

# Philosophy and Reflective Practice in Sport Studies

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## Introduction

The commencement of university studies can be both an exciting and daunting experience for many students. In addition to dealing with new surroundings and people, students are introduced to a variety of disciplines with their own specialist ways of knowing and technical vocabularies. For example, students undertaking undergraduate programmes of study related to sport (e.g., Exercise and Sport Science, Human Movement, Physical Education) are introduced to disciplines such as anatomy, physiology, biochemistry, biomechanics, motor learning and psychology. Some programmes include history and sociology but few offer philosophy.

Pedagogical methods are changing in sport studies, but there is still a strong tradition of teacher-centred learning that favours theoretical and experimental knowledge over lived experience and social-critical knowledge. For example, in the natural sciences, and the social science disciplines with a strong positivist bent, students learn how to apply the scientific method to solve problems related to skill acquisition, behaviour modification, and performance. As part of their socialisation into the largely scientific discourse of sport studies, students learn to discount personal experience and to adopt a so-called 'objective' perspective and a third-person language.

This paper discusses a more student-centred approach to introduce philosophy into an undergraduate programme of this type. The goal is not to produce philosophers, *per se*, but to promote reflective practitioners who will enter professional fields such as exercise therapy and rehabilitation, teaching and coaching, as well as exercise and sport psychology counselling. The essay by Russell Smelter ('Peter Pan and the Lost Boy') below is an example of a major writing assignment in Philosophy of Exercise Science and Human Movement, a core unit for all first year students in the sport studies programme. It is included in full to illustrate how practical activities and life experiences can be the starting point for learning and teaching.<sup>1</sup>

A paper by Hemphill (2004) outlined the format and discussed the educational value of an experience-based writing project for use in sport and leisure studies. It details what is referred to as the 'Experiential Report – Research Paper' couplet. In short, students are asked to write a descriptive and reflective account of a significant personal experience in a sport or leisure related activity, then develop it into a philosophically informed and documented research paper. The paper explained a teacher-centred method for student feedback and support, and provided several examples to illustrate the juxtaposition of first-person narrative and third-person philosophical discussion. The

1 We would like to thank the anonymous referee and the editor for their thoughtful and constructive comments on earlier versions of this paper.

current paper goes a step further: it details a student-centred method of feedback and provides a full example of both stages of the writing process.<sup>2</sup>

## Stage 1: The Experiential Report

The Experiential Report commences very early in the semester before students are 'contaminated' by philosophical concepts and language. Without undertaking research, students are asked to write a 750-900 word story in a style that is both evocative and draws out the personal significance of the lived experience. That is, students are asked to avoid abstract concepts or generalisations, and write in a manner that elicits in the reader an appreciation of what it was like to live through and make sense of a significant (i.e., sublime, tragic, comic) event. Below is a revised and edited example of just such an Experiential Report.

## Peter Pan and the Lost Boy

### Introduction

This is a coming-of-age story. The experience marks the transition between living in a manner much like the mythical Peter Pan – as a boy who never wanted to grow up – to one having to unexpectedly face a 'real-life' emergency situation. In other words, it involved losing Peter Pan to find the 'lost boy.'

### Descriptive Narrative

It is early morning. I am standing at the top of the ski run, surveying the breathtaking mountain landscape around me. A brisk wind nips at my face - all is well with my world. The newly-fallen powder on the slopes below me lies still and unblemished. The hill is there for my taking. Before I know it, I am pure motion, carving turns, negotiating moguls, and landing jumps effortlessly.

Suddenly I snap out of it. The foggy daydream of idyllic ski runs from last ski season clears. I notice that it is snowing, finally. Three weeks of being a ski instructor, yet I have been in front of students only three times. The snow, brilliant if in Australia, is poor by Rocky Mountain standards. No snow means no families, and therefore no groups of children to teach. Today it snows, heavily.

2 For additional examples of fully developed student papers using this method, see Beddoe, B. (1998) 'In the Fight: Phenomenology of a Pugilist', in D. Hemphill (ed.) *All Part of the Game: Violence and Australian Sport*. (Sydney, Walla Walla Press); and Costello, L. (1998) 'The Picture Perfect Day: A Phenomenology of Rowing', *ASSH Bulletin* 29, December, 3-8. See also the discussion of autoethnography in Sparkes, A. (ed.) (1992) *Research in Physical Education and Sport: Exploring Alternative Visions*. (London, The Falmer Press); and Sparkes, Andrew (2004) 'From performance to impairment: A patchwork of embodied memories'; and J. Evans, B. Davies and J. Wright (eds.) *Body Knowledge and Control*. (London: Routledge). Van Manen also provides numerous examples of philosophically-inflected narratives at: <http://www.phenomenologyonline.com>.

I have five children to take care of in my group, the maximum allowed by the ski school. My laborious training to this point has given me grounding in the protocols of ski instruction. Little did I know how it would be tested on this day.

It is cold – really cold. The ‘magic carpet’ conveyor belt and children’s ski school area is small and sheltered compared to the rest of the mountain areas, yet it is little relief. The wind-swept snow screams around the buildings, its flight-path horizontal and literally, ‘in my face.’ I look around and sense that the other instructors are feeling uncomfortable. The group of children, aged 4-5, are freezing and look miserable.

Each instructor takes a group out to begin a lesson. It is not long before I realise that this is not a good decision. The weather is too much; the blizzard conditions are drastically reducing visibility. We decide to pull out. One group at a time leaves through the small gate of the instruction area, boards a sled, and heads toward the warmth of the ski school classroom, 150 metres away. Due to the proximity of my sled to the gate, my group is the last to pack and leave.

As protocol demands, I begin my head count: one, two, three, four ... Where is Jackson? Where is Jackson? I am missing a child. Shhhhit! Panic sets in. My heart is racing. It is as if I have sat up too quickly after lying on the couch – my head is spinning! My stomach is in my throat and I swallow several times to quell the urge to vomit. My goggles are fogged up. My skin feels cold and clammy, yet I am burning up inside.

Why did Jackson leave the group? Where could he be? Injured? Buried? The surroundings so familiar this morning are blurred, both by the whirling snow and my desperate searching for Jackson. The familiar spaces I usually associate with people aboard chairlifts and ‘whooshing’ downhill are now tragically mysterious spaces – places where the lost boy might be.

I can see my kids huddled on the sled, shivering below layers of mittens, beanies, coats, goggles, ski pants, gloves, helmets and their purple ski school bibs. Their fashionable and colourful ski outfits are quickly turning to white as the blizzard snow clings to them. I must get the children back to safety and raise the alarm.

Shame and adrenalin give me the strength to keep moving. However, it is like one of those bad dreams where the harder you try to move, the slower you go. My head seems severed from my body and unable to interpret or control what I am doing or feeling below the neck. ‘Left foot, then right foot,’ ‘one foot in front of the other’ I try to tell myself as I trudge through the snow. Five pairs of skis on my left shoulder grind into my neck with every other step. My right shoulder screams from the weight of the four little ‘snow kids’ in tow in the sled. The chalet still seems impossibly far away. Finally we make it back. I bustle the children inside, and run to find a phone to call for help, only to find Jackson sitting in the lounge, warm and dry, in front of the television. I am torn between hugging him and throttling him!

As it turned out, Jackson had walked off and joined one of

the other ski groups ahead of ours as they began their return from the ski slope to the chalet. Yet, my relief soon turned to anger when pondering the lack of communication on the part of my ski instructor colleague, whose head count of six in his group should have been cause for alarm. This indignation was made worse later when I was told that Jackson was prone to wandering off on his own and had done so with his parents, much to their dismay, just the evening before.

## Reflections and Implications

Immediately following this incident I experienced a crisis of confidence. That is, I questioned my ability to be responsible, not only for myself, but for someone else’s children. Was I progressing to adulthood, or was I still a child myself that required overseeing by parents? In pointing the finger at the other instructors or the parents for their lack of communication, was I simply making it easier on myself?

Prior to this experience of working overseas as a part-time ski instructor, I had been babied all my life. This was my first experience of living away from home and having to make decisions on my own. I was not only dealing with what it takes to look after myself, but I was also put into the position of being responsible for the safety and welfare of others. I was out of my comfort zone twice over. I had no desire to grow up, yet my overseas ski ‘holiday’ forced me out of my Peter Pan existence.

## Stage 2: The Research Paper

Once students complete the Experiential Report, a lecture is devoted to the Research Paper format and grading criteria, and how to make first-person writing more effective (i.e. more evocative of the lived experience). Thereafter, several tutorials become writing workshops where students have the opportunity to seek constructive and personalised feedback from the tutorial leader and/or from other students. Students are also asked to make use of the rubric or ‘theme chart’ below to self-assess their writing and identify salient philosophical themes, which will then be researched and discussed in the Research Paper.<sup>3</sup>

Key themes emerging from student reports (e.g. injury, loss, risk-taking, anxiety, joy, freedom, alienation, camaraderie) are used as examples in several lectures that introduce students to phenomenology and existentialism. The key themes are also used to develop a supplementary reading list, which students are expected to refer to when researching their topics. The principal educational value of this student-centred writing format lies in its ability to engage students

3 Prior to the development of the rubric or philosophical ‘theme chart’, the main author (D. Hemphill) read each Experiential Report and provided constructive feedback, including the identification of the salient philosophical themes, to guide the development of the Research Paper. As the overall sport studies programme expanded, student numbers in the unit Philosophy of Exercise Science and Human Movement have risen to close to 300 students, making individualised feedback of this type prohibitive. The ‘theme chart’ was compiled from an informal content analysis of the Experiential Reports, where common expressions were clustered according to key existential and (Merleau-Pontian) phenomenological themes. Educationally, this student-centred method of equipping students with the tools to self-assess their Experiential Reports is consistent with the aim of developing reflective practitioners.

early in the semester, to provide ongoing methods of feedback and support, and to link practice and philosophy in a more meaningful way.

The following story exemplifies the Experiential Report – Research Paper. That is, it uses a practical experience as the starting point for reflection, employs narrative to communicate the experience, and incorporates philosophical material to flesh out the personal significance and professional implications. Throughout, first-person narrative is interspersed with third-person philosophical discussion, especially of issues related to lived experience, risk, choice and responsibility. While the student story has been revised and edited, it is indicative of a very high standard of writing for this unit of study.

Where the story repeats some of the earlier narrative the words have been italicised.

Examples of Students' Expressions in Experiential Report	Philosophical Theme
'My mind and body felt split' 'My mind and body seemed to be fighting each other' 'My mind was willing, my body unable' 'Don't think, just do,' the coach said. 'My head is just not in it today'	Mind-body dualism
'I felt a stabbing pain in my knee' 'I did my ankle' 'I made sure I stretched each muscle' 'My heart was beating out of my chest' 'My body was a well-oiled machine'	Body-as-object
'Everyone was looking at me; I felt flushed and embarrassed' 'I swelled with pride when I made the team' 'I couldn't look my team mates in the eyes' 'My mother's loving look settled me' 'My opponent's stare intimidated me.' 'I was so nervous in front of the camera.'	Body-as-object-for-others
'It felt effortless' 'I was in the zone' 'Everything was flowing' 'I became the wave' 'It was like I was on automatic pilot'	Body-as-subject
'It felt like slow motion' 'The second half flew by' 'The coach's decision took forever' 'The final whistle couldn't come soon enough' 'Time seemed to stand still'	Lived Time
'The arena seemed to close in on me' 'The finish line seemed miles away' 'The hoop looked twice the size' 'The wave swallowed me'	Lived Space

'I cheated death' 'I looked death in the eye' 'I saw my life flashing before me' 'Losing is a bit like dying' 'After the injury, I reassessed my life' 'After surviving the crash, I don't take anything for granted anymore'	Being-toward-death
'I was no longer in control' 'After the injury, I felt invisible at the club' 'My body let me down' 'The sledging was getting to me' 'I felt good about myself, until I looked in the mirror' 'The coach treats me like a machine' 'I let the team down'	Alienation
'I put my life in my team mates' hands' 'I'd run through a wall for my mates, and they'd do the same for me' 'We knew we had to dig deep' 'We could sense that the tide was turning in our favour' 'I knew exactly where she'd be on the court, so I passed the ball without even looking' 'We had to rely only on ourselves' 'I wanted to kill my opponent' 'My opponent brought out the best in me' 'My opponent really pushed me' 'In Division One netball, I had to lift my game'	Inter-subjectivity (Camaraderie, mateship, team, competition)
'I feel most at home on the sport field' 'Compared to everyday life, sport is freedom' 'Now is my moment of truth' 'Today I face my fears' 'Out of my comfort zone' 'There was no one else to blame for my mistake' 'For once, I can really say that I did it!'	Authenticity and Freedom
'I felt really bad that I hurt him on purpose, but the coach said to do what needed to be done' 'Deep down inside, I knew I cheated myself' 'I kept making excuses to save face' 'I really hate this game, but my parents would kill me if I quit now' 'I took too much credit for what was really a team effort'	Inauthenticity

## Peter Pan and the Lost Boy

### Introduction

This paper describes and evaluates the meaning of a distinct first-hand experience in skiing: losing a child during a ski lesson. This a coming-of-age story of sorts. It is about a 'forced' transition to becoming not only an adult, but also

a professional – an equally difficult calling. Up to this point, I lived in a manner much like the mythical Peter Pan – as a boy who never wanted to grow up. Life was easier and more enjoyable, especially with no responsibilities other than to me. However, on one occasion, I would be faced with having to lose Peter Pan to find the ‘lost boy.’

### Descriptive Narrative

*It is early morning. Standing at the top of the ski run, surveying the breathtaking mountain landscape around me, a brisk wind nipping at my face - all is well with my world. The newly-fallen powder on the slopes below me lies still and unblemished. The hill is there for my taking. Before I know it, I am pure motion, carving turns, negotiating moguls, and landing jumps effortlessly. All too soon it is over. I look back up the slope to see, with some measure of satisfaction, my signature all over it.*

According to Sartre (1956: pp. 743-745), skiing is a type of appropriation, turning the snow from mere crystalline particles into a support for my project of freedom. In other words, I make the snow mine. The freedom expressed here is as much a freedom ‘from’ as it is a freedom ‘to.’ In one sense, skiing is a freedom from the responsibilities and often-meaningless routines of everyday life. In another sense, actions are palpable and are ‘effective,’ that is, make a difference in settling the issue at hand (Algozin, 1979, p. 121).

Skiing is also a freedom to explore, to test and invent myself. I welcome the risks and challenges of skiing — the difficult ski runs, unpredictable snow conditions, not to mention the fear of humiliation or injury when I fall — for it forces me out of my comfort zone. I ski not with reckless abandon, but rather controlled exuberance. Central to the value that I place on skiing is the aloneness, not skiing by myself mind you, but the individual ‘moment of truth’ when I confront my fears, act, and take responsibility for the outcome. For Harper,

And it is the awareness of this personal responsibility which characterizes the man who really knows he is alone in the sport experience. In his aloneness the obligation to himself distinguishes his sport experience from the ‘other’ determined experiences of the everyday world. And it is this reliance upon his own special capabilities and potentials, and not the public panaceas, that allows the sport participant to realize his unique individuality. (1979, p. 126)

In situations like these, there is no one else to depend upon, no one else to blame for mistakes; I quietly savour the rare ‘glorious’ moments.

*Suddenly I snap out of it. The foggy daydream of idyllic ski runs from last ski season clears. I notice that it is snowing, finally. Three weeks of being a ski instructor, yet I have been in front of students only twice. The snow, brilliant if in Australia, is poor by Rocky Mountain standards. No snow means no families, and therefore no groups of children to teach. Today it snows ... heavily.*

*I have five children aged 4-5 to take care of in my group, the maximum allowed by the ski school. My laborious training by this point has given me grounding in some of the protocols of ski*

*instruction including lesson plans, breaks, lunches, behaviour management, as well as first aid and emergency procedures. Little did I know how it would be tested on this day.*

*It is cold – really cold. The ‘magic carpet’ ski lift and teaching area for the children is small and sheltered compared to the rest of the mountain areas, yet provides little relief. The wind-swept snow screams around the buildings, its flight path horizontal and literally ‘in my face.’ I look around and sense that the other instructors are feeling uncomfortable. The children are freezing and look miserable.*

According to Westbury (1997, p. 79) ‘... activities ... in outdoor education are designed to be adventurous, their value lying in their novelty and their impact.’ However, the delivery of outdoor or adventure activity is coupled with the constant analysis of safety and well being of the students, more so than in a traditional classroom style environment due to the unpredictability of the outside ‘classroom’ environment, in this case, the weather, mountain and snow conditions. A balance needs to be struck between offering the outdoor challenge and safety. This is often discussed in terms of risk. A simple explanation of risk is ‘... the calculation of the statistical probability that an event with a negative consequence will occur’ (Ibid., p. 79). Teachers, coaches and other education providers need to find the ‘ethical balance (of) the assessment of risk,’ that is ‘the probability of negative outcomes against the educational benefits and the probability that learning has occurred’ (Ibid. p. 85).

*Each instructor takes a group out to begin a lesson. It is not long before I realise that this is not a good decision. The weather is too much; the blizzard conditions are drastically reducing visibility. We need to pull out. One group at a time leaves through the small gate of the instruction area, boards a sled, and heads toward the warmth of the ski school classroom, 150 metres away. Due to the proximity of my sled to the gate, my group is the last to pack and leave.*

*As protocol demands, I begin my head count: one, two, three, four ... Where is Jackson? Where is Jackson? I am missing a child. Shhhhit! Panic sets in. My heart is racing. It is as if I have sat up too quickly after lying on the couch – my head is spinning! My stomach is in my throat and I swallow several times to quell the urge to vomit. My legs feel numb, weak and useless, and it’s not just the deep snow or cumbersome ski boots. My goggles are fogged up. My skin feels cold and clammy, yet I am burning up inside.*

*Why did Jackson leave the group? Where could he be? Injured? Buried? Even more dire thoughts flood my brain. The surroundings so familiar this morning are blurred, both by the whirling snow and my desperate searching for Jackson. The familiar spaces I usually associate with people aboard chairlifts and ‘whooshing’ downhill are now tragically mysterious spaces – places where the lost boy might be.*

In phenomenological terms I am living my body and space in a qualitatively different way. Mine is not the body of anatomy, its parts seen with the detached, objective eye of the scientist (Schrag, 1979, p. 156). It is not the body of the experienced skier of my previous daydream, that is, the body that I ‘forget’ about as I merge with the snowy

landscape in an exercise of Sartrean freedom. Rather, it is the body lived as fear. Fear for the safety of Jackson, and, drawing on a sense of guilt, fear for myself here in a country notorious for litigation.

The space around me is 'felt' space (van Manen, 2002.) It is not geometric space, that is, the quantitative map-like space of the chalet, ski lifts and ski runs. Rather, it is the oriented space of the lived body, that is, 'the spatial things and relations between them ... encountered in the life-world of everyday practice' (Schrag, 1979, p. 160). In this emergency situation, the lived body as fear constructs or sees space in a different way. It is a look of desperation and urgency. The spaces around me, each building, tree, fence or mound of snow, is scrutinised frantically as something behind which, or under which Jackson could be found.

*I can see my kids huddled on the sled, shivering below layers of mittens, beanies, coats, goggles, ski pants, gloves, helmets and their purple ski school bibs. Their fashionable and colourful ski outfits are quickly turning to white as the blizzard snow clings to them. I must get the children back to safety and raise the alarm.*

*Shame and adrenalin give me the strength to keep moving. However, it is like one of those bad dreams where the harder you try to run, the slower you go. My head still seems severed from my body and unable to interpret or control what I am doing or feeling below the neck. 'Left foot, then right foot,' 'one foot in front of the other' I try to tell myself as I trudge through the snow. Four pairs of skis on my left shoulder grind into the side of my head with every other step. My right shoulder screams from the weight of the four little 'snowkids' in tow in the sled. The chalet still seems impossibly far away. Finally we make it back. I bustle the children inside, and run to find a phone to call for help, only to find Jackson sitting in the lounge, warm and dry, in front of the television. I am torn between hugging him and throttling him!*

*As it turned out, Jackson had walked off and joined one of the other ski groups ahead of ours as they began their return from the ski slope to the chalet. Yet, my relief soon turned to indignation when pondering the lack of communication on the part of my ski instructor colleague, whose head count of six in his group should have been cause for alarm. This indignation was exacerbated later when I was told that Jackson was prone to wandering off on his own and had done so with his parents, much to their dismay, just the evening before.*

### **Reflections and Implications**

*Immediately following this incident I experienced a crisis of confidence. That is, I questioned my ability to be responsible, not only for myself, but for someone else's children. Was I progressing to adulthood, or was I still a child myself that required overseeing by parents? In pointing the finger at the other instructors or the parents for their lack of communication, was I making it easier on myself to avoid responsibility?*

Who was responsible for this situation? Could Jackson be held accountable for leaving the group when it was made clear to him and all the other children beforehand that, among other things, they must stay with their group at all times? Of course not. We do not expect young children to be fully responsible for their actions.

The duty of care lies clearly with the instructor, and duty of care is linked to the ethical principle of paternalism. Paternalism is defined by Dworkin (2002) as 'the interference of a state or a person with another person, against their will, and justified by a claim that the person interfered with will be better off or protected from harm.' In other words, we forbid individuals from doing something or compel them to act in some way on the grounds that we know what's in their best interests. When paternalism is directed towards informed and consenting adults, this type of paternalism, referred to as 'hard' paternalism, is difficult to justify. It is usually the case that an adult's actions, even if informed and voluntary, must result in harm to others before we are justified in interfering with his or her behaviour.

However, when it can be shown that a person lacks the capacity to make an informed or voluntary choice, interference may be justified. This may be the case where an adult seeks legal authority for a parent who, because of severe Alzheimer's disease, for example, can no longer manage his or her own affairs. In the case of children, we assume that, due to lack of training and experience, they often and inadvertently undertake dangerous activities and are not aware of the consequences of their actions. As a result, they cannot be permitted unlimited freedom. This is generally referred to as 'soft paternalism,' and, for Brown, has special relevance for the care of children.

In the case of children ... restrictions on individual liberty may be justified as preventing significant harm that might not otherwise be recognized and avoided. In such cases it seems clear that paternalistic interference is not only permissible but may indeed be obligatory to prevent harm and allow for a full flourishing of the child's potential development (Brown, 1995, p. 215).

Accordingly, instructors are justified in not allowing children to make their own decisions as to where to ski, whom to ski with, and what runs they may ski down, due to their limited skills and experience in snowy, mountainous conditions.

However, Brown is quick to add that 'An important part of growing up is making mistakes and learning from them' (Ibid. p. 215), so paternalism needs to be balanced with the learning opportunities afforded by risky activities. Prescriptive or proscriptive limitations are justified on the grounds that we expect that, with appropriate instruction, mentoring and experience, children will eventually learn to make informed decisions of their own. For Brown 'teachers and parents must at some point help facilitate the transition to full autonomy at which earlier limits to freedom can no longer be tolerated' (Ibid. p. 219). In other words, paternalism with children is justified on the basis of safety and health concerns, but should taper off as children gradually develop the ability to 'stand on their own two feet' or 'make up their own minds.'

Upon reflection, duty of care on this day may have been compromised by impatience, that is, by the anxiousness of the instructors, after so many snow-less days, to finally teach and get paid. However, a more serious threat to duty of care came in the form of lack of communication amongst instructors. Protocol clearly required a head count of the

children at regular intervals during a normal ski lesson, let alone in adverse conditions such as those we experienced on that day. What was going on in the head of the other instructor when he noticed six, not five, children in his group? I could assume that the other instructor was simply concerned, as I and the other instructors were, with getting all the children back to the chalet safely. When feeling less than generous, I resent having been put in a situation of panic and dread, of not knowing where Jackson was, a situation that could have been easily avoided with some basic communication between instructors.

This is reminiscent of Meier's paper (1976), where he discusses the 'kinships and the rope' and the importance of communication to the safety and welfare of mountain climbers. The climbing rope is literally a lifeline, but it also symbolises the mutual struggle and solidarity of the group. Clear and effective communications are essential, not only for the success of the climb, but because the life of each member depends on it. In my situation, there were seven instructors, each with a sled of children, attempting to achieve the same goal, that is, safely reach the chalet. However, in retrospect, while we had the same goal, we had no 'lifeline.' We acted independently, cut off from each other not only by sight due to the blizzard, but also by sound. The ability to fulfill our duty of care in this case would have benefited immensely from clear and effective communication.

The lack of communication by the parents as to Jackson's tendencies to wander off also undermined the instructors' ability to fulfil their duty of care. If it couldn't be considered a (legal) parental duty of care, it would seem at least prudent for parents to disclose information that would assist instructors to look after the health and welfare of their children. In fitness centres, for example, general screening procedures are often undertaken to identify medical conditions or previous injuries that may put the participant at risk. In some cases, medical clearance may be required before the participant is allowed to participate in fitness programmes, while in others, programmes are modified to take into account of these conditions and previous injuries. It is not uncommon for instructors to ask participants before class if they have suffered any recent injury or illness that would affect their ability to participate fully in the class, thus allowing the instructor to modify the programme and monitor the participant accordingly.

It is not always clear what obligations, if any, parents have to disclose information about their child's health conditions or behavioural peculiarities that might affect the nature and level of supervisory care provided by instructors. Maybe parents withhold this type of information out of a heartfelt desire to not have their child treated differently, which is, to not have them singled out for special attention. It is understandable why a parent would want to have their child treated the same as others. However, withholding certain medical or behavioural information may not only compromise the ability of instructors to teach well, but may also prove disastrous, especially if it leaves both the child and the instructor vulnerable.

The main point here is not to shift the blame for the 'lost child' on to other instructors or parents for their lack of

communication. Rather, it is to make the case for shared responsibility. It is quite clear that instructors have a duty of care to take reasonable (i.e., professionally recognised) precautions to ensure that conditions, equipment and instruction are suitable to the age and ability of the group and the goals of the activity. It is also quite clear from the account above that clear and effective communication between instructors is essential, and 'lifeline' and other safety protocols need to be established or revised accordingly. Perhaps parents, too, need to be better educated about the risks associated with skiing and other types of children's adventure learning activities, and the type of information they should consider disclosing to instructors in order to help them deliver an optimal standard of professional care.

What began as a skiing 'holiday,' with some part-time ski instruction work on the side, soon became a very hands-on start to my professional development. Professionalism in some areas means emotional detachment and adopting a business-like demeanour. However, in people-oriented professions like teaching/coaching, exercise therapy, and fitness/adventure leadership, professionalism means something more. It is certainly more than the type of risk management that links professional care of clients to minimising personal or corporate exposure and liability. Professionalism can also mean being 'other-directed,' which is an ethical posture that connects professional care principally with the interests and welfare of programme participants.

*Prior to this experience of working overseas as a part-time ski instructor, I had been babied all my life. This was my first experience of living away from home and having to make decisions on my own. I was not only dealing with what it takes to look after myself, but I was also put into the position of being responsible for the safety and welfare of others. I was out of my comfort zone twice over. I had no desire to grow up, yet my overseas ski 'holiday' forced me out of my Peter Pan existence.*

Choice and responsibility are inextricably linked. Responsibility is understood by many existentialist writers as meaning, first of all, responsibility for oneself and, according to Hatab, 'choosing oneself as freedom' (Hatab (1999). Skiing is still my freedom. I am free in the sense of facing a decision to live a routine life or one filled with challenge. I am also free in the sense of putting myself on the line, risking what I am for a fuller sense of being. I am also responsible for and to myself; there can be no standards for my performance, and no one to blame for what I fail to do.

However, there is also the choice to choose for others, which carries with it its own responsibilities, especially when dealing with children. In choosing for others, I make their needs and interests mine. I now take back the claim that the 'lost boy' event forced me to abandon my Peter Pan existence. Rather, it presented me with an expanded sense of choice and responsibility, with its own risks and rewards. I am more sensitive now to the erratic and inquisitive behaviour of children, and act in ways to ensure that parents and colleagues are aware that professional care is a mutual responsibility requiring good communication. Finally, I have learned that professional leadership and care is not simply

about risk management, but providing the knowledge and support to allow children to make the most of the risks, learning opportunities and freedoms offered by skiing and other sporting and leisure activities.

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## Discussion and Concluding Remarks

The essay 'Peter Pan and the Lost Boy' illustrates how philosophical reflection and discussion can be stimulated when practical experience is the starting point for learning. Students learn to trust not only their own experience, but also their own language by being able to put the experience 'in their own words'. Building on this, students learn to identify and discuss philosophically relevant themes that emerge from their stories, without losing the richness

of the first-person narrative. When students begin to make the links between their first person narratives and philosophical themes, students realise that philosophy is not 'out there,' but closer to experience than they might have first thought.

The Experiential Report-Research Paper writing project links experiential knowledge to existential-phenomenology in a way that discloses worlds of human interest and concern for students. This writing format also makes philosophy more accessible as a vocabulary that can help students make sense of their lives, sporting or otherwise. The story 'Peter Pan and the Lost Boy,' like hundreds of other student papers, provides a window into the lives of students – their achievements and joys, as well as their pains, sorrows and frustrations. However, the description and evaluation of a personally significant experience is only the first step in promoting reflective practice.

The educational value of the Experiential Report-Research Paper is intended to go beyond self-disclosure and increased self-knowledge. In an approach similar to Rorty (1989), Duncan claims that the power of stories lies in their ability to 'convey the suffering of those who we might be tempted to dismiss as having nothing in common with us' and also allow us to 're-envision ourselves as the marginalized Other, and thereby offer us the possibility of moral behavior' (Duncan, 1998, p. 97). Having completed their own self-reflective essays, the next step is to develop empathy towards the lived experience of others, especially of those who graduates are likely to encounter in professional practice. Students are introduced to literature and develop case studies based upon the lived experience of patients, athletes, school students, and clients that they are likely to be dealing with in professions such as exercise therapy and rehabilitation, coaching and teaching, as well as in exercise and sport psychology counselling.

In the lectures, tutorials and case study on exercise therapy and rehabilitation, existential-phenomenology is introduced to balance the largely biomedical approach in the field, with its emphasis on the body-as-machine. Articles are selected that feature first-person narratives dealing with lived experiences such as injury, heart attack and stroke. For example, Thomas and Rintala (1989) discuss injury and alienation in sport, while Doolittle (1994) uses narrative to illustrate how 'recovery' from stroke is defined differently by clinicians and patients. That is, clinicians often mark recovery in terms of the regaining of general, everyday functioning, while patients often measure recovery in terms of how well and to what extent they can take up activities of concern, give them identity and continuity with the past, and provide a vision of a liveable future. For example, an avid fisherman may be concerned less with walking than with the ability to sit in a boat and fly-cast. In order to determine what is meaningful to the patient, clinicians must be able to access the life world of patients.

In the lectures, tutorials and case studies devoted to teaching or coaching, narratives are employed to disclose the lived experience of school children and adolescents, as it may be affected by factors such as ability/disability, race and ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation. For example, Wessinger (1994) uses narrative to illustrate the

joys of participation in sport that have little to do with 'winning'. Fitzpatrick and Watkinson (2003) use narrative to disclose the lived experience and meaning of physical awkwardness. Duncan (1998) uses narrative to illustrate the lived experience of being bullied in schoolyard game culture. The narratives are often tales of 'otherness' for students in the sports studies programme, for they are athletically competent and thoroughly socialised into the culture of competitive sport.

In the teaching and learning activities devoted to exercise and sport psychology counselling, existential-phenomenology is introduced in order to balance the largely cognitive-behaviourist approach in the field, with its emphasis on attitude change and behaviour reinforcement. Fahlberg is used to demonstrate how an existential-phenomenological approach to therapy can shed light on the lived experience of exercising and its authentic/inauthentic meaning for clients (Fahlberg and Gates, 1998). Szekeley (1987) examines women's lived experience of the body in light of social pressure to measure up to a masculine image of feminine beauty. Case study material in Andersen (2005) illustrates not only the importance of empathy and 'therapeutic listening' in psychodynamic counselling, but how counsellors need to be mindful of the 'baggage' they bring to the therapeutic relationship. Taken together, these more client-centred perspectives can expand the notion of what is considered expert knowledge in the field.

In conclusion, this paper has gone some way toward explaining and illustrating how philosophy can contribute to reflective practice in sport studies. In the first instance, students reflect on and write about a significant personal experience, its meaning and significance then expanded with the help of an existential-phenomenology vocabulary. In the second instance, students are exposed to narratives and existential-phenomenological assessments of the lived experiences of others, especially those they are likely to encounter in fields such as exercise therapy and rehabilitation, teaching and coaching, and exercise and sport psychology counselling. What begins as an exercise in self-reflection and self-knowledge gradually becomes an exercise to develop empathy so that students can work more effectively in settings of social and cultural diversity.

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