

EDITORIAL

EDITORIAL AT THE REQUEST OF THE EDITORIAL TEAM AT THE JOURNAL OF SPORTS PSYCHOLOGY

A criticism levelled against Academia since time immemorial is how it distances itself from the “mundane” questions, focusing instead on cerebral circumlocutions about vacuous issues. It is not necessary to employ a single sentence to justify how mistaken such an argument is. To some extent, and in some disciplines, this gap between reality and academia, as perceived by certain social agents, seems to have lessened whereas in other disciplines, there are indicators that such a rift still exists.

This all comes from the debate, initiated on these same pages in a lead article penned by this journal’s Senior Editor, Professor García-Mas, and from a letter to the director sent by Professor Pablo Jodra.

Firstly, Professor García-Mas reflected on the “breach” between the academic and the professional, which was highlighted in each of the symposia at the last World Congress of Sports Psychology celebrated in Seville in June 2017. The conclusions, which were not clearly understood by the editorial writer, inclined towards the professional standpoint, berating, or simply putting into question, the utility of scientific evidence.

For his part, Professor Jodra raised the issue of “the difficulties in translating research results to the applied field”, alluding to the difficulty of controlling variables in real contexts. His conclusion advocated the need to establish links between both fields so that they would function in a coordinated fashion.

The following lines serve as an additional contribution that, without wishing to pass judgement, presents a perspective from the academic standpoint (which for some is far from reality).

It is not news to say that one of the tasks of a University is to generate knowledge and then spread it. The basic tool available to do this is research. Further still, to carry out research, it has to be supported by another reviled element: a theory, or at least a collection of conceptual baggage concerning a particular problem. That said, what does the existence of solid research (which provides results that help to configure theories) contribute to an applied professional in Sports Psychology? We have already seen that for some, it is little or nothing – but is this an accurate portrayal?

We should try to clarify the dilemma by referring to a term that nobody feels able to discuss: “professional”. What is the objective of Sports Psychology training programmes? The answer appears simple – to train “good” professionals. Up to this point there is supposedly nothing to debate. In which case, what would the characteristics of this good professional be? For many, as pointed out by Professor García-Mas, they would be those that knew how to utilize applied techniques to obtain the objectives, targeting, for example, improved sports performance. Expressed in another way - the technical skill to know how to do things, or more than that, to do the things you know how to do well. So, would this be sufficient? If you would permit me a gastronomic analogy, would it be enough to know and follow the recipes without considering the nutritional properties of the foodstuffs used or the best ways to cook them? In our opinion, the answer is no, this should not be enough.

Returning to the Sports Psychology field, one cannot doubt the need for technical skill; in short (as has already been indicated), the importance of doing things well. However, from our perspective, to achieve good professionals, another fundamental pillar is required: **to know why we have done things well**. This signifies a criterion that helps the professional to traverse the route from good practice to having control over the practice. What does control add? In essence, the ability to reflect on one’s own action and the possibility to adjust the applied techniques to the particular characteristics of each case without undermining the basic precepts. Ultimately, control allows one to innovate without the professional action losing quality. Research is the essential element for generating precise knowledge that brings about this control.

Finally, to make things as clear as possible, the obligation of researchers is to address problems that not only have academic relevance but also have practical importance. This obliges them to abandon the gloom of their laboratories and involve themselves in the glow of the training field. Only in this way can the link between both contexts be achieved, as advocated by Pablo Jodra.

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