzi (1973) as participants are provided with descriptions of their experiences in order to ensure trustworthiness of the analysis.



PHILOSOPHICAL UNDERPINNING

This study is situated within the constructionist paradigm whereby "...meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting" (Crotty, 2003, p.43). Phenomenology provides an ideal philosophical stance from which to approach this research. Phenomenology literally means the study/knowledge of lived experience (Crotty, 2003) and as outlined in the following methods section provides an ideal theoretical and methodological framework to convey an understanding of the lived experience of becoming an Applied Sport and Exercise Psychologist.

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