The think aloud method and its utility within coach, athlete and sport psychology practitioner development
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The Think Aloud method and its utility within coach, athlete, and sport psychology practitioner development.

Proposal of 90-minute symposium

Presentation 1

Title: Think Aloud as a Coach Developer tool

Dr Amy Whitehead, Liverpool John Moores University
Dr Hayley McEwan, University of the West of Scotland

Applied practice focused, coach education and development

During 2020, remote coach development became a priority for coach developers. The aim of this project was to pilot the use of Think Aloud (TA) as a remote coach development tool with coaches working on a UK coach development programme. TA was introduced as an in-situ reflection tool to 30 coaches and 3 coach developers. TA involves coaches wearing a clip-mic and recording device and verbalising their thoughts aloud (where possible) whilst in the act of coaching, and reflecting on these thoughts as they occur. Coaches are then encouraged to listen to their recordings and reflect on what, so what and now what (Driscoll, 2007). Coaches were supported by their individual coach developer to explore perceptions of TA and how reflection could be further developed. Four coaches and all three coach developers were interviewed at 4, 10 and 16 week time points. Interviews were conducted to understand perceptions of TA as a tool to develop coach reflection, to support the coach development process and to develop coaching practice. Initial analysis from the first two data collection points (weeks 4 and 10) demonstrates that TA was viewed by the coach developer as a useful tool to develop rapport and a vehicle for conversation with their coach on areas for development. Coaches perceived TA to be beneficial for analysing and challenging their own thought processes during coaching practice. Final analysis will allow applied implications for the use of TA as a coach developer tool.

Reference:


Biography:

Dr Amy Whitehead is a Reader in Sport Psychology and Coaching at Liverpool John Moores University. Her research focuses on the use of Think Aloud to understand athlete and coach cognition and how Think Aloud can used as a reflective practice tool for coaches. Dr Whitehead is also a BPS accredited Sport and Exercise Psychologist working as a consultant with a variety of athletes.

Dr Hayley McEwan is a Senior Lecturer in Sport Psychology and Coaching at University of the West of Scotland. Her research focuses on development of practitioners in support of athletes (e.g., coaches, psychologists). Hayley is training and education lead for the British Association of Sport & Exercise Sciences (BASES) sport psychology accreditation route.
Abstract
The current study aims to explore the perceptions of football academy coaches on their use of a novel reflective tool (Think Aloud) and to understand if the tool can support the development of knowledge within these coaches. Eight male coaches (M age = 36) employed full time at a category 1 football academy within the UK took part. All coaches attended a 2-hour workshop on the use of Think Aloud (TA) as a reflective tool, with the opportunity to practice TA on the pitch whilst coaching. Participants were then interviewed on their perceptions of TA as a reflective tool using a semi-structured interview guide. Interviews were analysed using thematic analysis. Data were analysed inductively initially before formulating deductively using ‘The Triad of Knowledge’ (professional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal knowledge), which has been adopted within coaching and identified as component for developing coaching expertise (Côté & Gilbert, 2009). Results from the current study suggest all three types of knowledge can be developed through the use of TA, with secondary themes identified within each type of knowledge: Professional knowledge (player development, session design), interpersonal knowledge (communication, relationships), intrapersonal knowledge (biases, self-awareness, reflection). This research offers a novel perspective on coach development through the implementation of TA, with the potential to support the development of coaching knowledge and expertise.

Reference:

Biography:
Dr Laura Swettenham is a Sport and Exercise Psychologist and is currently appointed at Blackburn Rovers Football Club where she delivers sport psychology support within their Academy. Laura is also lead of sport psychology and coach development at the International Federation of Esports Coaches and an associate lecturer at the University of Portsmouth. Laura’s recent publications have focused on the use of Think Aloud to develop coaches and understand stress and coping in athletes.
Presentation 3

Title: Me, my bike and my thoughts: a cyclist’s subjective experience of using Think Aloud and its application to coaching.

Steven Vaughan, Liverpool John Moores University

Applied practice focused, coach education and development

At present understanding cognitions of endurance athletes has mainly relied on retrospective data collected after performance, which may limit a coaches understanding of their athletes in event thoughts. Recently, Think Aloud (TA) has been used to capture athlete thoughts during competition over 1 or 2 sessions, however, no TA study has collected data during real-world routine training sessions longitudinally. Therefore, this mixed methods study used TA, a diary and reflective interview to record the subjective experience of using TA to collect verbal reports from a single self-as-participant cyclist, during their training over 11-weeks. These three data sources combined to provide an integrated analysis over this period. Qualitative data were inductively coded, identifying three phases each typified by a predominant theme; an initial phase (w1-3) centred on the process of using TA whilst cycling was followed by a period (w4-7) where areas of cognitive focus were recognised by the cyclist. Evidence of reactivity was identified, which led to a final phase (w8-11) of enhanced cognitive awareness and engagement. Deductive coding of transcribed TA data enabled mapping onto existing metacognitive attentional dimensions, for analysis in line with identified phases. Verbalised cognitions changed over time, thoughts with an internal focus (on self-monitoring and self-regulation) significantly increased from 55% to 64% between phases 1 and 3. Thus suggesting that metacognitive development appeared to mirror the stages of Fitts and Posner’s (1967) Skills Acquisition Model. For coaches, these findings suggest that TA could be used to understand athlete cognitions during training and develop athlete self-awareness.

Reference:


Biography:

Steven is a Professional Doctorate student and Trainee Sport & Exercise Psychologist. He has a specific interest in enhancing the athlete’s cognitive knowledge whilst participating in endurance sports. His current research will contribute to the development of a framework and training package based on reflection from in-action verbalised cognitions using Think Aloud for endurance athletes, coaches and applied Sport Psychologists. In his applied practice, Steven works with a range of athletes including elite cyclists and triathletes.
A primary objective of sport psychology consulting is to assist athletes and coaches in identifying the thoughts, feelings, and behaviours associated with effective performance. A potential method that has been adopted within research is the think aloud (TA) method, which has been used to explore athlete cognition in a variety of different sports. TA involves asking a participant to verbalise their thoughts concurrently throughout the duration of a task (Ericsson & Simon, 1993). Previous studies have used TA to generate information about athletes’ and coach’s thoughts and understand how they think during performances, cope with pressure, and focus their attention. With the growth in interest in TA as a method to generate insights into athletes’ “in-event” cognitions, it is timely to examine the utility of this method in applied sport psychology practice. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the use of TA within sport psychology practice. To achieve this, we delivered an educational workshop on TA to 25 trainee or HCPC sport psychologists, and conducted follow-up interviews with 10 trainees and 4 HCPC practitioners at 6 and 12 weeks’ post-workshop to identify if and how the participants used TA within their practice as applied sport psychologists. Preliminary findings reveal the practicalities of applying TA with a range of athletes (e.g., golfers, rugby kickers) and coaches. Applied implications demonstrate how TA can be used at different phases of applied sport psychology support (e.g., needs analysis, monitoring phases). Finally, conclusions are drawn on the perceived benefits and limitations of TA in applied sport psychology practice.

Reference:


Biography:

Dr Patricia C. Jackman is a Lecturer in Sport and Exercise Psychology at the University of Lincoln, UK. Her research interests include: optimal psychological states (flow and clutch states) in sport and exercise; self-regulation of optimal experiences; cognition in sport; and goal setting in physical activity. She has published quantitative, qualitative, and mixed method studies, as well as systematic reviews in these areas.

Dr Phil Birch is a Senior Lecturer in Sport and Exercise Psychology at University of Chichester, England. Phil’s research focuses on performance psychology, with a particular focus on the
psychological determinants of performance in both traditional sports and esports. Phil’s research in traditional sports has examined the use of think aloud protocols to capture in-event cognitions in athletes. Phil’s research in esports primarily focuses on stress, coping and mental health.