

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

The Development of a Model to Evaluate the Effectiveness of Applied Sport Psychology Practice

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PART II

CONCEPTUALISING A MODEL TO EVALUATE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF APPLIED SPORT PSYCHOLOGY PRACTICE

The aim of Part II of the thesis is to develop an appropriate model to evaluate the effectiveness of applied sport psychology practice. In order to do this it is appropriate to consider a number of issues. The first chapter in Part II aims to position the thesis within the field of sport psychology. Further the nature of applied sport psychology practice and the implications of this on the development of an appropriate evaluation model are considered. The current status of evaluation in applied sport psychology practice is also explored to justify and demonstrate the need for an appropriate evaluation model.

The second chapter in Part II endeavours to develop an understanding of the field of evaluation and the application of evaluation in other applied areas. The relevance of issues that arose in these areas and their implications for developing a model for evaluation in applied sport psychology are discussed.

The final chapter proposes a model for evaluating applied sport psychology support that aims to fit within the constraints of practice and provide pertinent information to document effectiveness and facilitate improvement.

CHAPTER 3

SETTING THE SCENE: THE NEED FOR AN EVALUATION MODEL

SECTION 3.1

POSITIONING THE THESIS WITHIN THE FIELD OF SPORT PSYCHOLOGY

3.1.1 Defining applied sport psychology

In order to position the thesis within the field of sport psychology it is appropriate to explore and define what applied sport psychology is. Debate, and at times confusion, exists within the field and a lucid starting point will prove valuable (Weiss, 1998). In their position statement the European Federation of Sport Psychology defined sport psychology as being concerned with

'the psychological foundations, processes and consequences of the psychological regulation of sport related activities of one or several persons acting as the subject(s) of the activity. The focus may be on behaviour or on different psychological dimensions of human behaviour (i.e. affective, cognitive, motivational and sensorimotor dimensions' (p221, 1996)

Further, they suggested that physical activity can take place in competitive, educational, recreational, preventative and rehabilitation settings and includes health related exercise. Subjects include all persons involved in the different sport and exercise settings (athletes, coaches, officials, teachers, physiotherapists, parents, spectators). This broad definition reflects the diversity of the discipline which has been recognised elsewhere (Morris & Summers, 1996).

The definition of applied sport psychology adopted for this thesis should be seen as one element of the discipline of sport psychology. Applied sport psychology is principally concerned with the application of theories, principles and techniques from psychology to the enhancement of performance and the personal growth of competitive athletes (William and Straub, 1993). Arguably, the aim of applied sport psychology is to induce psycho-behavioural change in the athlete to enhance performance and the quality of the sport experience (Vealey, 1994).

3.1.2 Practice and research in applied sport psychology

Applied sport psychology has been recognised as a scientific discipline as well as a professional body and the activities of applied sport psychologists reflect this dual role. The presence of both a research-oriented theme, including basic and applied research, and

a practice-oriented theme within applied sport psychology has been consistently recognised (Figure 3.1.1; Dishman, 1983; Weiss, 1998). Further, the need to ensure these two themes do not become distant relatives has been steadfastly argued.

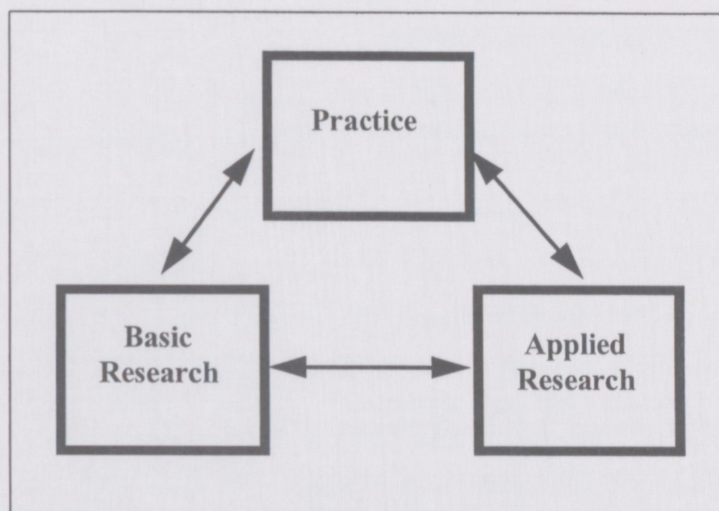


Figure 3.1.1: Three areas of activity in the field of applied sport psychology

The field is committed to a scientist-practitioner approach and there is a need to integrate knowledge derived from basic research, applied research and practice in order to develop the field as a scientific and applied discipline (McCullagh, 1998). This scientist-practitioner approach which is prevalent in clinical psychology has three aims (Barlow *et al.*, 1984; Nelson-Gray, 1994):

1. to produce practitioners who have the skills to demonstrate evidence of their effectiveness
2. encourage practitioners to be active consumers of research, using the latest findings to compliment their practice
3. encourage practitioners to be active researchers reporting their data to the scientific community

Practice must be evidence-based whereby decisions are taken on the basis of current, relevant research findings (Biddle, 1997; Jenkinson, 1997). Further, practice must influence research to ensure it is appropriate and relevant to the realities of this setting.

It has been argued that, a reciprocal relationship or '*passionate collaboration*' between research and practice is essential for the advancement of the field (Weiss, 1998).

In order to develop an appropriate model and methods for the evaluation of applied sport psychology practice it is important to recognise and appreciate the goals of practice and how they differ from the goals of applied research and basic research (Vealey & Garner-Holman, 1998). In applied sport psychology practice, as in clinical psychology practice, the goal is improved client outcome (Barlow *et al.*, 1984). This is the primary issue and the practitioner does not choose the issues to be examined, the athlete/client does and, '*each problem must be addressed as it occurs in nature, as an open living process in all of its complexity*' (Peterson, 1991, p426). The practitioner must strive to provide the best service possible to increase the likelihood of athlete improvement. The service is driven by the needs and demands of the athlete. Arguably, in this role the applied sport psychologist should be identified as a practitioner-scientist (Milne, 1987) because the demands of science are secondary to the demands of practice.

In applied research the goal of the activity is to generate theory-based knowledge and answer problems related to the applied setting in a systematic manner (Barlow *et al.*, 1987; McCullagh, 1998). Athlete improvement is hoped for but this is not the central issue. In applied research the athlete's needs did not start the sequence of events and therefore are not the central issue. The athlete was recruited and engaged in the intervention because it was developed as a research study, not because the athlete required intervention. In basic research Barlow *et al.* (1987) argued that client improvement is not even a secondary issue, instead developing an understanding of processes and mechanisms and meeting the rigorous demands of science are primary.

In order to develop a credible scientific and knowledge basis for the field evaluation in each of these arenas is necessary and should be valued (Strean & Roberts, 1992). However, in practice it is important to bear in mind the primary goal and recognise that this focus will necessarily constrain the methods of evaluation that are available to the practitioner. This thesis is situated in the area of practice and aims to develop a model to

evaluate its effectiveness. In developing this model it will be necessary to consider the unique constraints and demands of practice that differ from a research setting.

3.1.3 Clinical and educational applied sport psychology practice

In the UK, applied sport psychology practice typically takes one of two forms: educational or clinical (Biddle, *et al.*, 1992). The majority of practitioners focus on education and usually offer services that include education of coaches and athletes on the psychological processes involved in sport as well as developing mental training programmes designed to enhance sport performance. Sport psychologists operating in the clinical domain have qualifications in clinical psychology which will enable them to deal with problem behaviours. At the time of writing, only 3 out of 63 individuals accredited by BASES to provide sport psychology support have clinical qualifications (BASES, 1998). This suggests that the majority of practitioners may be seen as educational sport psychologists working to enhance performance through education and non-clinical problem solving.

This focus on performance enhancement is also reflected in the reported activities of practitioners working with U.S. Olympic athletes (Gould *et al.*, 1989). Therefore, the thesis will focus on developing a model to evaluate the activities of non-clinical sport psychologists where the aim is, arguably, to provide a quality service to induce psycho-behavioural change in the athlete to enhance performance and the quality of the sport experience (Vealey, 1994). Further, it should be highlighted that the thesis is specifically focused on the effectiveness of interventions when working with athletes and this may involve working with individuals, groups or squads. Further, this thesis advocates and works within the framework that, wherever possible, interventions should be tailored to fit the idiosyncratic needs of each individual athlete. This is in line with the recommendations for the UKSI which suggests psychological services '*would be highly specific to the individual athlete*' (UKSC, 1998, p14). It is recognised that adopting this position necessarily neglects consideration of sport psychology work undertaken with others, for example coaches, parents, or officials. However, it was deemed necessary to narrow the focus to fit the confines of a PhD thesis and address only working with

athletes. Linking with this, the evaluative instruments identified in this thesis have focused on the athlete (i.e. athlete's use of sport psychology, athlete's satisfaction).

In summary, the thesis is positioned in the educational aspect of applied sport psychology practice where the practitioner works with athletes typically providing an individualised service and this position is illustrated in Figure 3.1.2.

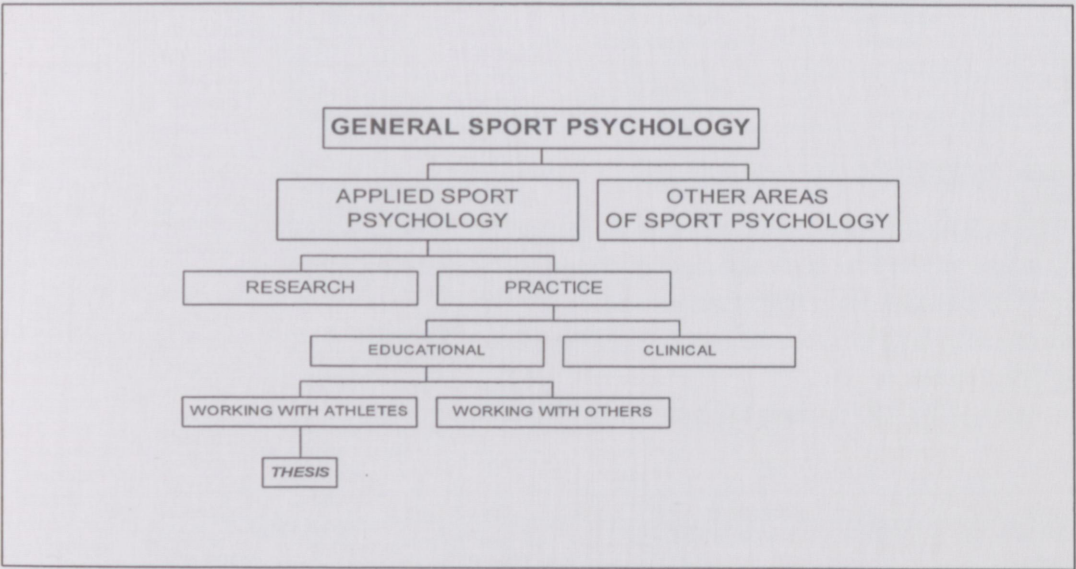


Figure 3.1.2: The position of this thesis within the field of sport psychology

3.1.4 Models of performance enhancement in applied sport psychology practice

A number of models exist which aim to outline the process of applied sport psychology practice (e.g. Boutcher & Rotella, 1987; Vealey, 1988) and it is appropriate to consider these in order to illustrate the activities involved in applied sport psychology practice and to position the concept of evaluation within this. Specifically, Thomas (1990) drew on a number of models and his observations of practising sport psychologists to develop a useful seven-stage model of performance enhancement (see Figure 3.1.3).

Phase 1 involves an orientation meeting where the purpose and objectives of the consultation are outlined and the athlete and consultant's level of commitment is

Figure 3.1.3: Performance enhancement process in applied sport psychology:
Thomas's model (1990)

determined. The second phase involves a detailed analysis of the sport involved which would draw on research in physiology and biomechanics as well as psychology. The next phase involves conducting a baseline assessment to determine strengths and weakness so that the programme can be directed to the athlete's needs. This may involve the use of psychometrics, performance profiling, questionnaires, interviews and information from significant others.

At phase 4 the psychologist analyses and interprets the athlete's profile and should feedback to the athlete to ensure that he or she is happy with its accuracy and understands its implications. Thomas argued that at this stage the athlete may be receptive to the idea of keeping a mental logbook. In Phase 5 psychological skills training should begin whereby the athlete can work on developing and improving skills by utilising various techniques. As is evident by Figure 3.1.3 this could involve a range of skills and

techniques. However, sport psychology practice has typically been associated with the techniques of stress management (including relaxation techniques and coping strategies), confidence building (including self-talk and thought management), attention training (including focusing techniques), imagery (including mental rehearsal and imagery relaxation) and goal setting to increase motivation (Gould *et al.*, 1989).

Following extensive practice the skills can be implemented into practice and then competition (Phase 6). Phase 7 involves evaluating the performance enhancement process to determine whether the athlete adhered to the programme and whether this resulted in performance improvements and/or personal adjustment. Importantly, the evaluation should be based on the objectives of phase 1 and, arguably, evaluation should be an on-going process integrated within the model and not an add-on end activity (see Chapter 5 for further discussion).

Thomas's model provides a useful outline of the process of applied sport psychology practice. However, the inflexibility and rigidity of general models is acknowledged and it is noted that the model should not be followed blindly. It should be recognised that consultancy is a dynamic interactive process whereby the process is adapted to the idiosyncratic demands of each consultancy (Hardy *et al.*, 1996). Further, it is inappropriate to see sport psychologists as mere psychological skill trainers, the role is more complex and this will be considered throughout this thesis (Hardy & Parfitt, 1994; Morris & Thomas, 1994). Nevertheless, this performance enhancement model provided a useful framework in which to position the concept of evaluation within this thesis.

SECTION 3.2

EVALUATION IN APPLIED SPORT PSYCHOLOGY PRACTICE: THE CURRENT STATUS IN THE 'AGE OF ACCOUNTABILITY'

3.2.1 Introduction

In order to understand the need for an evaluation model in applied sport psychology it is appropriate to consider the current situation. This chapter examines the reasons why evaluation is essential and what methods are currently being employed within the field.

3.2.2 Calls for accountability

Smith (1989) recognised that applied sport psychology had entered an '*age of accountability*' and that the need to respond to these accountability demands was primary. As sport science support in the U.K continues to grow and sport psychologists move towards professional status, it is imperative that they are able to document, monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of their services in order to enhance accountability and credibility (Williams, 1995).

A number of practitioners have echoed these concerns and emphasised the importance of sound evaluation methods. Biddle *et al.* (1992) argued that for the practice of sport psychology to develop in the UK, more systematic evaluation of the services being provided should be undertaken. Further, Poczwadowski *et al.* (1998) recognised programme and consultant evaluation as an important consideration in their 11 stage model for the delivery of effective applied sport psychology. A number of other practitioners have also noted the important role of evaluation in their models of performance enhancement (Thomas, 1990; Terry, 1997). In short, sport psychologists should be willing and able to take responsibility for evaluating the services they provide (Heyman, 1987; Weigand *et al.*, 1999).

3.2.3 Current methods of evaluation

From sport psychology literature there are occasional examples of evaluation of practice (e.g. Partington & Orlick, 1987b; Gould *et al.*, 1990; Grove *et al.*, 1999; Weigand *et al.*, 1999) which will be discussed in more detail in subsequent chapters. However evaluation is not customary and '*rather conspicuous by its absence*' (Hardy & Jones, 1994, p82). It appears that this lack of evaluation is also mirrored in sport psychology

practice in the UK. Although developments are ongoing, at the time of writing few clear concrete criteria were developed.

As noted previously, developments in sports science support in the UK have been accelerating. In order to protect the profession and increase its credibility and accountability, evaluation of the services is essential. However, rigorous evaluation methods are yet to be established. As discussed in Section 2.1, BASES has a process of Accreditation through which individuals must demonstrate their knowledge and competence in order to be recognised as a competent sport psychologist. The Association works closely with UK Sport and the national governing bodies of sport and this process of Accreditation is recognised as the 'gold standard' of service delivery (BASES, 1999a).

This process serves as a quality control mechanism in that accredited members are the only ones recognised by the Association as having the skills to practice independently as a sport psychologist (BASES, 1999b). These procedures are commendable and on-going refinement will increase the credibility of the process. However, although the sport psychologist must show evidence of evaluating their services, there is no uniformity or guidelines on how to best evaluate and what criteria should be used. Weigand *et al.* (1999) expressed the same concern for the equivalent accrediting organisation in North America; the Association for the Advancement of Applied Sport Psychology (AAASP).

Prior to the development of the World Class Performance Programme (WCPP), from 1988 to 1998, sport science support was delivered to governing bodies through 29 Sports Science Support Programmes (SSSP; UKSC/NCF, 1998). The SSSPs were co-ordinated by the National Coaching Foundation and typically included a Project Director and Assistant. Monitoring and evaluation was undertaken both internally and externally. Internal monitoring procedures included written and verbal reports between the programme personnel and governing body representative and evaluation of the Project Assistant. External evaluation was also undertaken on randomly selected projects by a BASES accredited sport scientist over a 3-6 month period. General guidelines for undertaking this were available, however with the exception of an Athlete Evaluation

Form, standardised instruments were not identified, (SSSP Committee, 1995). Further, little information on the success of these evaluations was available. Nevertheless, it would be appropriate to build upon these developments.

Currently, sport psychologists may practice within WCPPs and these are monitored and evaluated by Sport England's Lottery Unit. Business and financial measures are assessed and measures of performance are also evaluated. Each governing body is required to identify their own long term performance goals and milestone targets which will be used to evaluate effectiveness. The World Class Programme (1998) suggested that '*goals and targets are likely to be in terms of rankings or medals won at significant international competitions*' (p16). Therefore, WCPPs are judged in terms of performance and ultimately sport psychologists working within these programmes must also be willing to be evaluated by these criteria. Arguably this focus on outcome performance is not ideal because it will fail to provide pertinent information required to improve and develop the services.

Recently, Sport England has developed a monitoring programme to consider the integrity of each general programme, individual athlete programmes and the framework within which services are delivered. Monitoring is typically undertaken in partnership with individuals from the Expert Adviser's Register who are world class experts on the specific sport and nominated by the governing bodies. This approach to evaluation would appear to provide more useful feedback information that could be used to develop programmes. However this is a new process and again details on exactly how this is undertaken and whether it is successful were, at the time of writing, unavailable.

It appears that Sport England's policy is to develop a general approach to evaluating an entire programme, of which sport psychology is a very small part. Arguably, an approach that is specific to sport psychology, yet fits within the policy framework, would prove more beneficial to the profession and ultimately the standard of the services.

As noted previously, linking in with and complimenting the WCPPs has been the development of the United Kingdom Sports Institute (UKSI) and its network centres. The stated aim of the UKSI is to *'provide our best men and women with the facilities and support services they need to compete and win at the highest level'* (Sport England, 1999). Although developments are ongoing and final decisions are yet to be made it has been suggested that quality assurance of the services (including sport psychology) delivered by the UKSI will be monitored through a number of procedures. Firstly, the UKSI is developing an accreditation system for the Network centres in partnership with the British Olympic Association Accreditation Steering Group. This system was being piloted and recommendations unavailable at the time of writing.

Secondly, the UKSI was developing its own standards and baseline criteria against which service providers will be assessed. At the time of writing pilot projects were being undertaken by the National Sports Medicine Institute (NSMI) and the Scottish Institute of Sports Medicine and Sports Science (SISMSS), in cooperation with BASES and the BOA, to develop a Register of Exercise and Sport Care in the UK (RESCU) on which individuals who reached certain criteria would be included (NSMI, 1999). This register was previously known as the United Classifications System for Sports Science and Sports Medicine in the UK. The existing BASES' accreditation criteria for sport and exercise scientists have been integrated into this scheme (BASES, 1999a).

Thirdly, it has been stated that *'more importantly, it is anticipated that 'world class' should be principally defined by customer satisfaction'* (UKSC, 1998, p5). This focus on customer (i.e. athletes, coaches and performance directors) satisfaction is commendable, however the shortcomings of subjective feedback suggest it should be viewed with caution. Fourthly, the UKSI will adopt and incorporate the WCPP's performance goals of any governing body they are working with as additional evaluation criteria (McKinlay, 1999).

As is evident developments on evaluating sports psychology within the national framework of sports science are ongoing. The need for accountability has been

reinforced by the amount of lottery money fed into sport. However, although policy has been developed clear effectiveness criteria and methods for evaluation have not yet emerged. Despite continual calls for rigorous evaluation of practice, it is argued that the profession of sport psychology still lacks formal procedures to evaluate the work of its members. Strean (1998) suggested that the need for effective evaluation is one of the '*most pressing needs in applied sport psychology... and one that is essential for the growth of the field*' (p340). Similarly, Grove *et al.* (1999) stated that the need for systematic evaluation of mental skills training programmes is a '*significant professional practice issue in applied sport psychology*' (p107). A model and procedures to evaluate the effectiveness of applied sport psychology practice are an essential pre-requisite to enable the field to mature and develop into an established profession.

3.2.4 Focus on evaluating effectiveness

As has been demonstrated evaluation of practice is not a customary activity and there is a pressing need to develop appropriate methods and criteria. The aim of this thesis was to develop a model to evaluate the effectiveness of applied sport psychology practice. This focus on effectiveness was deliberate. It was essential to address the question of whether a programme or intervention was effective before questions of efficiency or cost-effectiveness can be considered. Milne (1996) argued that because sport psychology is still in an 'embryonic' stage it would be expected that evaluation would focus on outcome effectiveness. As more funding comes into sport psychology practice issues of efficiency and cost-effectiveness will become increasingly important, however, it is not possible to address these until an indication of effectiveness is accurately gauged.

3.2.5 Summary and linking with Chapter 4

Sport psychology is in an '*age of accountability*', however the current evaluation methods are insufficient to address these accountability demands. There is a need for a model that will fit with the demands of practice and evaluate effectiveness in a rigorous and credible manner.

In order to take steps towards developing an evaluation model it is appropriate to consider how other applied areas evaluate their practice. The aim of the next chapter is to firstly develop an understanding of the field of evaluation and then examine how evaluation has been undertaken in applied areas related to sport psychology.