

DEAR DIARY: THE USE OF A TRAINING DIARY AS A MEANS OF REFLECTING ON PERFORMANCE IN RUGBY UNION FOOTBALL

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Donald Schon (1987: Educating the Reflective Practitioner. Oxford: Jossey-Bass; and 1991; Reflective Practitioner. Aldershot: Avebury) has stimulated considerable debate in educational studies about the way to improve the performance of teachers. To date there has been little explicit discussion of his concept of 'reflection' in the sport and exercise sciences literature.

This paper has two objectives. The first is to explore the potential of a training diary as a vehicle for reflecting on performance in training and competition. The second is to consider how such a diary might act as a heuristic device to raise questions about narrative conventions in sport and exercise sciences.

During the 1993-1994 rugby union season, a third year undergraduate student (a senior international player) at the Cardiff Institute of Higher Education undertook to keep a daily record of his training programme in the form of a diary. Prior to the commencement of the research it was decided to include both quantitative and qualitative information in the diary so that it could provide a focus for reflection on training and competition.

The student wore a heart rate monitor in training and competition over a period of five months. Time and motion analysis of video tracks of his performance in competition was also undertaken (Carter, 1994: Time/Motion Analysis and Heart Rate Monitoring of a Back Row Forward in First Class Rugby Union Football. Cardiff Institute of Higher Education: Unpublished Dissertation). Both types of data were incorporated into the

diary. Such an approach was seen as a means of linking the insights stimulated by Donald Schon (1987, 1991) and Eamon Dunphy (1976: Only A Game?. Harmondsworth: Penguin).

It is suggested that such a diary enables a researcher-as-subject to offer sports scientists a unique insight into elite performance. It also makes possible a debate about what narrative structures sport and exercise sciences should encompass. Donald Polkinghorne (1988: Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press) and Norman Denzin (1989: Interpretative Biography. London: Sage Publications), for example, have provided accounts of how narrative conventions can be recast in research reports. It is argued that such a debate is essential for sport and exercise scientists.

It is concluded that the potential of a diary to provide 'thick description' of training and competition should be considered in a sport that hitherto has not had its participants at the forefront of reflective practice. Such a diary can offer a meta-commentary not only of performance but also of the ways by which performance is re-presented.