Reflective Practice within Elite Consultancy: Diary Extracts and Further Discussion on a Personal and Elusive Process

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This paper examines reflective practice by illustrating and commenting upon aspects of an elite sport psychology practitioner’s reflective processes. Extracts from a practitioner’s reflective diary, maintained during attendance at a major sporting event, focused upon issues that relate to on-going relationships and communication with fellow practitioners and athletes. Authors one and three offered subsequent comment on these accounts to facilitate movement toward critical reflection via an intrapersonal process creating considerations for the practitioners with regard to skills and personal development. These issues are discussed in relation to pragmatic topics such as “staged” and “layered” reflection encouraged by author collaboration and shared writing within the present paper. We argue these outcomes against more philosophical/opaque considerations such as the progression of critical reflection and critical social science.

Over the last ten years reflective practice has been increasingly discussed in the sport domain through coaching (e.g., Irwin, Hanton, & Kerwin, 2004; Knowles, Gilbourne, Borrie, & Nevil, 2001; Knowles, Tyler, Borrie, & Eubank, 2006) and sport and exercise psychology where a range of theoretical and applied directions have been discussed relating to process, focus and skills associated with reflection (e.g., Anderson, Knowles, & Gilbourne, 2004; Cropley, Hanton, Miles, & Niven, 2010a,b; Knowles & Gilbourne, 2010; Knowles, Gilbourne, & Niven, 2011; Martindale &
Collins, 2007; Winstone & Gervis, 2007). A subset within the applied sport psychology literature relates to neophyte practitioners’ use of reflection to develop skills and practice based knowledge (e.g., Cropley, Miles, Hanton, & Niven, 2007; Jones, Evans, & Mullen, 2007; Knowles, Gilbourne, Tomlinson, & Niven, 2007; Woodcock, Richards, & Mugford, 2008). More recent texts have considered the use of reflective practice with athletes (e.g., Faull & Cropley, 2009; Hanton, Cropley, & Lee, 2009). Furthermore, Jones, Lavallee, and Tod (2011) have suggested that young athletes could use reflection in-action and reflection on-action to develop life skills through sport.

There seems to be growing consensus within the literature that reflective practice can benefit both the practitioner and athlete alike, however, Faull and Cropley (2009) note that “Applied Sport Psychology (ASP) practitioners need to be convinced of the value and worth of reflection if they are to encourage athletes to truly ‘buy into’ and engage in the process” (p.337). Their cautionary tone might suggest that to create a case that convinces both practitioners and athletes to engage with and explore reflective processes, there needs to be more reflective accounts from experienced practitioners in sport psychology. In one isolated example of this, a special issue of the British Psychological Society *The Sport and Exercise Psychology Review* (Vol 2, No 2, 2006) undoubtedly made a contribution toward the sharing of in-event experiences via reflective practice writing. These “reflective accounts” were not gathered over-time through a staged reflection processes (a common approach in published neophyte accounts) but, instead, provided illustrations of a single point of reflection on practice during the 2004 Olympic Games. The precise reflective techniques used are not documented thus leaving readers with contextualized and valuable insights on practice but with little information on reflective processes in-action. In addition, and to extend the above critiques further, Knowles (2009) noted that only three of these accounts provided readers with illustrations of critical reflection. For example:

. . . I’ve noticed that I have held a belief to respect other people who have more experience than myself. What I had not appreciated and that became clear in Athens, was that as a consequence of this belief I would indiscriminately allow the views of others, who I felt were more experienced, to take precedence over mine . . . the next step is to restructure this belief such that it becomes more adaptive and helpful. My current thinking is to challenge the part of the old belief that indicated an indiscriminate appraisal when comparing the views of others to my own views. Thus I prefer to think in terms of discriminating between different views and coming to a more balanced conclusion (Katz, 2006, p.28).

In using the above example of critical reflection we have chosen to emphasize the intrapersonal nature of critical engagement and in previous writings we have not tended to dwell upon the intrapersonal nature of critical reflection (see Knowles & Gilbourne, 2010, 2011). Specifically, Knowles and Gilbourne (2010) noted that critical reflection might serve to challenge and contest established thinking and so unhinge views that had for some period of time held sway. In the present text we do not seek to move away or rewind from that view but stress again our appreciation of the fact that developing ideas and criticisms that might, one day, alter the course of applied practice. This may take a considerable amount of time and a good deal of personal conviction as often calls for change, and critique more generally, tend to be resisted.
For the purposes of the present paper we explore critical reflection in a more localized context. We place emphasis upon critical reflection bringing about change at an intrapersonal rather than at a community level. Of course it follows that, in some cases, what begins as challenges and changes in an individual’s own practice might gather momentum and develop in scope. Contesting messages, once highly personalized and contextualized within the boundaries of one’s own work, might therefore be presented to a wider audience and may have an impact on the way communities conduct practice. We propose that the intrapersonal, and the notion of globally contesting “the way” things are done, can be viewed potentially as interrelated. It also seems fair to consider personal change through the process of critical reflection as being something that might remain located in the personal domain, in essence something that is “kept private”. We will return to some of the issues as we explore the issue of critical reflective practice further.

Having stated this intention we feel obliged to stress that we do not subscribe to any overriding view that reflection of a technical nature (linked typically with issues of efficiency, effectiveness and accountability), and reflection that is practical in nature (associated with the exploration of personal meaning) is, somehow, less valuable or less mature than reflection which demonstrates critical engagement (Knowles, 2009). It seems entirely reasonable to propose that different circumstances are likely to require and engender different types of reflection. It also seems sensible to avoid any suggestion that we feel critical reflection is somehow “better” than other levels of engagement. Those caveats aside it is clear that reflective practice is centrally located within a number of applied sport psychology training pathways (see Knowles & Gilbourne, 2010; Knowles et al., 2011). It is also clear, particularly when the foundational literature is embraced, that critical reflection exists as a most challenging and, we would argue, essential reflective process.

As consumers of reflective practice texts we also feel that critical reflection is not a process that is widely illustrated across the sports-based literature, and/or, if present, it has not been specifically identified and focused-upon. The definitions provided by Knowles and Gilbourne (2010) and the nature of the discussions to follow, also indicate that critical reflection might be a difficult topic to grasp and a problematic process to identify even when it is in evidence through the direction of writing or the quizzical nature of thinking. Maybe it is easier to turn away from things that seem a little opaque and ill-defined, maybe we all feel more comfortable with what we can easily grasp. In terms of reflective practice technical and practical reflection appear to be understood, we sense critical reflection is not. We do urge, however, that the applied community stays engaged with the challenges associated with progressing our understanding of what critical reflection might be, and sustains interest in developing processes that might encourage critical engagement.

In making this appeal we do, rather directly, respond to one facet of reviewer feedback which intimated that critical reflection, and the issues that surround it, may not be so essential to the progression of the reflective agenda. That may or may not be the case and we do not propose that critical reflection becomes a primary focus of debate within reflective practice communities, however, we do believe that this idea is given time to develop a literature base. Our thinking on this challenge is that we should stay the course and keep open dialogue on this topic. Our hope is that the present paper manages to make some contribution to that debate,
to sustain the currency of critical reflective practice and make ideas available for others to contemplate and critique.

Further Rationale and Overview

In the UK changes to professional training pathways through the British Psychological Society (BPS) and the British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences (BASES) for sport psychologists and sports scientists, respectively, highlight the role of reflective practice within their preaward curricula, renewal of awards and supervision roles (BASES, 2009, p.6; BPS, 2011, p. 6.). In addition, practitioners on both schemes are advised to maintain a reflective diary and provide periodic reflections on their development and experience akin to the principles of staged reflection. The emergence of neophyte practitioners’ experiences with the process of reflective practice has provided us with insights into ways that a reflective diary might be structured. Such illustrations also offer future reflective practitioners with guidance on the type of issues that might be discussed and/or recorded as part of the training-reflection procedure.

Practitioners with several years post award experience have also reported on reflective practice procedures linked with practitioner effectiveness (e.g., Cropley et al., 2010a,b) and more specific reports on its use with practice. As an example, of the latter Devenport and Lane (2009) underpinned delivery and management of a one year coping intervention program with national and junior national netball players with reflective practice. They conclude that “future research could utilize data from reflective diaries to identify factors associated with effective sport psychology delivery” (p.176). These observations appear to support the idea of presenting further examples of reflective diary writing in an effort to explore the experiences of more established practitioners.

The current paper aligns with these aspirations by utilizing the diary-based writing of an experienced practitioner during a time of working in an elite sports context (Author two). He is an independent consultant psychologist who works in clinical practice and also provides psychology support to individuals and organizations involved in Paralympic, Olympic and Professional sports. To date this includes psychology support at the Athens 2004 and Beijing 2008 Summer Paralympic Games and at the Vancouver 2010 Winter Paralympic Games. The diary extracts from Author two relate to his day-to-day practice at the 2010 Games. Author two had previously alluded to the use of reflections (Katz, 2009) but before commencement of the current paper had not formally maintained a reflective diary associated with the sport psychology in-event support. Our presentation of his diary extracts emphasize the “process” of reflection (the way it takes place in a sense of time and place) and also shed light onto critical reflection and on staged approaches to reflective activity.

Before we move to the presentation and subsequent discussion of the diary extracts we offer some brief observations on the nature and style of the material to follow, outline the core objectives for our paper, and indicate some of the collaborative processes that we three authors have followed as part of a broader collaborative writing exercise. In writing the present paper we decided to identify the practitioner whose diary we have used and appreciate this permission and access to their practice experiences and private reflections. Second, we feel it is important to
reemphasize that the present paper has also been compiled to present an example of experienced/elite practitioner reflection to the literature base. While being interested in all levels of reflection (and all are highlighted), it is, however, written with the specific intention of firstly provide an opportunity to illustrate examples of critical reflection in action and subsequently further discuss this concept in light of our findings. In our consideration of the critical facets of the dairy extracts, we propose the wider topic of critical social science as something that might philosophically underpin critical reflective practice and personal development.

**Method**

**Diary Construction and the Staged Process of Reflection**

Once the diary had been completed by author two it was sent to Authors one and three. Feedback and questions relating to different elements of diary submissions were relayed back to Author two by Authors one and three via e-mail. This collaboration encouraged further responses in effect a staged reflective process (Knowles et al., 2007) and was initiated as the writing of the present paper progressed. For the interested reader and/or reflective practitioner this process creates evidence of critical reflection and a facilitation process through which on-going reflection can be achieved. Staged reflection is evidenced within the present text by the inclusion of comments from Author two that lie 12 months-on from the in-event diary entries. In the final discussion phase Author one and Author three reflect themselves on the reflective writing within Author two’s dairy and, a process that seeks to emphasize practice and philosophical issues, consider what this particular example of reflective writing can tell us all about the process and nature of reflection within an elite sport setting.

**Scene Setting and Structure**

The section that follows contains verbatim text extracted from Author two’s reflective diary of 32 pages of single spaced text (23,300 words) and covers a period of 24th Feb 2010 and the first day at holding camp to 23rd March 2010 flying home overnight. The word count of the diary is, therefore, extensive and the topics/issues contained within the diary entries are wide ranging. We have been forced, through demands of brevity, to narrow down the illustrations of reflective writing and have used only 6% of text available to us. The diary extracts are located under three emergent reflective themes of establishing communication, engaging with reflection and dealing with role clarity, boundary and acceptance which were identified independently between Author 1 and Author three. For the reader the extracts are contextualized and linked to give a sense of flow and there is a sense of overlap and interconnection between them. This notion of thematic synthesis and opaque boundaries between one theme and another was a feature of many sections within the diary. At the conclusion of the presentation of each theme a brief summary is followed by the question(s) posed to Author two by Author one and Author three at 12 months postevent and his subsequent reply. As noted earlier this postevent process in turn is indicative of both staged reflection (immediate and delayed) and layered (indicative of sharing) reflection (Knowles et al., 2007).
Results: Extracts From a Reflective Diary and Staged Reflection

Establishing Communication

For Author two, the first few days of his applied work were characterized by establishing formalized communication with others and also getting used to his own engagement with the reflective diary. On arrival to the Holding Camp (HC) the initial entry into the diary was lengthy and focused on settling into to the camp where both athletes and staff had been for two weeks:

. . . of note has been the fact that there has yet to be a squad meeting since arriving at the HC on the 10th Feb. I’ve taken the decision to request a squad meeting for tomorrow using my arrival as a pretext to update myself on what’s been happening. This is disappointing as we’ve worked hard for some time at previous camps and comps to have regular (daily) meetings with the resultant feedback being helpful for the athletes (25th Feb).

After the meeting on the following day:

I felt a little anxious prior to this meeting as it was the first time that I had organized such a meeting with the squad. I was certain in my own mind, that the communication system had broken down in any formal sense and this needed to be established. I voiced this in my intro to the meeting emphasizing how using effective communication systems and structures is an important strategy to manage pressure. My impression is that the meeting went well and that the athletes, in particular, felt pleased and relieved to have finally the opportunity to voice concerns the net result is that we’re going to be installing re-instating daily meetings before the evening meal and my intention is to carry this on when in the Games. . . . I feel pleased to have been able to influence the organizational system. . . . I am acutely aware though that this has, and continues, to be possible because of the time to build effective relationships over the last 2 or 3 years.

The above extracts offers examples of technical and practical based reflection culminating in the reemergence of meetings that had been accepted practice on previous events. In the process of writing and discussion Author one and Author three asked further questions of Author two. Firstly, why now do you feel the meetings had failed to reemerge?

Author Two’s Response (One Year Post-Event)

I feel pleased to have taken the risk of potentially upsetting some squad members by being proactive in organizing and running this meeting. Apart from the specific meeting content and immediate outcome, I feel it set the tone for my approach to supporting the squad for the duration of the Games one of balancing being assertive and challenging with being supportive to athletes, coaches and management. I have been able to generalize these professional skills gained from that experience in subsequent work/support settings. The comment by authors one and three that
I could have “explored why the meetings had failed to re-emerge, was it indeed valued and accepted practice by “we” and thus at a stage of running autonomously without me” is a reasonable observation. At that time my view was shaped by the experience that the importance of daily team meetings had been discussed, agreed and trialed, thus I was focused on implementing what had already been agreed. I recognized at the time that further discussion could have been held but felt it more important to be focused on the “here-and-now”. I recognize that it’s important to take time to understand each situation like this on a case-by-case basis, as some examples would be better managed more “gently” while others possibly require a more “direct” approach. Thus, my view that understanding issues within a broader context has been reinforced.

**Engaging With Reflection**

From the in-event diary Author two noted engagement with the reflection process was encouraged by previous experience which had previously seen use of a familiar peer as support. More specifically, Author two was keen to “document” reflection:

> . . . in part by the research with author one and colleagues. I guess that this may provide a degree of motivation to keep up with it when I perhaps don’t feel like doing so.

Author two goes on to note:

> I value reflective practice, but feel I have sufficient experience not to need a daily log. However this could be a degree of complacency and a rationalization used by more experienced practitioners to excuse not doing something that is considered “good practice.”

The practitioner employed shared reflection through professional support before the event with a colleague known for some time. Here, he noted facing similar issues, challenges, emotional reactions and frustration together with plotting “how much progress had been made over six years”. Throughout the diary period the practitioner typically engaged in writing at the end of the day and with a sense of real time. An example of this is from February 28:

> . . . if the guys go skiing, I am obliged to go with them for safety reasons as well as the logistical ones. Safety to “pick them up” if they crash while skiing. So their decision to go skiing meant I’ve no choice and, generally, I’m not too comfortable with feeling as though I am being dictated to. In addition, I tend to toward being more cautious so would err on safety, particularly so close to the games. I feel that maybe this internal dynamic is that may be fueling the occasional ambivalence in wanting to take the lead and feeling that in so doing it may be contravening my role. As I’m writing this the issues and internal dynamics don’t yet feel clear to me so I probably need to revisit this later?

The next entry reads:

> It’s now about 30 minutes since writing this – I’m clear and have stated this publically that although I enjoy skiing, I’m here to provide sport psych support and not here for my social skiing purposes. The advantage of this “work
office” is that I need to be able to ski a bit to support the athletes on snow. I’m focused on performance support and perceive unstructured free skiing as a distraction thus possibly my harder line over the issue. Also I’ve been in camp 4/5 days while the others have been here since the 10th Feb so perhaps haven’t appreciated the development of “cabin fever” experienced by the guys. Will keep this issue in mind as intuitively I feel there may be more beneficial insights to be gained.

The following day (March 1) the practitioner expresses his “ambivalence for skiing for pleasure when here to work”. He notes how this was received by staff:

   Staff one’s response was that free time for staff was good and needed. Staff two’s response was I could baby-sit the athletes. Although both responses were meant helpfully, I felt angry and disappointed that my thoughts appeared not to have been acknowledged. I know I need to take time off and Staff one’s comments reinforced this. What I was trying to express was the internal conflict I can feel when taking time off! I let Staff two’s comments slip by—their way of being helpful?! 

The practitioner appears to engage to varying degrees with the diary and notes on March 6:

   As I reflect and write this entry, I’m beginning to feel a little more settled as I acknowledge my concerns and observations. Also, I notice the familiarity of the habit of writing this reflective log, is in itself, comforting due to it being familiar which is something I’d not considered or become aware of.

He notes on March 10 that in writing the log he felt it may become “a chore” as ‘the reasons I’d used such a log previously did not exist for these Games’. The diary became less of a chore, something to “look forward to” and provided:

   ... one aspect of the end of day routine to download the days events feelings etc which I’m finding helpful to put the day into perspective.

The practitioner also reports that noting thoughts, feelings and experiences creates:

   ... a record of the most important insights, activities and experiences I’ve had so that I feel more able to relax before going to bed, knowing that if I forget something overnight, at least I have some record to prompt me the next day or so.

On the 19th March the practitioner turns to a forward thinking focus and the return home:

   I’m aware that the Games are almost over with one event to go. I’m starting to gradually ‘flesh out’ in my thoughts what I’m going to be doing over the first few days once home. I think this has something to do with me wanting to moderate and manage the transition from living in the Games bubble back to my daily routine.

For the purposes of this paper Author one and Author three were interested in the notion of staged and layered reflection. More specifically, we wondered had Author two revisited his diary in the 12 months? If so, what patterns the practitioner had
he noted himself and if, in more recent experiences, he had drawn on reflections from this diary period? We finally asked if the process of diary writing has/was likely to change based on this experience?

**Author Two’s Response One Year On**

I regularly undertake peer supervision in my practice. My Games diary/log was shared with my colleague as part of this process. Thus, issues such as being more assertive in aspects of my support role were discussed. Indeed, the outcome from these discussions is already being applied and developed in subsequent support roles.

Reading through these extracts has refreshed my thoughts about how I approached keeping this diary. Far from the potential “complacency of being and experienced practitioner”, the experience of completing this diary has resulted in me appreciating that the “real-time” reflective practice provided me with increasingly deeper levels of understanding of personal, professional and interpersonal relationships individually and how they interact.

The entry from my diary related to “post-Games thought” followed the application of lessons learned from keeping a similar diary in both the Athens and Beijing Games. The awareness of the need to prepare the transition from Games-mode to daily-life was something I’d been conscious of before Vancouver and am pleased to note “a year on” that I applied the lessons I’d learned from previous Games!

**Dealing With Role Clarity, Boundaries and Acceptance**

Early in the diary period (February 26) Author two writes about an imposed change in primary role from that of the sport psychologist:

I’ve been asked to take the squad manager role for the period of time Staff two leaves for the Games (24 hours before the rest of the squad) and before the one group rejoins the others into the same hotel. Interestingly, this has been done without any discussion, consultation—just assumed I’d do it. Although happy to do so it does illustrate short-cuts in the communication process.

The day after this entry the practitioner notes a sense of “confusion” related to:

Sometimes I’m being asked to take on some “team management” responsibility and other times not. This, I feel, may be a constant role ambivalence I need to manage.

The practitioners primary role was challenged by way of practical reflection through an encounter with a distressed athlete and a hesitant moment as to whether to approach them outside formal consultation:

I was pleased that I approached the athlete rather than not, which would have been an equally viable option. I felt it was a spontaneous opportunity to offer “human support” rather than the more formal chat between an athlete and psych. I was conscious of my formal role but more aware of noticing someone in distress and what I perceived to be in need of support.
Another challenge was perceived to be that of how to act during clearly defined leisure time. Here an administration meeting (the establishment of which is discussed earlier) on March 1 held immediately before a group dinner allowed the group to flow from formal to informal interaction. From here we see indications of critical reflective practice characterized by constraints across professional boundaries:

For me I felt a continuation of a relaxed boundary between me and the guys (as noted earlier in the day at lunch), which I feel is good as it has been a challenge for me to sometimes “be myself” more. I feel this is, partly, as a consequence of my clinical psych experience in the hospital setting where the boundary between personal and professional in relation to clients was very much clearer. I seem to be able to moderate this boundary to suit different contexts in the sport setting where I can be clear about “this is me the psych’ and sometimes this is me (Jonathan) minimizing the psych part”.

The next day a “general chat” occurred after the meal which happened spontaneously as other had left to go to bed:

We (Staff two and I) had a wide ranging chat about the history of how we’d arrived at that point. I felt relaxed and able to chat freely. I feel this is an important example of the changing boundaries whereby I’m able to be myself a little more although I was conscious afterwards that although I was able to be aware of my personal/professional boundary, I was less certain if Staff two would be equally clear on this? One consequence of this is that information I disclose when ‘being my personal self” may be used by others in the squad as a more formal statement associated with ‘being my professional self’ in relation to the NGB (National Governing Body) psych role. May need to remain vigilant of this moving forward?

The practitioner continues to explore boundary related issues a week later after “a social and chatty supper” with delegates from the South African team commenting:

I’ve been aware in recent months that I’ve been integrating the various strands of my professional work (counseling, clinical, sport psych and coaching experience). This evening I became aware of extending this to my cultural experience by directly linking my GB and South African backgrounds within the context of the games.

The practitioners quest to consider activities outside of the primary role leads to a purposeful “widening to tasks outside my role” again indicating critical reflection and a “coffee and chat” ensued with Staff three (March 19). The practitioner notes:

. . . how disciplined I’d been on remaining focused for the primary task limiting opportunities for distraction. I was unaware consciously of how effective I’d been in achieving this level of discipline and focus until I’d allowed a degree of relaxation.

The following day the practitioner returns to this issue:

This morning I wondered about the unintentional consequences to this other than being effective in my role. I realized that such a focus may give the non verbal (counter-transferential) message that I’m not approachable socially?
The practitioner then focuses on socializing activities prompting immediate arrangements to be made. The practitioner concludes the day (before the social event) with:

I think I need to think through this dynamic some more as it has potentially big implications on how I implement the personal-professional boundary when on longer trips with squads.

It appears that role clarity/acceptance, at times, conflicted with that of the sport psychologist role and over the period of the Games caused several encounters for the practitioner with regard to his own personal confidence. It is through this section we see evidence of critical reflection and unresolved matters indicated by the practitioners own “in-event” questioning thus reflection is perhaps incomplete. Once again, Author one and Author three asked Author two to engage in staged reflection and firstly to revisit the “themes” of role clarity, boundary and acceptance. Indeed, were these issues still live for the practitioner?

**Author Two’s Response (One Year Post-Event)**

I acknowledge that I exerted a degree of effort and energy on managing issues, as I saw them, associated with role clarity-conflict and personal-professional boundaries, upon reflecting on the theme identified from my diary by authors one and three. My sense is that my formative professional experience of providing psychology support in clinical psychology settings has significantly influenced the way I go about delivering sport psychology support. In particular, the clinical psychology setting provides clear and explicit practitioner-client boundaries. A couple of key areas is that my clinical experience was hospital/consulting room based with limited contact outside of the formal support process and little or no disclosure of the practitioner’s personal experience to the client. The context of delivering sport psychology is in a more “ambiguous” context with the work/play and professional/personal boundaries being less clear.

This theme remains an area of on-going reflection. Indeed, I’ve progressed this in subsequent support provision where I’ve discussed with athletes how to “read” my behavior in terms of personal/professional. Further, I’m undertaking further CPD on recognizing how others interpret my behavior so that I’m able to gain further self-awareness in interpersonal relationships.

In the latter reflections Author two appear to be questioning why a set of technical and rationale procedures from one setting might not actually benefit people in another, and this line of critical reflection has spawned direct action in terms of dialogue with athletes and in terms of personal training and development. These are perhaps intrapersonal issues emerging from the irritations of interpersonal facets of practice and they appear, at this point, to be practitioner specific. Over time, however, these kinds of issues, based around the transferability of technical rationality from one context (clinical psychology in this case), might translate to more global challenges relating to questions over “how-to-be” in sports-based practice.
Discussion

The intention of the current paper was firstly to illustrate extracts from a reflective diary written by a seasoned experienced practitioner providing in-event support at a major event. Subsequent outcomes from guided reflections by Authors one and three at one year postevent are also presented. Specifically, examples of critical reflection were sought directly from within the in-event diary and fostered through the postevent reflections forged from the more general view that evidence of critical reflection within the reflective practice literature is rare.

The practitioners diary extracts suggest that reflection on day-to-day practice can be rather “every-day” in its tone and focus. On first reading the diary we were a little perplexed over how to select appropriate sections for inclusion. Our dilemma, as such, was that the diary did not provide us with a range of reflections on issues of athlete performance and so forth, such commentaries, we had thought would captivate readers. Instead, we found ourselves sifting through reflections that told us a great deal about the minutiae of the practitioner’s daily exchanges, about their concerns, their insecurities, their hopes and expectations.

In these accounts of asides, of meetings when x said something to y, of more general strategic aspirations over clarity and boundary of role, we quickly came to understand, that this was critical reflective practice written large and this, we came to appreciate, provided us with one example of how critical reflection might look presented in an intrapersonal context as opposed to critical reflection as a basis for macro-challenges to established processes.

We also worried that these accounts might seem disappointing to some, almost banal, but critical reflective practice is essentially, about the self and the self-in-context. This is a point of differentiation and integration that we consider in the discussion that follows. Earlier in the present paper we suggested that interconnections between these self-in-context reflections and more strategic-type challenges (to established power-blocks and institutions for example) might well begin life in quieter intrapersonal critical musings and it seems important to reemphasize those points again here.

Reflective writings, such as those presented here, will naturally feel rather homely and embrace a sense of introspection and of self striving to function in a practice-based world. In these practitioner contemplations we wondered about using the analogy of different writing being related to a different camera lens each, in-turn, providing a glimpse of a self-portrait and also a view of the self in-landscape.

Our more general task in this discussion is to reframe the diary extracts into the common language of reflective practice and with that aspiration in mind we have opted to review the diary through three interrelated themes, staged and layered reflection, critical reflection (leading toward critical social science) and personal development.

Staged and Layered Reflection

Staged reflection is typically characterized by an immediate and then delayed engagement in reflection. In the case of the present paper, this was demonstrated at two points through “in-event” reflection by the practitioner alone and a delayed
engagement 12 months respectively. With regards to the latter, the author team used forms of summarizing, reflecting back aspects of the diary text and questioning to stimulate Author two into a delayed reengagement in the reflective process. It is not, however, claimed that in-event reflections had not already been revisited by the practitioner in between author communications. Indeed, the practitioner makes reference to this and also the principles of layered reflection noting that he “regularly undertakes peer supervision in my practice and my Games diary/log was shared with my colleague as part of this process”.

Beyond this he alludes to conversations with athletes and implementation of changes in practice within the 12 month period. Layered reflection or the sharing of reflection from that of the self to others (e.g., a peer, supervisor or group) allows multiple explorations of thoughts and feelings, sense making and perhaps offering alternatives for action at the latter stages of the reflection cycle. The role of the Author one and Author one perhaps mirrored that of an “external critical friend” by prompting and reminding at a pre determined point akin to that highlighted by Woodcock, Richards, and Mungford (2008).

In a temporal sense the timings of the process and interactions among the authors is in some ways representative of that required for annual reviews, submission or reports aligned with professional accreditation or Chartership training in the UK. For the practitioner this “check-point” allows contemplation of what reflection has achieved. In the present paper the practitioner highlights a range of “outcomes” from reflection including engagement in CPD activity and a change in practice to date as regards “the need to prepare the transition from Games-mode to daily-life.” In contrast, issues remain “live” in respect of the challenges with professional/personal boundaries and thus reflection is on-going.

The staged and layered process above depicts a model of reflective engagement that is both embracing and practical within a supervision relationship and applicable we advocate both within and post professional training. Mentors and applied practitioners, both neophyte and experienced alike, who are committed to the notion of critical reflective practice should be able to draw from the ideals of a wider philosophy that, is itself, drawn from researchers and practitioners from across the social sciences. As a consequence of accessing diversity, in terms of thinking and nomenclature, then, a new emphasis in writing, one that utilizes different sources of literature, might become part of the discourse of applied sport psychology practice also. The formalities of the supervisor and reviewer within the process of achieving or maintaining standards to practice may well be worthy of revisiting with the reviewing process suggested here to become more interactive and more critical in focus as opposed to that simply of competency verification.

**Revisiting Critical Reflection**

In our view, Author two’s reflective diary provides an example of critical reflection-in-action as it sketches out a process that includes moments of evaluative activity that move reader’s from the professional in-context to the person in a more global and interactive sense. We propose here that such thinking could be meaningful enough to challenge wider beliefs or perspectives that might have become established to the point of truth. This “leap” from a reflecting on a something that is essentially localized and contextualized and moving toward critique that is more generic and global is an issue that has surfaced several times in the present paper. We wonder
also, if, as part of the journey, a continual exposure to contextualized and staged reflection might help to engender critical perspectives that first carry the capacity to inform both self and others and, though maybe later, also possibly challenge wider beliefs or truths. In presenting these thought we extend on critical reflection outlined in Knowles and Gilbourne (2010).

Although the present paper was always designed to be more practical and illustrative than philosophical the discussion to follow considers how the diary encourages critical reflection to be appreciation in terms of Author two as “himself” and author 2 as “practitioner-self”, an idea that emerged from our continual reading and rereading of the diary.

To our way of thinking one important feature of being critically reflective is the sense that the practitioner is striving to understand “self” in global terms alongside the unpicking of “self-in-practice”. When this kind of thinking is in evidence it might suggest a dynamic between the challenges that are experienced in the practice-based context and the person you happen to be at that particular moment assuming, of course, that we might all grow and change over time. The diary submission dated 28th February offers an example of this interface between the self and the practicing self. Reflecting and writing about the contextual challenges of daily agendas and his place within them he writes “I’m not too comfortable with feeling as though I’m being dictated to”. These few words open the window into a dilemma that many practitioners might need to confront at some point. By accepting that the day’s happenings are making him feel uncomfortable as a practitioner he also draws on his own understanding that, more generally, he does not enjoy being told what he must do. Many of us might sympathize with that, however, the notion that a more generalized mind-set might be at the core of any emotional or role discomfort is a point that we felt worthy of further reflection, particularly as it is a point Author 2 makes toward the end of the diary extract, it seemed to be offered as a point of understanding, an issue that might impact upon many situations.

Critical reflective practice and the broader notion of critical social science both stress the importance of “evaluative” thinking as a springboard for understanding self both in context and more generally also. Essential to this is the notion that there is the potential of interplay between self (and all the history that contributes to the attitudes and perspectives of self) and, what we have termed here, the “practitioner-self”. To our way of reading and interpreting these issues of self and practitioner-self permeate most diary extracts in some form or other, for example, Author two writes about the challenges in-event of being able to “be myself” (first March 2010) and comments further on notions of the notions of a practice-based and personal interface through a need to alter, depending on demands of context, the emphasis between acting as the practitioner-self and being more open:

I seem to be able to moderate this boundary to suit different contexts where I can be clear this is me the psych and sometimes this is me minimizing the psych part (1st March 2010).

In our view these contributions provide explicit illustrations of critical reflective practice in-action as they evidence a practitioner contemplating the challenges of practice (in-context) by addressing the actions of self in both contextualized and more generalized terms. To use examples in all our daily lives, this might be understood as the self others might see at evenings and weekends as we relax and
socialize and the “self” that act as a coach on the playing field, instructs in the gym
or lectures on an educational program. In all these situations we might interface our
ways of being, and, in so doing, allow some observable connection between the
ways we behave in professional or social settings. Awareness of what Author two
terms “boundary” between these two contexts is what appeared as central to his
critical reflective process, it is something he is challenged by and also something
he seeks to understand further and to evaluate.

The final diary entry also stresses the critical nature of this understanding exer-
cise as Author two identifies an interface between practitioner-self and self as an
area for personal development. This is something we associated earlier with Author
two’s exploration of technical rationality and the benefits and weaknesses of transfer
of practice regimen from one setting (or context) to another. In this case Author
two also suggested that he would seek this development through the opportunities
offered by CPD programs. In more general terms and in terms we might all share
and appreciate, a critical social science agenda is suggested here as the dilemmas
Author two faced are likely to be experienced in different ways by different practitio-
ners in different settings. A discussion on such issues, over time, helps to build new
perspectives and identifies the possible need for additions to training (for neophyte
and experienced practitioners) and/or curricular for the practitioners of the future.

Conclusion

The present paper has sought to comment further on the process of critical reflec-
tion through reference to an in-event reflective practice diary and subsequent guided
reflection of an experienced elite practitioner. In this exercise we develop our thinking
on the way we might understand in-event support and the challenges that emerge from
this with regard to relationships and communication. Examples of critical reflection
were identified and discussed with reference to intrapersonal and localized critical
engagement with more global interpretations of the critical reflection and toward the
social science agenda. In the introduction we urged that readers and practitioners
sustain interest in the capacity of critical reflection to move practitioners forward
at a personal level while also understanding the potential for such work to impact
across practice communities more widely. Having undertaken the exercise of writ-
ing the present paper and working alongside an experienced practitioner as a part
of that process, we remain convinced that critical reflection carries true potential to
bring about change be it change at a personal level or change across professions.
Finally we would wish to thank both reviewers for their helpful and challenging
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