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Evaluating sport psychology teaching through action research

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, there has been a growing emphasis on action research (Norton, 2009), accompanied by an increasing focus on staff evaluation. This paper aimed to evaluate a single teaching session of a new member to the profession. Forty-three second year undergraduate students responded to a standard teaching evaluation form and the 'Stop, Start, Continue' method (Angelo & Cross, 1993) of evaluation. The results revealed that students were particularly concerned with issues surrounding interaction, relevance to assessment and practical work. The findings are discussed in terms of their implications for teaching practice

1. Introduction

Over recent years, the concept of pedagogical action research has become prevalent, with many Higher Education Institutions attempting to gain feedback on the student experience. Action research is a "dual focus on practice and theory" (Norton, 2009, p. 44) with practitioners completing the research. In the case of Higher Education, this would mean the University teacher collating evidence in reference to their own teaching practice. By doing so, action research can directly benefit the teacher by serving as a powerful tool to encourage modification of one's own practice with the view to promoting optimal learning experiences for his or her students (Biggs & Tang, 2007; Moreira, 2009). Drawing from an action research approach (Norton, 2009), the current study aimed to discern the quality of, and potential modifications to, teaching practices used by a new teacher to the profession.

According to Biggs and Tang (2007), the promotion of a "deeper" level of learning among student populations (i.e., developing critical thinkers) is a function of teachers (and especially that of new staff) continually monitoring, evaluating and reflecting upon their own practice. To corroborate this assumption, D'Andrea and Gosling (2005) pointed out that a daily requirement for all educators is to critically reflect on their own teaching practice. One evaluative method to facilitate reflection and ensuing teaching quality is by obtaining regular student feedback.

Student evaluations have emerged as an appropriate (and to some degree expected) strategy for gaining feedback to indicate teaching quality (Nuemann, 2000). A review by Wachtel (1998) highlighted evidence both in support of and in opposition to the use of student evaluations. This review indicated that continual improvement in teaching can be supported by regular student evaluations. A number of variables have been used to indicate teaching quality including student achievement, student satisfaction, student enjoyment, and promotion of shared attitudes between teacher and students (cf. Wachtel, 1998). For the purposes of this study, teaching quality refers to enhancement of the student experience and perceived satisfaction of the teaching quality amongst students. It is important to note here that teaching

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quality and satisfied students are not necessarily closely related and that instances may occur where large discrepancies are apparent between the two. For example, with tasks which are not enjoyable but necessary to learning and development. However, offering students an opportunity to voice their opinions and addressing such concerns can facilitate subsequent teaching practices (Dunrong & Fan, 2009) by allowing future teaching styles and content to be driven, in part, by the feedback surrounding student satisfaction. Several methods of teaching evaluation exist in the feedback literature with student feedback questionnaires the most widely used (Kember, Lueng, & Kwan, 2002). Standard student evaluations have seldom shown support for the expected relationship between perceptions of teaching quality and student achievement (Pounder, 2008). Another way of conducting student evaluation is by employing the 'Stop Start Continue' method, based on the one minute paper (Angelo & Cross, 1993; Wilson, 1986). Thus, the present study will employ a combination of both conventional and contemporary student evaluation methods (i.e., a standard University evaluation form, and the "Stop, Start, Continue" approach) to promote "learning in action".

According to Biggs and Tang (2007), "learning in action" (i.e., receiving feedback during actual teaching) refers not only to student learning, or even learning about teaching, but rather to learning about oneself as a teacher and learning how to use reflection to become a better teacher. With this in mind, the present study served two purposes. First, it applied two types of student evaluation methods relating to a teaching session in order to ascertain which elements of teaching were effective and which were not. Second, the study aimed to provide a critical reflection of perceived teaching areas that warrant necessary changes for future practice.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Forty three male and female students volunteered for the study from a University in the Northwest of England, UK. Participants completed the evaluation measures following a Level 2 undergraduate Sport Psychology teaching session. All participants provided informed written consent and were assured that all data would remain anonymous and confidential.

2.2. Measures

Standard Evaluation Form. A standardised module evaluation form of the authors' institution was adapted to specifically relate to the teaching session in question. Participants rated the teaching session across eight dimensions (i.e., session organisation, content of teaching, content of practical work, relevance of practical work to the topic, developed understanding of the topic, relevance to assessment and overall satisfaction of the session) along a scale of "not satisfied", "satisfied" or "very satisfied".

Stop, Start, Continue Form (Angelo & Cross, 1993). This qualitative method of evaluation asks participants to indicate which elements of teaching (including style, pace, delivery) they would benefit from the teacher stopping, starting or continuing such practice. According to Norton (2009), this form of evaluation is a useful supplement in action research to provide expansion on conventional close-ended questionnaire evaluations (i.e., the standard evaluation method).

2.3. Procedure

The chosen teaching session focussed on the Sport Psychology topic of "attribution" and was delivered with promoting student engagement in mind. Following the session, interested participants were invited to complete both evaluation measures (i.e., standard evaluation form; Stop, Start, Continue form) and return them to a box at the front of the room. Aligned with the recommended time frame for completing (teacher) evaluations (Angelo & Cross, 1993), participants completed both forms inside of the allotted 20 min.

The procedure was repeated by an independent observer. Consistent with the pedagogical literature (Backer, 2008), a colleague in the same subject area (i.e., Sport Psychology) was recruited to observe the session and provide feedback to enable and assist with reflection. After the analysis was completed, the interpretation of the findings was checked for consistency with both participant groups (i.e., the students and observer).

3. Results

3.1. Standard evaluation

Students. Fig. 1 presents the percentage satisfaction scores of each teaching dimension from the standard evaluation form. Participants reported being 'satisfied' (mean percentage = 28.57) or 'very satisfied' (mean percentage = 71.42) across all eight dimensions. In other words, no students reported being "unsatisfied" with the teaching session. The least positive response was for the evaluation dimension "relevance to assessment", scoring 54.8% very satisfactory and 45.2% satisfactory.