The Value of Reflective Practice in Professional Development:
An Applied Sport Psychology Review

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The purpose of this review is to situate the concept of reflective practice within the professional training and development of applied sport psychology (ASP) practitioners. In particular, to consider the progression of the field of ASP into professional status and examine the potential value of reflective practice as a mechanism to assist practitioners develop their effectiveness. The review initially outlines recent developments in professional training and development within ASP in order to frame the current environment in which neophyte consultants are trained and professional practitioners work before progressing to consider reflective practice, its definitions and relationship with experiential learning and professional practice. The use of reflective practice within sport psychology is then considered, with the final section of the review focusing on potential limitations of the available sport psychology literature and thus the rationale for further investigation.

Keywords: Reflective practice, effectiveness, knowing-in-action.

For the past two decades researchers and practitioners have reported significant developments in the discipline of applied sport psychology (ASP) and deliberated over the professional status of the field (e.g., Anderson, Miles, Mahoney, & Robinson, 2002; Silva, 1989; Zeigler, 1987). With the emergence of professional bodies (e.g., The British Association of Sport & Exercise Sciences [BASES]; The British Psychological Society’s Division of Sport & Exercise Psychology [BPS-DSEP]; The Association for Applied Sport Psychology [AASP]) each with their own code of conduct, code of ethics, professional training frameworks, and continuing professional development programmes, it is now widely accepted that sport psychology has achieved professional status. Such claims are further supported by considerable research output that has
augmented the body of specialised knowledge available within the field. This knowledge has been disseminated to practitioners through a range of applied peer-reviewed journals (e.g., *The Sport Psychologist; The Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*) and is regarded as an important determinant of a profession (Pellegrino, 1983).

Both BASES and BPS professional training frameworks are mechanisms for ensuring quality and professionalism from practitioners by recognising their ability to demonstrate professional competence and practice independently. These programmes have undergone review over recent years (BASES, 2009; BPS, 2004) in attempts to meet the demands associated with the professionalisation of the field. Consequently, those wishing to gain Accreditation (BASES) or Chartership (BPS) must engage in a period of supervised experience in order to develop a level of competence deemed appropriate to achieve professional standing. This period is usually 2-3 years in duration and involves the development of knowledge, skills, and experience in several pre-defined competency areas (see BASES Supervised Experience guidelines, 2009; and BPS Chartership handbook, 2007). Formal training and development opportunities have further evolved with BASES introducing the ‘High Performance Sport Accreditation Framework’ (HPSA, BASES, 2006). HPSA is directed at those providing sports science services to high performance sports organisations and offers accredited practitioners the chance for progression, thus confirming the commitment of professional bodies to sustain the popularity and credibility of the field.

Martindale and Collins (2007) proposed that, “External market forces have added to the internal professional requirements for accreditation” (p. 459). Due to the professions now serving a global market, it would appear imperative to present standards that ensure that ASP services are effective, provide quality, and allow for continued progression of the field. As a result, attention is shifting within ASP from what techniques work to a focus on the processes and factors that influence the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of service delivery (Holt & Strean, 2001). This has led to growing research effort focusing on the elucidation of the constituents, measurement, and enhancement of effective practice. Due to the recognition of the central role of the practitioner in successful practice, however, much of the research focusing on the constituents has been limited to exploring the characteristics of effective consultants rather than considering the concept of effective practice more holistically. Nevertheless, such research has provided pertinent information that has helped to expound evaluative processes and provide a framework to guide the professional development and practice of ASP consultants (Anderson et al., 2002; Anderson, Miles, Robinson, & Mahoney, 2004). Research using a range of approaches (e.g., interviews, questionnaires, anecdotal reports) has uncovered a number of characteristics associated with consultant effectiveness (see Table 1).
The progression of the field of ASP into professional status has resulted in consultants becoming increasingly accountable for their practices (Martindale & Collins, 2007). In fact, it has been recognised for some time that the field has entered an ‘age of accountability’ (Smith, 1989). Consequently, there is an increased demand for practitioners to take responsibility for evaluating and documenting their effectiveness (Anderson et al., 2002; Strean, 1998). Although the presentation of a wide range of consultant characteristics has helped to progress understanding of ‘how’ and ‘what’ to evaluate in attempts to examine the effectiveness of service delivery, Hardy and Jones (1994) previously acknowledged that systematic evaluation of practice was not a customary process in the field. Nevertheless, interest in the evaluation of the sport psychologist’s effectiveness by coaches and athletes has been positively influenced by the development of standardised evaluation forms (e.g., the Consultant Evaluation Form, Partington & Orlick, 1987). It has been suggested, however, that such measures might not sufficiently cater for methodical evaluation given the evolving nature of ASP (Martindale & Collins, 2007). For example, the assessment of only the characteristics of the consultant is unlikely to provide reliable evidence concerning the efficacy of performance enhancement interventions and thus the impact of the support (cf. Martindale & Collins, 2007; Strean, 1998). Accordingly, other approaches to evaluation (e.g., Goal Attainment Scaling, Kiresuk & Sherman, 1968) have been suggested and successfully implemented in some cases (e.g., Martin, Thompson, & McKnight, 1998), but again it appears that such methods are not customary nor indicative of providing evidence to determine the quality of the service provided or the impact of the practitioner. It is difficult, therefore, to establish the accountability of the consultant to their practice.

In attempts to address issues concerning limitations in evaluative practices Anderson et al. (2002) proposed a case study approach that uses a battery of effectiveness indicators (e.g., performance, psychological skills and well being, athlete response to the support, and consultant effectiveness). Anderson and her colleagues proposed that using the indicators in triangulation to evaluate practice would comprehensively improve confidence over whether support was effective or not. Martindale and Collins (2007) suggested that although Anderson et al.’s work provides the most comprehensive coverage of the issues surrounding evaluation it also requires further consideration and debate. Further, validation and practical application of the case study method is still to be considered, making it difficult to verify the value such an approach. Martindale and Collins substantiated the need for additional insight by implying that Anderson et al.’s indicators do not represent the full picture of what signifies effectiveness in ASP practice. The authors subsequently recommended the inclusion of professional judgment and decision making (PJDM) into evaluative case studies. Explicating the ideas of Hill and O’Grady (1985), Martindale and Collins (2007) outlined that
by assessing PJDM the practitioner’s ‘intention for impact’ could be measured, which in turn offers insights into cognitive elements that mediate intervention choice. This suggestion has helped to reveal additional process measures of effectiveness and further elucidate holistic evaluation procedures that can help to comprehensively assess and represent the work of applied sport psychologists.

As well as the outcomes of evaluation providing evidence to increase the practitioner’s accountability to the client, the profession, and themselves (cf. Anderson et al., 2002), they also add to the evidence-base of knowledge concerning what actually works in practice. This is important in the professional climate ASP now finds itself in as responsibility to engage in evidence-based practice is at the forefront of issues regarding the provision of ASP service and is consistent with the demands of being a profession (Dinsdale, 2008). Practice-based knowledge is therefore currently highly valued within ASP as it has been widely documented for some time that the application of theory to practice is problematic within ASP (Martens, 1987). In light of this, a common theme emerging from the ASP literature on evaluation of practice is that of the utility of reflective practice. Reflective practice has been reported as a mechanism to enable practitioners to better understand themselves, the effectiveness of the service they provide, and actually learn about ‘doing’ sport psychology by generating practice-based knowledge (cf., Andersen, 2000; Anderson, Knowles, et al., 2004; Cropley, Hanton, Miles, & Niven, 2007). Moreover, practitioners from a variety of fields (e.g., nursing, sports coaching) have consistently suggested that reflective practice is synonymous with professional practice (e.g., Larrivee, 2008; Yip, 2006). Mirroring developments in other fields (e.g., nursing), professional practitioners who provide supervision to neophytes during the practicum experience element of their training within ASP have recognised the need to provide supervisees with the essential skills for understanding their own practice (Knowles, Gilbourne, Tomlinson, & Anderson, 2007). As a consequence, systematic reflection is considered integral to ASP practice and both BASES and BPS have recognised the value of reflection and incorporated it into their professional training and development programmes. Before examining the research that focuses on the utility of reflective practice in ASP in greater detail it is first important to consider what reflective practice actually is and explicate its proposed role in both personal and professional development.

**Reflective Practice**

In order to frame the utility of reflective practice within ASP it is important to initially consider where reflection is situated in the process of experiential learning by examining the work of Kolb (1984). Building on this notion of experiential learning, it is then necessary to attempt to reveal what reflective
practice actually is. Despite recent research attempting to provide a better understanding of reflective practice for ASP practitioners (e.g., Anderson, Knowles, et al., 2004; Cropley et al., in press) some confusion over the concept and its practical application appears to remain. This is also considered to be true in other fields where distinctions between reflective practice and other modes of reflective theorising are not clear (e.g., education, Procee, 2006). Such confusion in ASP maybe manifested by the lack of guidance and instruction provided by professional bodies (e.g., BASES) on its use and integration into practice. It is therefore essential to consider the work of Ghaye and Lillyman (2000) and Schön (1983, 1987), which is proposed to illuminate the relationship between reflective practice and the practice of ASP as well as the value that reflective practice potentially has for the development of ASP practitioners and the field as a whole.

**Reflection in Experiential Learning.** In consideration of the value of reflective practice as a mechanism for practitioner development within ASP, the concept of experiential learning must be examined. In general terms, the distinguishing features of experiential learning are that it refers to the organisation and construction of learning from observations produced in a practical situation, with the implication that the learning can lead to action or improved action (Moon, 1999). Further, it is suggested that experiential learning is a programme for profoundly re-creating our personal lives and social systems (Kolb, 1984). The outcome of experiential learning is action or learning and is best expressed in Kolb’s cycle (see Figure 1). Although cyclical in diagrammatic representation Kolb suggests that it should be approached as a continuous spiral. Indeed, the process of ‘reflective observation’ enables the ‘concrete experience’ to be brought into a state of ‘abstract conceptualisation’. When framed, the abstract concepts guide ‘active experimentation’ and subsequently lead to more ‘concrete experience’. If learning has taken place a new form of experience on which to reflect and conceptualise should be created in each cycle as subsequent action is experienced in a different set of circumstances (e.g., enhanced practitioner understanding of their client).

In ASP, particularly during the supervised experience element of professional training, there are lots of opportunities to gain experience. However, if practitioners are to hone their skills, learn about themselves, and better serve the needs of their athlete-clients, frameworks that engage practitioners in a process of learning are essential (Van Raalte & Andersen, 2000). It is important not avoid presuming that learning is an automatic process associated with ‘having an experience’. For example, recent research that has attempted to develop understanding of the term ‘experience’ in the context of sport highlighted that, “Experience is the current product of a process whereby knowledge is acquired
and adapted so that action, reflection, and learning take place” (Hanton, Cropley, Neil, Mellalieu, & Miles, 2007, p. 32). Additionally, through examining potential learning experiences that contribute to service delivery competence in ASP, Tod, Marchant, and Andersen (2007) emphasised the need for a greater focus on reflective practice to assist practitioners in developing knowledge and skills. Thus, the role of reflective practice in potentially learning from experience appears to be vital and is consistent with experiential learning theory (cf. Burnard, 1991; Kolb, 1984).

Although the work on experiential learning is helpful in furnishing us with ideas about how to guide reflection in learners, the sequencing of the stages of the model of experiential learning may be problematic. Dewey (1933) suggested that in relation to reflection a number of processes can occur at once. Kolb’s learning cycle, therefore, maybe too neat and simplistic for blind application within ASP. The nature of providing ASP support is a complex one that involves making in-vivo decisions about how best to act in situations that unfold in the moment. Action, reflection, conceptualisation and learning, therefore, do not always present themselves in neatly defined stages. Further, whilst Kolb (1984) outlined that the quality of reflection is crucial in ensuring that the learner does progress in their learning, his work does not expand on and uncover the elements of reflection itself (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985). Therefore, if the role of reflection in experiential learning is to be better understood, interpretations of reflective practice must be clarified.

**What is Reflective Practice?** It is reported that the Westernised concept of reflective practice was born out of the work of Dewey (1859-1952) who took the notion of reflection from philosophy and introduced it into the fields of psychology and pedagogy. Dewey allied reflection with thinking and described it as the kind of thinking that consists in turning a subject over in the mind and giving it serious thought (cf. Moon, 1999). Dewey indicated that reflection may be seen as an active and deliberate cognitive process involving sequences of interconnected ideas that take account of underlying beliefs and knowledge. Reflective thinking generally addresses practical problems, allowing for doubt and perplexity before possible solutions are reached (Edwards, 1999). In essence, Dewey created a greater sense of valuing practice in ways that went beyond any superficial sense of just thinking about practice. Through the notion of reflection, practice could be seen as being more informed (Dewey, 1933). By being more informed, a practitioner could be regarded as being particularly skilful and therefore possess important knowledge of practice. In this sense, reflection rings true to many professions as a concept because it raises thinking about practice to a position from which it can be viewed as a specialised form, and therefore has important ramifications in relation to knowledge of practice.
As a result, since its inception, the term reflective practice has been widely examined with authors building on the ideas of Dewey and others (e.g., Habermas, 1971) who have thought to have given currency to the way in which the term is viewed. In response to this, Loughran (2002) highlighted that, “Reflection has developed a variety of meanings as the bandwagon has travelled through the world of practice” (p. 33).

Reflective practice is often seen as representing a choice for practitioners to be reflective or not about their work, but in reality, all practitioners engage in reflection about the professional service they provide (Bright, 1993). What passes for reflection, however, is often not representative of reflective practice. For example, contemplating an experience or event is not always purposeful and does not necessarily lead to new ways of thinking or behaving in practice, which is the crux of effective reflective activity (Andrews, Gidman, & Humphreys, 1998). This implies that in order to engage in reflective practice the process must be purposeful and result in change to beliefs, values, understanding and/or behaviour and thus supports Dewey’s (1933) contention that reflective practice must be deliberate. Other commonalities that appear to exist in definitions of reflective practice are that it involves the self and that it is triggered by the questioning of actions, values and beliefs. For example, Boyd and Fales (1983) suggested that reflection is, “The process of internally examining and exploring an issue of concern, triggered by an experience, which creates and clarifies meaning in terms of self and results in a changed conceptual perspective” (p. 100). This definition, along with those of other authors (e.g., Barnett & O’Mahoney, 2006; Daudelin, 1996), suggests the process is initiated when individuals become aware of or concerned with an incident or problem. However, although reflecting on problems is important it should not be done at the expense of other aspects of our working lives, such as reflecting on experiences where behaviour has been effective (Ghaye, 2010; Loughran, 2006). This represents a movement away from traditional conceptualisations of reflective practice (e.g., Dewey) that suggest that reflection is driven by the occurrence of problems, and emphasises the utility of reflective practice for human flourishing by focusing on practice-based strengths. Raelin’s (2002) definition of reflective practice may therefore offer a more apt understanding:

The practice of periodically stepping back to ponder the meaning of what has recently transpired to ourselves and to others in our immediate environment. It illuminates what the self and others have experienced, providing a basis for future action. In particular, it privileges the process of inquiry, leading to an understanding of experiences that may have been overlooked in practice (p. 66).
In contrast to Dewey, Ghaye and Lillyman (2000) outlined that reflective practice is not just an intellectual endeavour but a complex process involving the whole person, including their emotions, thus making a simple definition elusive. In attempts to understand the concept of reflective practice more comprehensively and be able to frame reflection within the practice of ASP it may therefore be more valuable to consider the principles associated with reflective practice. Indeed, Ghaye and Lillyman (2000) acknowledged that it is beneficial to see reflective practice holistically and outlined 12 principles that are proposed to define the landscape of reflective practice (see Figure 2). Themes within this framework represent common ideas emanating from other holistic approaches to defining reflective practice (e.g., descriptive frameworks, see Johns, 2000). Such themes include: recognising the nature of the workplace as self-focused and context specific; stressing improvements to self; generating practice-specific knowledge; and recognising the psychological processes utilised by the practitioner during reflective practice. Although the landscape map conceptualisation of reflective practice was originally developed within health care, it is deemed viable for consideration within ASP due to the similarities in activities and practice goals between the professions. The 12 principles should be questioned in terms of what they mean for ASP practice but in essence provide a more inclusive insight into the concept.

**Reflection in Professional Practice.** The work of Schön (1983) has particular relevance for the field of ASP as it examines the way in which professionals go about their daily practices. Schön’s contributions also afford greater understanding of the design and implementation of reflective practice. Although a full discussion of Schön’s theories goes beyond the scope of this review some elements thought to be intertwined in the practice and development of ASP are considered briefly. These are: *technical rationality, knowing-in-action, reflection-in-action,* and *reflection-on-action.*

*Technical rationality.* Technical rationality is linked to the idea of practice being separated from theory, and of the practitioner being seen as a ‘technician’ who simply applies theoretical knowledge (developed in educational establishments) to their own practice. Within sport psychology and other professions, professional knowledge has traditionally been defined in terms of a positivistic framework (Martens, 1987; Schön, 1987). Schön argued that within this framework, practitioners are seen as instrumental problem solvers who exact solutions by applying theory and techniques derived from systematic scientific knowledge. This application of theory to practice may be suitable for well defined and recognisable problems (cf. Romer, 2003). However, within ASP problems rarely present themselves in easily definable and resolvable form, making the neat application of theory to practice difficult (Anderson, Knowles, et al., 2004). In
support of this, the findings of Tod et al. (2007) indicated that graduates and teachers of applied sport psychology Master’s programmes devalued learning research and theory as in some cases it was not applicable to clients and practical situations, and “too textbook” reducing its relevance to real-life practice (p. 327). Technical rationality is therefore thought to devalue the knowledge that practitioners develop about and through their work (Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998). Subsequently, Schön (1983) turned the view of technical rationality around and considered how reflective practice can help us to frame problems, as well as how we should value and use the type of knowledge that is embedded within our workplaces. Such knowledge is thought to be generated by our practice experiences and is considered as tacit knowing-in-action (Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998).

Knowing-in-action. In a different view of theory than technical rationality, Schön (1987) discussed the use of knowledge-in-action as core to the artistry of professional practice. He suggested that,

“Artistry is an exercise of intelligence, a kind of knowing, though different in respects from our standard model of professional knowledge. It is not inherently mysterious; it is rigorous in its own terms; and we can learn a great deal about it” (p. 13).

Knowledge-in-action has also been labelled as craft knowledge (e.g., Knowles, Gilbourne, Borrie, & Neville, 2001) and tacit knowledge (e.g., Martens, 1987) and is suggested to be constructed of two parts. First, is that improving practice and professional development begins with reflecting on what we actually do, on our own experience. This reflection generates a rich and detailed knowledge base derived from practice (Ghaye & Lillyman, 2000). Second, this knowledge is used by practitioners in their work and thus it becomes our knowing-in-action. Much of this knowing is often difficult to make verbally explicit but it manifests itself in a practitioner’s behaviour (Schön). Accordingly, knowing-in-action is a view that professional practice is no longer to be understood as a mechanical application of scientifically based rules, but the function of personally tailored theories about what does and does not work in practice. Schön recognised the importance of making these theories explicit and the value of reflection in linking our espoused theories (e.g., what we say or claim we do) with our theories-in-use (e.g., what actually happens in practice). Hence, using reflection to examine not just the research based knowledge that influences our practice but also hands on knowledge-in-action, we will be in a better position to identify good practice and take steps to learn from it. Importantly, Johns (1995) suggested that reflective tacit knowledge-in-action should be seen as,
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“The most substantive form of knowledge and should properly constitute the body of knowledge of a practice discipline” (p. 25).

Reflection-in-action. This is described by Schön (1983) as,

“An epistemology of practice implicit in the artistic, intuitive processes which some practitioners do bring to situations of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and value conflict” (p. 49).

Reflection-in-action occurs during the work of a practitioner and concerns thinking about how to reshape and adjust what we are doing whilst it is underway (Ghaye & Lillyman, 2000). Schön argued that it is central to the art by which professionals handle and resolve their difficulties and concerns about practice, whilst actually in practice. This has particular links with the delivery of ASP services because in many instances practitioners are required to ‘think on their feet’ and display intuitive action in order to deal with the problems and issues that arise out of the idiosyncrasies of practice. With ASP practitioners now becoming increasingly engaged in humanistic approaches and counselling-based activities (e.g., Holt & Strean, 2001) it is likely that there ability to reflect-in-action will be a determinant of the effectiveness of their practice due to the client in such approaches and activities having a major role in directing interventions (cf. Hill, 2001). Critics of the notion of reflection-in-action, however, question whether practitioners have the time to reflect during action. Indeed, Van Manen (1991) described reflection-in-action more as a process of making a decision. Nevertheless, in contrast, Larrivee (2008) actually defines reflective practice as,

“On the job performance resulting from using a reflective process for daily decision making and problem-solving” (p. 342).

Despite the potential value of reflection-in-action in both aiding practice and better understanding how ASP practitioners work it is a confusing phenomenon that requires more research to better appreciate it.

Reflection-on-action. Reflection-on-action is the form of reflection that occurs after action and relates, via verbalised or non-verbalised thought, to the action that the practitioner has taken (Moon, 1999). It is a deliberate and conscious activity that can be conducted privately or publicly and is principally designed to improve future action (Ghaye & Lillyman, 2000). Thus, it is reminiscent of the definitions of reflective practice stated earlier. Reflection-on-action is thought to allow practitioners to access and make sense of their knowledge-in-action and subsequently allows practitioners to make more informed decisions in practice based on the knowledge generated from previous experience.
Reflective Practice in ASP. Growing research interest has been placed on understanding reflective practice and reporting the benefits of engaging in reflective practices within ASP. The increasing amount of publications is indicative of alternative methods of research becoming more accepted and trusted in the field (cf. Sparkes, 2002). Further, the product of reflection is suggested to have the potential to offer a rich resource highlighting the knowledge-in-action required to do sport psychology (Anderson, Knowles, et al., 2004; Cropley et al., in press), and answer calls from practitioners for the reporting of real-life consulting experiences (Andersen, 2000). It is thought that the use of reflective narratives to outline specific issues concerning ASP practice has the potential to not only inform the supervision of trainee sport psychologists but also enhance the effectiveness of sport psychologists’ professional practice (Jones, Evans, & Mullen, 2007). For example, transcripts and self-reflections on neophyte practice have identified key issues (e.g., self-awareness, role of supervision) related to the process of sport psychology service delivery, provided a sense of what aspiring professionals can expect during their initial training experiences, and outlined relevant practice knowledge to aid in the growth of sport psychology consultants-in-training (e.g., Cropley et al., 2007; Jones et al., 2007; Tammen, 2000; Tonn & Harmison, 2004; Woodcock, Richards, & Mugford, 2008). The practitioners at the centre of these research papers also consistently advocate the use of reflective practice.

Reflective accounts reported by professionally accredited practitioners have traditionally been less readily available, particularly within the peer-reviewed literature. In an early paper, Bull (1995) offered reflections on a five year consultancy programme delivered to an international cricket team in attempts to inform the practices of other practitioners. Whilst the paper clearly describes many aspects of practice and offers recommendations to those embarking on extended periods of ASP support there is a lack of emphasis on the reflective process he engaged in to draw his conclusions. This lack of attention to the reflective process is representative of many narratives (e.g., McCann, 2000) available by both neophyte and professional practitioners and has compounded the confusion experienced over the integration of reflective processes into the practice of ASP consultants. However, the potential learning opportunities provided by honest and insightful reflections is thought to outweigh such limitations and consequently the emergence of reflective accounts offered by professional consultants is now apparent. This is best seen in the special issue of the BPS Sport & Exercise Psychology Review (2006), which, guided by the principles of reflection, presents experienced practitioners’ reflective accounts of providing in-event support at the Athens Olympics. This narrative analysis of ‘Athens’ provided recommendations for those ‘in-event’ psychologists working towards
the Beijing Olympics and substantiates claims over the value of reflection in providing a source for learning and development within ASP.

Anderson, Knowles, et al. (2004) have provided the most substantial understanding of reflective practice and its role within ASP to date. Prior to the development of Accreditation and Chartership schemes (circa 2004), Petitpas, Giges, and Danish (1999) raised issues over whether training models were equipped to support sport psychology trainees in learning the requisite humanistic skills to provide athlete-centred services. Based on this premise, Anderson and colleagues presented a case for the value of reflective practice as an approach to professional training and development that can assist practitioners in effectively managing themselves in practice. By drawing on the types of knowledge that are valued within ASP and considering the work of Schön (1987), Anderson et al. proposed that,

“Through reflective practice, sport psychology practitioners can access, make sense of, and learn from the relevant knowledge-in-action that contributes to actually doing sport psychology” (p. 191).

Such proposals are in agreement with those made in related fields (e.g., sports coaching, Knowles et al., 2001) and raise awareness of the utility of reflective practice in helping practitioners to understand their work and themselves. This is consistent with Petitpas et al.’s view that greater emphasis on self-knowledge and adaptability is required to prepare practitioners to practice more effectively. Further, Poczwardowski, Sherman, and Henschen (1998) contented that,

“By paying attention to the self, thoughtfully analysing consultations and being aware of limitations, self-interests, prejudices and frustrations; practitioners will be in a better position to manage themselves and their practice effectively” (p.199).

In addition, Poczwardowski et al. suggested that reflecting on each consulting experience is essential for maximal personal growth and development.

The relationship between reflective practice and self-awareness is a common theme emanating from the ASP literature. Specific accounts of practitioner’s reflections-on-practice have highlighted reflection to be a valuable process in examining the “self” and uncovering more effective ways of “being”. For example, Holt and Strean’s (2001) narrative account of neophyte practice focused on the process of becoming a more athlete-centred practitioner. Through the understanding that a crucial element of athlete-centred approaches is the development of trust and rapport (cf. Ravizza, 1990) and the fact that
reflection may be an appropriate mechanism to help practitioners develop the self-understanding required to build working alliances in sport psychology relationships (cf. Poczwardowski et al., 1998), Holt engaged in a process of critical incident reflection. The findings reported that personal reflections helped to increase self-awareness and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses arising from initiating a consultation. This helped to identify key issues related to service delivery and led to improved self-management and applied practice. Similarly, Tonn and Harmison’s (2004) account of neophyte practice revealed that reflecting on her (Tonn’s) experiences allowed the enhancement of self-awareness regarding how she provided sport psychology services to athletes in a team setting. Tonn and Harmison additionally suggested that trainees can benefit tremendously from the process of self-reflection regarding their practicum experience by gaining a deeper insight into practice and self-awareness. Support for these recommendations has been provided by Tod et al. (2007) who interviewed participants regarding potential learning experiences within ASP. The participants in this study revealed a belief that the benefits of practical experience are enhanced with self-reflection, which leads to enhanced self-awareness. A contention further corroborated in related fields (e.g., nursing, Conway, 1998; education, Scanlan & Chernomas, 1997). Tod et al. indicated that practitioners enhance their understanding of their client interactions and themselves with self-reflection, and such knowledge might help them become more effective consultants.

Building on the notion that reflective practice enhances self-awareness, Winstone and Gervis (2006) outlined the potential importance of reflection in combating against the occurrence of countertransference in ASP practice. Countertransference refers specifically to the direction of the transference from practitioner to client, and occurs when thoughts and feelings in the sport psychologist are evoked by the client (Winstone & Gervis, 2006). Strean and Strean (1998) highlighted that if practitioners are not aware of negative feelings toward clients, or have no way of talking about them and working with them, they are likely to repress them. The danger is that without self-awareness of potential countertransference the sport psychologist/athlete relationship will be compromised, which will have a significant effect on the effectiveness of the support provided. Referring to the work of Anderson, Knowles, et al. (2004), Winstone and Gervis outlined that despite the intuitive value of reflective practice in helping practitioners to resolve this issue, little research attention has considered this relationship in any detail. However, Candy, Harri-Augstein, and Thomas (1985) suggested that if people are aware of what they are presently doing and can be encouraged to reflect on it and to consider alternatives, they are in an excellent position to adjust their ways of behaving. Therefore, it seems key that practitioners are able to access knowledge of self-awareness and act upon it.
appropriately. Attempting to do this in situations where countertransference may be an issue may lead to feelings of discomfort and vulnerability, but Anderson, Knowles, et al. suggested that if reflective practitioners are committed to improving practice, then challenging thoughts and emotions should ultimately enable them to learn from their experiences and understand the context of their practice.

Self-awareness gained through reflecting-on-practice has also been highlighted as an important contributor to the understanding, development, and integration of professional philosophy within ASP. Understanding the philosophical underpinnings of approaches to ASP (e.g., psychological skills training) has the potential to enhance the effectiveness of service-delivery within ASP (Poczwardowski, Sherman, & Ravizza, 2004). However, Lindsay, Breckon, Thomas, & Maynard (2007) explained that a lack of congruence between chosen methods and practitioner beliefs and values may become apparent if ASP practitioners do not examine and become familiar with their own personal philosophy. Further, Poczwardowski et al. (2004) suggested that questions relating to core beliefs and values should be addressed through a practitioner’s ongoing self-reflection and training to foster and develop knowledge of the self. Lindsay et al. therefore presented autoethnographic accounts and reflections on consultancies by an ASP practitioner in attempts to explore one practitioner’s journey towards congruence in professional philosophy. Lindsay and his colleagues disclosed that the process of formal reflection-on-action adopted by the practitioner in the study was central to making changes to his practice and establish an approach and act in a manner that was far more congruent with his underpinning values. This supports suggestions in other fields that reflection offers a focus to become more self-aware of the contradictions that exist between how we would like to practice, and how we actually do (Driscoll & Teh, 2001). Accordingly, Lindsay et al. indicated that practitioners need to clearly identify opportunities to reflect, particularly on sessions that have an increased degree of emotional significance for the practitioner. Ghaye and Lillyman (2000) suggested that we are unable to reflect on every aspect of what we do and should therefore consider “significant” aspects of practice or “critical” situations, which is consistent with the practice of using critical incidents to promote reflection as advocated by Griffin (2003).

Considerations of the specific reflective processes practitioners have engaged in are scarce within the ASP literature making it difficult to inform decisions about how to integrate reflection in ASP practice. For example, although Tonn and Harmison (2004) advocated the value of engaging in reflective practice for the development of ASP practice they do little to explicate the approaches adopted that resulted in such perceptions. Anderson, Knowles, et al. (2004)
suggested that the practicalities of engaging in reflective practice are flexible, but in a field where reflective practice is in its infancy an evidence-base of models of best practice may enhance the adoption of systematic reflection-on-action and thus aid practitioners to elicit the proposed benefits of reflecting on their experiences. Importantly, Anderson, Knowles, et al. suggested that becoming a reflective practitioner is more than a collection of techniques, and instead involves an all-encompassing attitude to practice that requires the practitioner to commit to professional and personal development. Nevertheless, Johns (1994) argued that reflective practice is a profoundly difficult thing to do and therefore guidance to support practitioners’ reflections is important.

Anderson, Knowles, et al. highlighted that a commonly used method of engaging in reflective practice involves writing a journal (Scanlan & Chernomas, 1997), which could be structured by a reflective guide (e.g., Gibbs, 1998, six-staged cyclical model). Such an approach has been successfully adopted within ASP by Lindsay et al. (2006) who proposed that the cyclical approach of Gibbs’s model facilitated the continual development of the practitioner as they progressed through each stage of the model’s process. In addition, the focus of the model on practical action plans meant that the practitioner was able to generate behavioural solutions to issues that they faced in their practice. Additional reports of the use of specific reflective methods have been provided by Anderson (1999) who used John’s (1994) structured model. The model developed by Johns was designed to tune the practitioner into his or her experience and facilitate reflection and consists of a range of questions that guide practitioners to examine actions, thoughts, and feelings in an attempt to develop a deeper understanding of practice. In response to the comments of Johns who warned practitioners against blindly following the structured reflection, Anderson recommended several changes to the structured procedure for use in sport psychology practice. As a consequence, Anderson demonstrated that engaging in reflective practice can increase practitioners’ understanding of their practice. Specifically, Anderson suggested that reflective practice assisted her in accessing and making sense of her knowledge-in-action. This is also evident in the findings of Lindsay et al. (2006) who outlined how reflective practice helped the practitioner to realise that the theoretical tools developed in the ‘classroom’ were not sufficient in the successful development of a rapport with the client. Hence, the practitioner was able to make specific changes to practice in behaviour in a subsequent consultation and, accordingly, practice more effectively. Additionally, in attempts to investigate the potential impact of reflective practice on the development of ASP consultant characteristics associated with effectiveness; Cropley et al. (2007) reported the use of Anderson’s version of John’s structured approach throughout a year of a trainee practitioner’s supervised experience. Whilst the findings of Cropley et al.’s study further substantiated the notion that reflection
improves self-awareness and generates understanding of knowledge-in-action that can enhance the delivery of ASP support, the authors also highlighted the benefits of adopting a structured reflective approach. Specifically, the approach was acknowledged to have facilitated the reflective process by focusing the trainee practitioner’s thinking and elucidating the process of excavating learning from practice. Such findings offer support for the use of more formalised, structured approaches to reflection where practitioners are encouraged to reflect methodically. In addition, Anderson et al. (2002) proposed that formal reflective models could provide a framework within which sport psychologists can reflect on their practice in a structured and effective way. This supports Knowles et al.’s (2001) claim that without structure there may be a tendency to simply ‘mull over’ an experience rather than systematically reflect. Further, learning through reflection may be more potent if there is an understanding of frameworks that encourage a structural process to guide the act of reflection (Platzer, Snelling, & Blake, 1997).

Despite support for the use of structured reflective writing, personal reflection can be limited by our own knowledge and understanding; therefore, sharing experiences with others publicly may create a forum to facilitate an interchange of views (Knowles et al., 2001). Certainly, engaging in reflective conversations with others presents the practitioner with the opportunity to access the knowledge of a colleague and thus make more informed decisions about developments to future practice in light of the current experience. In a recent study, Cropley et al.’s (in press) sample of trainee and accredited ASP practitioners expressed concerns over only engaging in processes of self-reflection due to practitioners being limited by their own knowledge and suggested that considerable value can be gained by reflecting with others. These findings support the contentions of Woodcock et al. (2008) who reported that by conducting reflections in solitude the practitioner may restrict professional development processes promoted by shared reflections with supervisors and peers. Further, Johns (2000) considered that through sharing reflections on learning experiences greater understanding of those experiences could be achieved than by reflection as a lone exercise.

The notion of shared reflection could be linked to the supervisory and mentoring processes associated with professional development programmes. For example, Anderson, Knowles, et al. (2004) clearly advocated supervision and mentoring structures to support reflective practice, which appears to be the first call for ongoing supervision in the literature from a UK sport psychology perspective. Nevertheless, recent research has highlighted that many sport psychologists do not have access to regular and frequent supervision (Winstone & Gervis, 2006). This has implications for the way in which professional training
programmes attempt to implement reflective practice and develop practitioners capable of taking responsibility for their own learning. Johns (1994) suggested that a supervisor could provide a supportive environment that will encourage reflective practitioners to develop a deeper more critical understanding of their work. This clearly lends itself well to the supervised experience framework for practitioner development within ASP, where the professional practice supervisor could encourage the use of reflective practice by engaging their supervisees in reflection. However, Johns proposed that although the practitioner’s supervisor may be appropriate to fulfil this role, it is important that a relationship of mutual respect and understanding is developed between the supervisor and practitioner. This is indicative of the concept of the ‘safe learning environment’, which is proposed to be essential to learning the skill of reflection (Saylor, 1990). A safe environment is one in which students are free to examine and reflect on their work thoughtfully and honestly without fear of judgment or reprisal (Riley-Doucet & Wilson, 1997). Supervisors must therefore be aware that such conditions must be met. Building on the concept of shared reflection, Knowles et al. (2007) explored the value of reflective practice in facilitating the supervision process associated with professional training programmes. Over a 3 year period of supervision the supervisee in the study outlined that,

“The combination of experiences increased my capacity to make sense of my applied experiences, to critically evaluate my own practice, and to manage my own professional and personal development” (p. 119).

Knowles and colleagues also outlined the significance in a shared (two-way) approach to reflection that assisted the supervisee in better understanding new approaches to practice. It must be noted, however, that the potential success of this approach to supervision may lie in the ability of the supervisor to engage in a shared reflective process. In Knowles et al.’s investigation, the supervisor was experienced in the research and application of reflective practice, and it cannot, therefore, be assumed that by merely applying a process of reflection the benefits stated in previous research will be achieved. Indeed, Andrews et al. (1998) outlined that supervisors not only need to be skilled in reflecting but also need to be competent in facilitating reflectiveness in others. This may mean that in order to teach reflectively we have to become reflective ourselves (cf. Scanlan & Chernomas, 1997).

Critiquing Reflective Practice: Future Directions for the Field of ASP. Reflective practice appears to becoming more prominent within the field of ASP with researchers and practitioners promoting the value of reflection in the personal and professional development of ASP consultants. However,
before the field unquestioningly embraces the concept of reflective practice it is important to raise a number of issues concerning its integration into ASP practice.

First, understandings of the concept of reflective practice are still equivocal in ASP. This may be due to the field taking its understandings of reflection from related areas and applying them without due consideration for the milieu of ASP practice. For example, Martindale and Collins (2007) acknowledged that there is little guidance concerning “what” ASP practitioners should actually be reflecting on. Thus, the benefits so widely acknowledged in other fields are not recognised. Consequently, a greater awareness of the way in which reflective practice can be adopted by both trainee and qualified ASP practitioners is required.

Second, reflective practice is recognised as a highly skilled activity (cf. Andrews et al., 1998) and it appears as though these skills may be taken for granted with assumptions within ASP being made that reflecting requires little effort. Such notions are compounded by the fact that professional ASP bodies place little emphasis on the development of reflective skills, and offer little guidance on its use (cf. Knowles et al., 2007). As a result, we are in danger of labelling reflection as “something to be done” rather than a mechanism for developing effective practice. Additionally, little evidence exists in the ASP literature that suggests how or even if reflective practice skills can be taught (cf. Ghaye & Lillyman, 2000).

Third, despite the intuitive and narrative reports that support the value of reflective practice, little empirical evidence exists to suggest that practice development occurs as a direct result of reflective practice (Andrews et al., 1998). Most studies have utilised self-report feedback as a means of assessing the effectiveness of reflective practice (e.g., Tammen, 2001; Tonn & Harmison, 2004) and no studies have used objective measures of performance which can determine improvements in applied practice. The relationship between reflective practice and effectiveness is therefore not explicitly clear. Nevertheless, in attempts to address this issue, Cropley et al. (in press) examined potential links between reflective and effective practice initially by developing a definition of effective practice in sport psychology. The emerging definition encapsulated a multi-dimensional process of meeting client needs through the development of a working alliance, goal setting and goal achievement, and reflection-on-action. Additionally, reflective practice emerged as a vital component in the concept and development of effectiveness, with participants also highlighting the seminal role of reflection in experiential learning. Despite such findings, if reflective practice is to be accepted as a valid means for practitioner development future research should empirically examine the potential of reflective practice to enhance the
effectiveness of ASP support so that a more holistic understanding of its value and integration in professional training and development can be gained.

Forth, reflective practice literature within ASP, in many cases, contains little detail about the approaches to reflection adopted by the practitioners within the study. It is therefore difficult to empathise with the authors and learn from their experiences with complete confidence. As the reporting of reflective narrative becomes a more accepted method of investigation it is hoped that researchers will be more lucid in their explanations of their reflective approach to practice. Finally, Anderson et al. (2002) suggested that reflective practice could be used to self-evaluate practice and increase sport psychologists’ accountability to their client, themselves, and their profession. Whilst using reflection to examine and justify practice, and take personal responsibility for monitoring practice and striving to increase effectiveness is clearly beneficial to the development of ASP practice, reflective practice as a means of being accountable to the profession may be problematic. The monitoring of practitioners by professional bodies (e.g., BASES) through reflection may result in practitioners engaging in a socially desirable practice in order to meet the requirements associated with the training and development syllabus (cf. Cropley et al., in press). Certainly, honest reflections of what ’actually’ happened during practice would undoubtedly raise ethical issues about a practitioner’s actions and behaviours (cf. Ghaye, 2007).

References


Table 1. Characteristics Associated with Effective ASP Consultants

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<th>Characteristic</th>
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<tr>
<td>▪ Ability to demonstrate the use of their own mental skills (e.g., Hardy et al., 1996).</td>
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<td>▪ Ability to develop a working alliance (e.g., Poczwardowski, Sherman, &amp; Henschen, 1998; Tod &amp; Andersen, 2005).</td>
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<td>▪ Approachable (e.g., Anderson, Miles, et al., 2004; Shambrook &amp; Bull, 1995).</td>
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<td>▪ Available (e.g., Bull, 1997; Weigand et al., 1999).</td>
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<td>▪ Aware of the boundaries of their expertise (e.g., Weigand et al., 1999).</td>
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<td>▪ Clarity of the role adopted by the practitioner (e.g., Anderson, Miles, et al., 2004).</td>
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<td>▪ Commitment and passion (e.g., Yukelson, 2001).</td>
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<td>▪ Counseling skills: empathetic, genuine, and patience (e.g., Petitpas, Danish, &amp; Giges, 1999; Yukelson, 2001).</td>
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<td>▪ Effective intervention skills / good practice service (e.g., Anderson, Miles, et al., 2004; Meichenbaum &amp; Turk, 1987; Yukelson, 2001).</td>
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<tr>
<td>▪ Flexible in approach to ASP (e.g., Partington &amp; Orlick, 1987; Yukelson, 2001).</td>
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<td>▪ Good communication and listening skills (e.g., Anderson, Miles, et al., 2004; Weigand, Richardson, &amp; Weinberg, 1999).</td>
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<td>▪ Honest and trustworthy (e.g., Hardy, Jones, &amp; Gould, 1996; Petitpas et al., 1999).</td>
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<tr>
<td>▪ Knowledgeable about sport and sport psychology (e.g., Anderson, Miles, et al., 2004; Orlick &amp; Partington, 1987).</td>
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<tr>
<td>▪ Perceptive (e.g., Anderson, Miles, et al., 2004).</td>
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<tr>
<td>▪ Personality / interpersonal skills (e.g., Partington &amp; Orlick, 1987; Yukelson, 2001).</td>
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<tr>
<td>▪ Understanding and implementing professional philosophy (e.g., Poczwardowski, Sherman, &amp; Ravizza, 2004).</td>
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Figure 1 The experiential learning cycle (Kolb, 1984).
Figure 2. An emerging landscape of reflective practice. Twelve principles of reflection (adapted from Ghaye and Lillyman, 2000, p. 120).
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