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BECOMING AN APPLIED SPORT AND EXERCISE PSYCHOLOGIST: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF SUPERVISED EXPERIENCE

Andrew Hooton

“A sportsman cannot be best unless he is dear to his competitor. He must be consumed by the desire to win in order to motivate himself.” Three time Olympic Gold medalist, Matthew Pinsent (as cited in Daily Mail, 2002)

“Sportsmen who overperformed 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.

"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.

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?

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.

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 insurmountable demand 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.

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” (Crofty, 2003, p.43). Phenomenology provides an ideal philosophical stance from which to approach this research. Phenomenology literally means the study/knowledge of lived experience (Crofty, 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.

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, in part inspired by 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.

REFERENCES


Case Studies

Reflective Diary

Semistructured Interviews

Descriptive Phenomenology

Interpretive Phenomenology

SAGE

Phenomenology

Constructionism

THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Former England rugby union coach, Sir Clive Woodward.