

# **Integrating deliberate practice into a counsellor training programme**

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# Integrating deliberate practice into a pluralistic counsellor training programme

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# Structure of presentation

- Background: what is deliberate practice and why is it important?
- Abertay pilot study:
  - aims
  - methods
  - preliminary findings
- Discussion – implications

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Additional slides: further reading, and introductory exercises

# Background

- Last 10 years – huge expansion in research on 'therapist effects' (some therapists are more effective than others)
- This has involved analysis of the nature of therapist expertise (i.e., level of skillfulness beyond basic competence)
- The evidence suggests that therapists do not become more effective over the course of their careers
- ... has triggered a search to make sense of this phenomenon
- Key source: research into the development of expertise in other occupations (sport, chess, surgery, etc)
- In these fields, expertise seems to be associated with a commitment to **deliberate practice**

# What is deliberate practice?

## **Deliberate practice**

- Just learning a skill and then using it seems to lead to a plateau in competence (i.e., practice on its own is not enough)
- Experts/high performers (in any field) are those who engage in **deliberate practice:**
  - they consistently collect **feedback**
  - identify errors, **failures** and gaps in competence
  - **consult with others** to devise an action plan for improvement of skills, knowledge, etc
  - are always eager to **acquire new knowledge/skills and try it out**
  - observe and evaluate impact on practice (**more feedback**)

## A similar idea: **self-practice**

- Discovered by Bennett-Levy and colleagues: studies of CBT therapist training
- “try things out on yourself”
- Examples:
  - **concepts and ideas** (negative automatic thoughts, ABC sequences)
    - what do they mean in terms of your own personal experience?
    - does using them help you to live a more satisfying and productive life?
  - **techniques** (mindfulness, exposure to feared situations, Socratic dialogue)
    - do they help you to deal with your own anxiety, depression, relationship difficulties, etc?
- Trainees who engage in self-practice tend to become better therapists

Study by Chow, D. L., Miller, S. D., Seidel, J. A., Kane, R. T., Thornton, J. A. and Andrews, W. P. (2015) The role of deliberate practice in the development of highly effective psychotherapists. *Psychotherapy*, 52, 337–345

- Data from >4500 clients seen by 69 therapists
- Therapist questionnaire on deliberate practice activities in a typical work month
- Continuum of therapist effectiveness
- Most effective group of therapists spent much more time on deliberate practice (average 7.39 hours per month) compared to their less effective colleagues (2.63 hours per month)
- Activities rated by therapists as most useful:
  - reviewing difficult/challenging cases alone
  - attending training workshops for specific models of therapy
  - mentally running through and reflecting on the past sessions in your mind
  - mentally running through and reflecting on what to do in future sessions

*Mean Relevance and Cognitive Effort Ratings for 20 Therapy-Related and Five Nontherapy-Related Activities for Participating Therapists*

Activity	<i>n</i>	Relevance		Cognitive effort	
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. General clinical supervision as a supervisee (without review of audiovisual recordings of sessions)	13	6.92	2.63	7.46	2.63
2. Clinical supervision as a supervisee (with review of audiovisual recordings of sessions)	10	4.10	3.93	5.30	4.60
3. Clinical supervision as a supervisee (review of difficult/challenging cases and/or cases with nil improvement)	12	7.67	2.77	8.00 H	2.76
4. Live supervision provided during sessions (e.g., supervisor as cotherapist, one-way mirror/reflecting team)	10	3.40 L	4.01	5.80	5.01
5. Reading of journals pertaining to psychotherapy and counseling	14	7.21	1.67	6.71	1.68
6. Reading/rereading core counseling materials	11	6.55	3.24	6.00	2.79
7. Focused learning in specific model(s) of psychotherapy	11	7.27	2.87	7.45	2.98
8. Reviewing therapy recordings alone	10	4.00	3.71	4.40	3.98
9. Reviewing therapy recordings with peers	10	4.30	3.83	4.50	4.04
10. Reviewing difficult/challenging cases alone	14	8.00 H	2.77	7.43	2.59
11. Attending training workshops for specific models of therapy	12	8.00 H	2.17	8.25 H	1.96
12. Case discussion/conceptualization/formulation with a mentor/clinical supervisor	12	6.25	3.49	6.50	3.26
13. Mentally running through and reflecting on the past sessions in your mind	15	8.20 H	2.65	7.13	2.30
14. Mentally running through and reflecting on what to do in future sessions	15	8.40 H	2.38	7.07	2.05
15. Writing down your reflections of previous sessions	12	7.92	3.00	6.92	3.20
16. Writing down your plans for future sessions	13	7.00	2.89	6.15	2.97
17. Case discussion/conceptualization/formulation with peers	12	6.67	2.64	6.75	2.45
18. Viewing master therapist videos, with the aim of developing specific therapeutic skills as a therapist	11	4.36	3.23	4.45	3.70
19. Reading case examples (e.g., narratives, transcripts, case studies)	12	4.33	3.23	4.92	3.40
20. Discussion of psychotherapy-related subjects with contemporaries/peers/mentors	13	6.85	3.02	5.69	2.66
21. Tending to self-care activities and emotional needs	13	7.31	2.29	4.85	3.58
22. Socializing	15	6.80	2.83	5.13	2.83
23. Exercising	15	6.27	3.63	4.40	3.68
24. Rest (e.g., naps in the day, going for a walk, engaging in a nontherapeutic activity that is enjoyable)	15	7.40	2.59	4.13	3.54
25. Others <sup>a</sup> (Please specify)	7	5.00	4.00	5.57	4.43



# Tony Rousmaniere

- Writes about incorporating deliberate practice into his own supervision and personal development
- Video records all sessions
- Example:
  - getting stuck with a male client who is talking about difficulties in relationships with women (fear of rejection)
  - Rousmaniere realizes he has 'frozen' (not emotionally available) during key moment in session
  - Even though this is an area he has previously worked on in his own personal therapy
  - With supervisor, he identifies other ways he might respond to this client
  - Practices them on his own (emotionally challenging process)
  - Keeps a log/record

# Tony Rousmaniere and Alex Vaz

Model of how to engage in deliberate practice:

- Identify skill/response that you want to develop
- Create a 'live' situation (recording of session, role-play, movie clip, mirror, etc)
- Using a journal/log as motivational device – tendency to avoid doing DP
- Monitor your **level of emotional arousal**
  - If the activity makes you too anxious, it is impossible to learn anything
  - If the activity is too easy, it is not sufficiently challenging
  - Aim is to carry out as much as possible of your learning somewhere between these extremes
- Repeat until you have mastered the new skill/response

# The Abertay Pilot Study

- MSc Counselling: 3-year part time (BACP validated); pluralistic model
- Key theme of year 1 of MSc Counselling (60 students): development of counselling skills
  - practice in triads, reflection in personal and professional development groups; assignments that focus on specific skills (*students not required to be seeing clients until year 2*)
- **Aims of study:**
  - **How do year 1 students experience deliberate practice?**
  - **What do they actually do? How do they use DP?**
- At start of year, students introduced to model of deliberate practice (workshop and handout)
  - reinforced in triads
  - integrated into assignments
- Use a Deliberate Practice log to collect data on their use of DP
- Focus group interviews at end of year
- Through year: collect observations from staff
- Ethical approval for data collection
- Look at what has been learned
  - improve DP input for next intake
  - further research to explore issues that emerge

## **DELIBERATE PRACTICE LOG ENTRY**

Date:

Length of time spent on this learning episode (minutes):

Focus/goal of the learning episode:

Type of learning activity:

Who was involved ...:

(roles rather than actual names, e.g., student on the course, tutor, therapist...)

How challenging/emotionally difficult was this activity:

[0 = easy, relaxing....10 = too hard]

How useful was it:

[0 = waste of time....10 = made a huge difference]

How close are you to completing this learning task (i.e., being competent in respect of the skill you are trying to master):

[0 = stuck/not at all close....10 = skill sufficiently mastered, ready to move on to something else)

NOTES:

# Preliminary findings

- Overview
- Examples
- Themes

# Overview

How students used deliberate practice (based on DP logs)

- Episode length: 10 minutes to 30 hours
- Participants: individual alone; fellow students; friends and family members
- Topics: **congruence/authenticity**, preparing for DP, responding to conflict, use of language (questions, metacommunication, opening statements), reflecting/summarizing skills, specific interventions (case formulation, 2-chair work, relaxation)
- Episodes were experienced as:
  - moderately challenging
  - highly useful
  - on-going (task typically rated as incomplete – there was more to learn)

# Example 1 (student DP log entry)

- Time: several hours per week over 7 weeks *so far*
- Goal: to become more congruent/authentic in relationships including the therapeutic relationship
- Activities:
  - reading about congruence
  - exploring origins of my authenticity with my therapist
  - listen to audio recordings of my work with practice clients – what could I have done differently?
  - practice being congruent in personal development group and counselling skills practice sessions
  - collect feedback from self and client, including using Real Relationship Inventory and Barrett-Lennard Relationship Inventory
- Evaluation: “I have found this exercise hugely helpful, although challenging, uncomfortable and upsetting at times. I now have huge optimism going forward as I feel as I have started to be authentic to myself and with further exploration (and help of therapist) to be more authentic in my relationships...this task is ongoing”

## Example 2 (student DP log entry)

- Time: 25 minutes
- Goal: to practice a guided relaxation exercise that had been introduced in class
- Activity: read through the instructions with a friend as a client
- Evaluation: “...we were both a bit self-conscious...had to fight the urge to treat it as a joke...in that sense it was also an exercise in openness to intimacy and it felt like an intimate thing to do together. I’ll need more practice to feel competent and comfortable”



## Example 3 (tutor report)

- XX had a very clipped way of speaking which got worse when she was feeling a bit anxious. I invited her to do DP around slowing down her speech, especially when she was feeling anxious. She reported she had been practicing with her family and found it was getting better.

## Example 4 (tutor report)

- ZZ had an incredibly anxious presence. I invited her to practice grounding herself at the beginning of the session. Both feet on the floor to stop her shaky legs. Arms on the chair rests to stop fiddly hands, then practicing her welcome face in front of the mirror to try to convey calm warmth. She said she has been working on it for a couple of hours a day and she feels she is getting better

## Example 5 (tutor report)

- I gave YY feedback about being overly directive and she's been practising using more collaborative, open statements by 'building up a stock of phrases' and thinking about the motivation of the question before she asks the question (e.g., is this in service of the client?). I have observed her becoming much less directive in recent skills practice sessions.

## Example 6 (tutor report)

- AA flagged up that she had issues with conflict, either being in it, or helping people who were exposed to it...it felt like she was not able to listen to conflict stories. She said she had been working intensively with her therapist on this issue. She had not yet felt able to ask for conflict to be created in the triads [counselling skills practice sessions], but that was her intention.

# Themes

- Extending learning beyond the classroom
- Personal/emotional learning is a central aspect of effective DP
- The deliberate practice model provides a valuable shared point of reference and language for interactions between tutors and students:
  - a “shared language which removes judgement”
  - asking students what their deliberate practice focus before observing their practice
  - enables students to decide what to focus on and prioritise
- Deliberate practice goals sometimes require development/refinement with a tutor to give them the most value (i.e., in some situations, feedback and guidance from fellow students was valuable, but not sufficient)
- Differences between individuals:
  - some students fully committed to engaging with concept of DP
  - minority appear to be merely paying lip service

# Discussion and implications

- As far as we are aware, this is the first study to look at DP in pre-placement trainees
- Overall findings (from both staff and students):
  - DP is a useful element of the learning process
  - DP complements and enhances a micro-skills training model
  - DP contributes to personal development goals of programme
- Unexpected findings:
  - understanding the concept of DP is an important precursor to engaging in DP
  - studies by Rousmaniere, Chow, etc focus on learning process within the individual therapist - our findings suggest that **creating an appropriate context** to support DP is important
- Further questions:
  - **How do students decide on the topic for DP? What sources of feedback do they use?**
  - How can we improve our use of a DP perspective (e.g., training activities, more use of video)?
  - What happens when these students start to work with actual clients?
    - do they continue to find DP valuable?
    - is there a link between use of DP and effectiveness with clients?
  - Implications of the amount of time available to students to engage in DP (pros and cons of full-time vs. part-time training)

# Deliberate/self-practice sources

Ericsson, K. A. and Pool, R. (2016). *Peak: Secrets from the new science of expertise*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

**Rousmaniere videos on youtube**

**Rousmaniere, T. (2017). *Deliberate Practice for Psychotherapists: A Guide to Improving Clinical Effectiveness*. New York: Routledge**

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Rousmaniere, T., Goodyear, R. K., Miller, S. D. and Wampold, B. E. (Eds) (2017) *The cycle of excellence: Using deliberate practice to improve supervision and training*. New York: Wiley/Blackwell

Gale, C. and Schröder, T. (2014). Experiences of self-practice/self-reflection in cognitive behavioural therapy: A meta-synthesis of qualitative studies. *Psychology and Psychotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice*, 87(4), 373-392

Chow, D. (2017). The practice and the practical: Pushing your clinical effectiveness to the next level. In D. Prescott, C. Maeschalck and S. D. Miller (Eds.), *Reaching for Excellence: Feedback–Informed Treatment in Practice*. Washington: American Psychological Association

Kulasegaram, K. M., Grierson, L. E. and Norman, G. R. (2013). The roles of deliberate practice and innate ability in developing expertise: evidence and implications. *Medical Education*, 47(10), 979-989.

# Self-reflection exercise and discussion

For 3 minutes, write your response to these questions:

- ***What do you do*** to enhance your effectiveness as a therapist?
- ***How do you decide*** to do what you do to enhance your effectiveness...?

Join up with your group of 3

Take it in turn to share what you have written (3 minutes for each person)



# Further self-reflection/journal writing task

- How have you acquired skill/competence in other areas of your life: are these ways of learning applicable to how you develop as a therapist?
- Take a few minutes to reflect on episodes in your life where you have learned a practical skill/competence. Examples could include: sport, driving a car, chess, martial arts, knitting, meditating....anything that has a practical side to it.
- For each skill consider the following questions in as much detail as possible:
  - What was the process you went through in acquiring this skill? What activities were involved? What parts of the process were you good at, and what bits were hard for you? What was the role of other people?
  - What might be the relevance of this learning process, to how you acquire counselling skills?