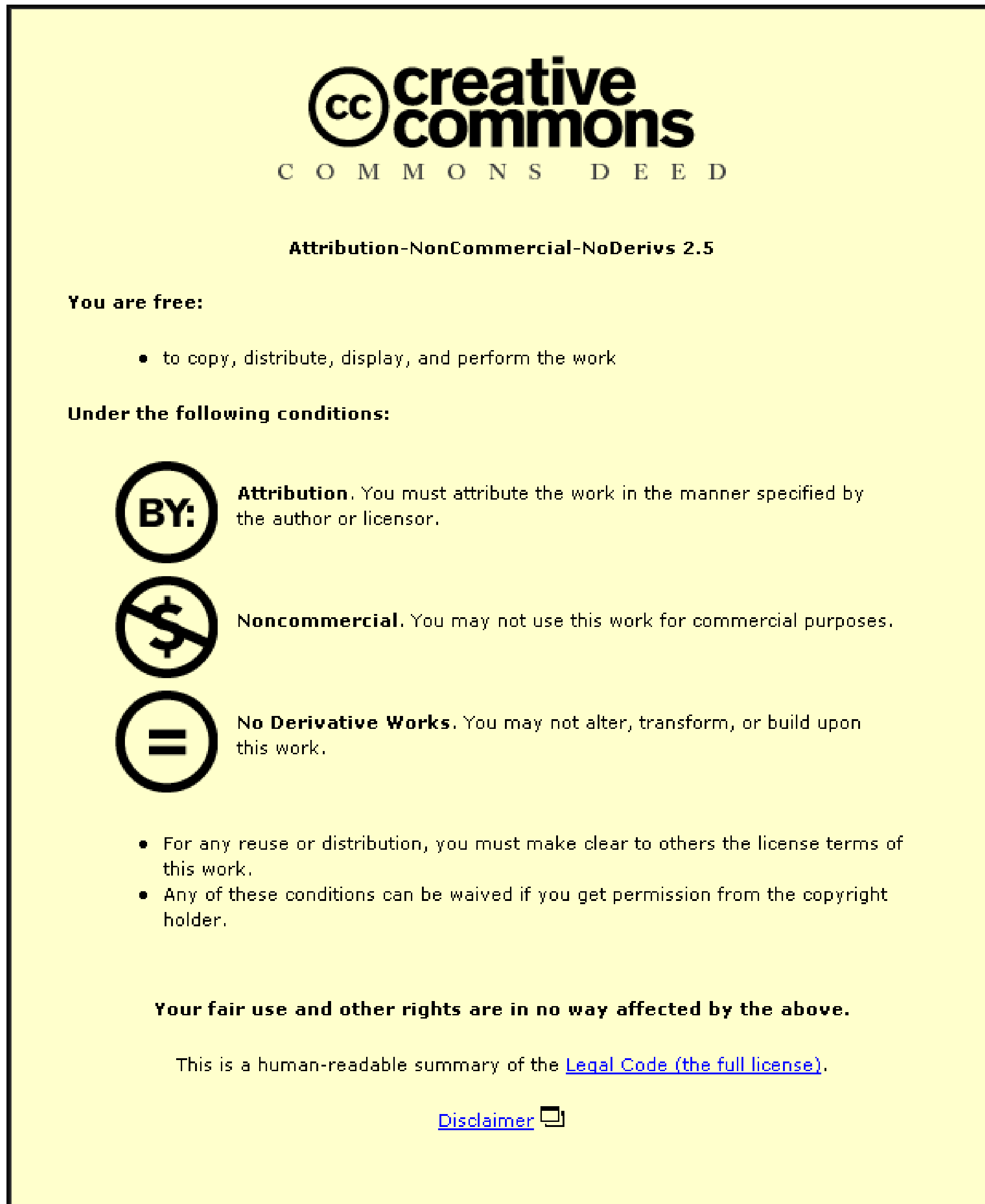


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# Positive youth development through sport: Teaching life skills

by

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A Doctoral Thesis

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For my Mum and Dad



## Abstract

This thesis aimed to develop an intervention to improve the life skills of British adolescent competitive sport participants, who are in full time education. Study One investigated the life skills needs of adolescent competitive sport participants and provided a participant-centred definition of life skills. The problem exists that it is unclear which life skills are needed by adolescent competitive sport participants and which life skills should be included in life skills programmes. As such, existing programmes may not reflect the needs of adolescents. The aim of this study was to examine the life skills needs of competitive adolescent sports participants from the perspective of youth sport participants, coaches, and experts in sport psychology and youth sport. Eighteen adolescent sports participants, fourteen coaches, and four experts in sport psychology and youth sport participated in a series of focus group interviews. An inductive analysis revealed how participants defined life skills and which life skills adolescent sports participants need. Life skills were defined as ranges of transferable skills needed for everyday life, by everybody, that help people thrive above and beyond the normal requirements of everyday existence. Participants described the need for interpersonal skills including social skills, respect, leadership, family interactions, and communication. Personal skills including organisation, discipline, self-reliance, goal setting, managing performance outcomes, motivation, and identity were also reported. Participants described communication skills and organisation as the most important life skills for British adolescent competitive sport participants to acquire.

Study Two presents an in-depth, idiographic study illustrating how life skills were learnt through the experience of sport. The aim of the current study was to investigate how life skills could be learnt and improved through experiences in sport.



Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a single participant. Resultant transcripts were subjected to Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Findings point to an integration of processes, which resulted in the development of life skills. Dispositional factors, situational requirements, and the family worked together to promote life skills. Sport was described as a context with high importance. Therefore, the participant strove to develop life skills to be the best that she could be in the sporting domain. Skills were considered transferable providing the participant was familiar with the new domain, had confidence in applying skills, and the new domain had high importance.

The aim of Study Three was to examine the feasibility of using reflective practice intervention procedures, used in the ELITE life skills programme, to improve the communication skills and organisation skills of British adolescent sport participants. Study Three also aimed to gain insights into participants' perceptions of the ELITE life skills programme procedures and how those procedures influenced life skills development. The participants were six male field hockey players and three female tennis players from a British University. A single subject, multiple baselines, across behaviours design was used to examine the effects of the ELITE life skills programme procedures on communication, organisation, and composite developmental experiences. The results demonstrated differences in skill improvement and the stages of skill improvement during the intervention. During post intervention interviews and focus groups participants described that the targeted behaviours were important to them, the intervention procedures were acceptable and enjoyable, and participants felt by taking part they had increased their self-awareness, leading to increased reports of developmental experiences.



Reflections of the development, implementation, and evaluation of the ELITE life skills programme provide the basis for Study Four. An intermittent reflection journal and records of personal correspondence were kept describing the issues faced as a doctoral researcher conducting intervention research. A confessional tale was used to present a highly personalised form of writing that highlights the research process in order to present what happened during the ELITE life skills programme. The study highlights areas of supervision, delivery style, working with a squad of golf players who ultimately withdrew from the research, gaining entry into the hockey and tennis squads, managing the difficult times, and lessons learnt. The study concludes by considering the levels of reflection with reference to the effectiveness of the intervention and the ethical issues raised.



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Chapter One

Introduction



## Introduction

Running taught me valuable lessons. In cross-country competition, training counted more than intrinsic ability, and I could compensate for a lack of natural aptitude with diligence. I applied this in everything I did.

(Nelson Mandela, 1995, p 55).

This quote highlights the central concept of this thesis, that sport can be used to teach people things that extend beyond the realms of sport into other areas of life. The use of sport as a vehicle for positive psychosocial development has a long and distinguished past. Philosophers, politicians, religious leaders, educators, and sports people have all described the benefits of sport on the development of the person. For example, Plato proclaimed that the moral value of sport far outweighed the physical value. Current President of the International Olympic Committee, Jacques Rogge (2004), said, "The world of sport is not separate from the rest of the world. Sport breaks down barriers, promotes self-esteem, and can teach life skills and healthy behaviour". Pope John Paul II (2000) said, "The potential of sports makes it a significant vehicle for the overall development of the person and a very useful element in building a more human society". Finally, Sir Phillip Craven MBE (2006), the president of the International Paralympics Committee said, "Sport teaches life skills you don't get anywhere else and you don't get them by watching TV or downloading stuff off a computer. It's about exercising the body as well as the mind. That's what makes sport crucial". Each quote represents a widely held belief that there is something positive in sport that can be used to help people beyond the confines of the sporting arena.



The problem exists that these quotes do not help us develop these positive values in young people. What are needed are interventions that improve young people's life skills through sport.

The influence of sport is evident in many realms of modern western society. It permeates fields of education, politics, economics, religion, and the arts. Additionally, sport provides a source of entertainment, role models for the young and old, and a resource for healthy lifestyles. Thus, it is not surprising that sport has high status and importance and attracts a broad participation. In the United Kingdom the Sport and Leisure General Household Survey was conducted with around 14,800 adults aged over 16 and over (Fox & Rickards, 2004). Results revealed that 72 per cent of young people aged between 16-19 years of age and 61 per cent of young people aged between 20-24 years of age participated in sports, games, and physical activities (excluding walking) in the four weeks prior to the research in 2002. Furthermore, 33 per cent of 16-19 years olds and 32 per cent of 20-24 year olds had been members of sports clubs and 42 per cent of 16-19 year olds and 31 per cent of 20-24 year old had participated in competitive sport in the 12 months prior to the research. Similarly, the Department for Children, Schools, and Families (2007) reported, "Children are involved in a wide range of activities, especially sport" (p3). The reported continued:

In 2006/07, the vast majority of children (95%) had participated in an active sport during the last four weeks and nearly 9 in 10 (89%) had participated outside of school lessons. The most common type of active sport was football (58%) followed by swimming or diving (38%) and basketball (31%). Outside of school, football and swimming were still the top two most common sports, and cycling was third most popular (p11).



Brunelle, Danish, and Forneris (2007) stated that the reality is that, regardless of its potential as a context for improving life skills, sport participation is simply “where the young people are.” It is an indisputable fact that sport represents a major source of leisure activity and entertainment for children, exceeded only by family, television, and school. As such, it is reasonable to conclude that young people do participate in organised sport and as such sport should be targeted as a context for helping young people improve their life skills.

Of the millions of young people who play sport, only a fraction will develop careers in professional sport. For the rest, growing up means further defining their individuality, discovering other skills and interests, and applying the valuable principles learnt during sport participation to their adult pursuits. These behaviours, skills, principles, and attitudes are what Danish, Nellen and Owens (1996) call ‘life skills’. In addition, the World Health Organisation (WHO: 1999) defines life skills as the ability for adaptive and positive behaviour that enables individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life.

Researchers have begun to investigate how sport can be used to improve the life of young people (reviewed in detail in Chapter Two). Researchers from developmental science have also investigated how young people can be helped to thrive in adulthood by participating in organised activities (such as sport). This broader area is known as positive youth development. Life skills are one method, which can be used to ensure positive youth development. Specifically, if young people can improve a range of life skills they are more likely to be classified as positive young people (Lerner et al., 2006).

The problem exists that there are very few interventions that aim to teach young people life skills through their experiences in sport. Moreover, the existing



interventions all teach life skills in the same way (i.e., through classroom based direct teaching strategies). Miller and Kerr (2002) stated, “The ideal sport model will not be attained until life skills development occurs within and as a result of the sport experience” (p. 150). The present thesis sought to develop existing research by investigating how a life skills intervention can be used to improve life skills of adolescent competitive sport participants. Specific attention was paid to developing a life skills intervention based on the sporting experience.

### *The sample and population*

The sample participating in the current research was taken from a broader population of British adolescent competitive sports participants, who were in full time education. Competitive sport participants were defined as people training in their sport at least once a week with the intention to compete. British adolescents were selected because the majority of existing research has been conducted with North American youth and therefore it is unclear whether this research is generalisable to British Adolescents and as such requires attention.

### *Personal rationale*

In addition to the aforementioned research issues the research contained in this thesis was also influenced by my own personal experiences of participating, coaching, and observing youth sport. The thesis is made up of a series of studies using both qualitative and qualitative methodologies. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated the researcher is the instrument of data collection in qualitative research and as such it is important that issues such as philosophical assumptions, expectations, theoretical, and conceptual beliefs and biases be explicated as they inevitably influence the research process. Knowledge of the researchers’ beliefs and assumptions helps elucidate decisions made regarding choice of methodology, data



collection techniques, and data analysis regardless of whether the research is qualitative or quantitative in nature. Moreover, my role as both researcher and programme leader in Study Three and the personal nature of Study Four means the search for personal experiences and beliefs should be the starting point for this research.

Personally, I have been involved in sport from a very young age. I was initiated into organised sport at the age of six when I started playing short tennis at a local club. Short tennis was designed as a feeding system into lawn tennis in which children played tennis on smaller courts with plastic rackets and sponge balls. Up to the age of ten I played many tournaments and was selected for the Staffordshire County team. At the age of ten players had to make the transition into full lawn tennis. Again I was selected for the county feeder group and began making my way through the ranks of junior tennis. Throughout this period I dreamed of becoming a professional tennis player, specifically winning the All England Championships at Wimbledon. At the age of 11 I started secondary school and began to broaden my participation in sport. This was partly due moving to a new school and a different peer group but also to many negative experiences in junior tennis that tainted my enjoyment and ultimately lead to me leaving the sport for a period of five years. Although I stopped playing tennis I started playing football, rugby union, and cricket for school teams and was playing basketball recreationally and field hockey and cricket for local teams. This was maintained throughout my secondary school education. During this time my aspirations of becoming a professional athlete had begun to waver, however my love for sport remained. This was demonstrated in the selection of A-level PE and later a BSc in Sport and Exercise Science.



Throughout my academic studies I had a keen interest in talent development and facilitating the transition into elite sport, with a particular interest in tennis. This included the psychosocial competencies of elite athletes in addition to the physiological and biomechanical requirements of elite tennis players. On reflection, I believe this was probably a quest to understand the skills, traits, and virtues that elite athletes had, as I never fulfilled my boyhood dream of winning Wimbledon. I feel that throughout the years I had gradually come to terms with not achieving my goal by focussing on my academic career and using sport as an enjoyable pastime. It was not until my MSc in Sport and Exercise Psychology that I started to reflect on my own sporting experiences and the things I had learnt from sport. This reflection was sparked when I saw a research seminar delivered by Professor Dan Gould during my MSc. Professor Gould delivered a seminar introducing the area of life skills and more specifically how coaches taught life skills to their players. Following this seminar I began reading around the area and developing my knowledge of life skills and positive youth development. I began to make a link between my own skills and traits and whether I felt sport had played a role in developing or not developing them. In essence I felt my experience in sport was multifaceted. My experience in tennis had developed many useful skills, values, and virtues. However, I equally felt that I had not developed many social skills and was a very shy teenager. On the other hand playing university rugby league had helped develop my social skills and self-confidence. I began to question what was it about these particular sporting experiences and all the other sports I played in that did or did not teach me these skills.



### *Practical position of the research*

From a practical perspective it is important to understand how to help young people develop positively so that coaches, youth sport leaders, policy makers, and parents can be given the resources to improve life skills in young people.

Dissemination of theoretical information is of primary importance in sport psychology and youth development. Griffith (1925) stated a fundamental role of the sport psychologist is to disseminate findings so that the coaching community can apply research into the real world. Similarly, Lerner (2005, p57) stated that contemporary youth development is a synthesis between basic and applied science and as such application of research is a fundamental goal. Lerner stated:

We can, through the application of our science, serve our worlds' citizens, actualise the idea that there is nothing of greater value to society than science devoted to using its scholarship to improve the life chances of all people.

The application of theoretical knowledge as an integral facet of positive youth development is reflected in the range of institutes set for the investigation and application of positive youth development research. For example, the Institute for Applied Research in Youth Development in the Eliot-Pearson Department of Child Development of Tufts University (<http://ase.tufts.edu/iaryd/about.htm>), the Child and Adolescent Sport and Activity Lab, Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation at the University of Alberta (<http://www.ualberta.ca/~nholt/index.html>), and the Youth Development Research Project at the University of Illinois (<http://web.aces.uiuc.edu/youthdev/>) have all been set up with applied research as primary objectives. The mission statement of the Child and Adolescent Activity lab captures the practical importance of positive youth development research "The overall goal of CASA is to conduct applied research with the intention of improving



the physical and mental well-being of children, adolescents, and their families. Specifically, we examine child, adolescent, and family involvement in sport and physical activity". Similarly, a core value of the Child and Adolescent Activity Lab is to conduct applied research and they are committed to translating research findings into practice. The Institute for Applied Research in Youth Development stated similar applied objectives in their mission "The Institute for Applied Research in Youth Development helps build the knowledge base vital for researchers, policy makers, and practitioners to foster positive development, improved life chances, and contributions of young people". In line with these mission statements the current thesis aimed to provide a life skills intervention that could be used by researchers and practitioners.

### *Philosophical position of the research*

The philosophical position of the present thesis is a result of a philosophical journey taken throughout the course of the research. These philosophical journeys are reflected in the design and write up of each study. As I wrote my PhD proposal in the winter of 2004 my research was grounded in a post positivist philosophy in which I believed in an objective sense of reality, which could only be approximated but could not be measured. This is reflected in the first study in which focus groups were selected as an appropriate data collection technique. By asking a range of people about their beliefs and opinions objectivity could be better approximated because of the triangulation across multiple potentially biased perspectives.

As I read around sport psychology, developmental psychology, and philosophy my beliefs began to change. Specifically, upon reading several texts in existential philosophy I began to question whether objectivity could even be approximated and as such began to embrace subjectivity. I began to see that understanding of the



individual experience was needed just as much and as such began to move toward the interpretative end of the epistemological spectrum. Additionally, I moved towards non-reductionism, particularly when looking at human development. I believe that human development cannot be better understood by reducing elements of development to their simplest form so that they can be studied in their own right. Rather, I believe that by reducing humans down to their constituent parts you remove what it is to be human. Thus, a holistic perspective of development should be taken, in which all elements of human development can be considered to play a role in the development of a person. This interpretative stance and holistic development is reflected in the single case exploration in Study Two.

During this period I had written up my MSc thesis for publication. I had received two sets of reviewers' comments and had spoken to several journal reviewers about getting published as a doctoral researcher setting out on a career in academia. At this point I began to see that while I believed in the existence of a subjective reality and that an interpretative epistemology had a clear place in sport psychology research, many reviewers and editors did not see things the same way. As such, I began to adopt what I would call a pragmatic research philosophy. Specifically, I still believe in non-reductionism, interpretation, and subjective meaning, however I believe in reality it is very difficult to conduct this type of research and to do it justice. Moreover, to get published in sport psychology it is important to be pragmatic and to do research that is reflected by the norms of the field and to slowly introduce and support different types of research over time. As such, this philosophical journey has effectively taken me full circle back to what would be described as post positivism.



### *Aim of the thesis*

The aim of the thesis is to develop an intervention to improve the life skills of British adolescent competitive sport participants, who are in full time education. In particular, the aim was improve upon the life skills that young people in sport already have and to increase their awareness of how they can be used in other life domains. In order to achieve this broad aim, individual objectives were to:

- Investigate how British adolescent competitive sport participants, who are in full time education define life skills,
- Investigate which skills British adolescent competitive sport participants, who are in full time education need,
- Investigate methods of how life skills can be improved,
- Develop intervention procedures for improving life skills through sport,
- Evaluate the intervention procedures.



## Chapter Two

### Literature Review



## Introduction

The purpose of the literature review is to introduce the area of positive youth development as an area of academic and applied interest and to show how the improvement of life skills fits into the broader field of positive youth development. An additional aim of the literature review is to demonstrate that there is a need for a new life skills intervention that can help British adolescent competitive sports people improve their life skills.

This chapter provides a comprehensive review of positive youth development as a contemporary strength based conception of adolescence. Theoretical foundations of positive youth development are described followed by the characteristics of effective programme design. Organised activities are described as contexts for positive youth development, which leads into research focused exclusively on sport as a context for positive development. Special attention is given to how sport has been used to develop life skills within the broader positive youth development framework. Methodological and conceptual limitations are highlighted alongside unanswered research questions and gaps in the literature.

The aim of the overall thesis is to develop an intervention to improve the life skills of British adolescent competitive sport participants, who are in full time education. Before this can be done the literature on life skills development, positive youth development, and using sport as a context for positive youth development must be examined. Firstly it is important to define life skills.

### *Defining life skills*

Several definitions of life skills exist. UNICEF (United Nations Children Fund) define life skills as a large group of psycho-social and interpersonal skills which can help people make informed decisions, communicate effectively, and



develop coping and self-management skills that may help them lead a healthy and productive life (UNICEF, n.d.). The World Health Organisation (1999) defines life skills as the abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. Finally, the Life Skills Centre defines life skills simply as the skills that enable us to succeed in the environments in which we live (Life Skills Centre, n.d.). Life skill training has been defined as the formalised teaching of requisite skills for surviving, living with others, and succeeding in a complex society (Hamburg, 1990). Within sport psychology literature few authors expressly define life skills. Rather they provide examples of skills they consider to be life skills. For example, many authors refer to physical life skills (e.g., proper posture), behavioural life skills (e.g., effective communication), or cognitive life skills (e.g., effective decision making) (Danish & Donohue, 1995; Danish & Nellen, 1997) without specifying what life skills are.

Relying on life skills definitions from outside the field of sport psychology may be problematic. Specifically, life skill training has been used across domains as a method of reducing negative behaviours. This deficit perspective of adolescent research is not reflective of the positive perspective taken in this research. Moreover, terms used by researchers in drug prevention may not be reflective of terms used by adolescent sports people. Many of the aforementioned definitions have not been derived from British adolescents and as such may not reflect how British young people define life skills. Therefore, there is a need for a new definition of life skills from the perspective of British adolescents.

### *Adolescence, youth, and young personhood*

In order to conceptualise positive youth development it is important to introduce adolescence and to describe trends in adolescent research relating to



positive youth development. Adolescence is typically viewed as the second decade of life (Lerner & Steinberg, 2004) beginning with biological transitions (e.g., puberty) and ending with cultural and sociological transitions (e.g., enactment of adult roles in society). Lerner et al. (2006) stated adolescence may be defined as the period in which a persons' biological, cognitive, psychological, and social characteristics are changing from what is considered child like to what is considered adult like. When a persons' characteristics are in this state of change the person is an adolescent.

Due to changes in society, adolescence can be viewed as a longer period than in previous decades. Contemporary adolescents remain out of the labour market, financially dependent on parents, do not begin capital accumulation, and do not acquire adult roles in society until early to mid twenties, especially if they remain in full time education. As such, contemporary adolescence is a longer transitional period than it used to be. Adolescence appears to be age related but not age dependent (i.e., adolescents may be over 20 years of age). In addition to these ambiguities regarding the chronological nature of adolescence the United Nations (2005) stated that the concept of adolescence is a largely western notion that does not apply across cultures. Moreover, cultural differences across western societies may result in different understandings of what it is like to be a young person. As a result, the United Nations rarely use adolescence as a term to classify individuals in this transitional stage of life. Rather, they use the terms youth and young people to represent individuals who are aged between 15-24 years and 10-24 years respectively.

The sample in the current thesis is British adolescent competitive sport participants who are in full time education. Thus, research in the current thesis



represents youth and young personhood. Specifically, all participants are aged 15-22 years of age. Contemporary conceptions of adolescence means those aged 22 years who are not partaking in adult roles in society could also be classified as adolescents. As such, the present research could be classified as adolescent research in addition to being classified as youth and young personhood research. Given that the existing research use youth, young personhood, and adolescence to represent ostensibly the same period in life all three terms are use to review extant research.

*The deficit perspective.* Until relatively recently (i.e., 1990s: Lerner, 2005) adolescence was predominantly viewed as a period of storm and stress characterised by chronic emotional turbulence, wavering between extremes of sorrow and exuberance, and shifting unexpectedly between friendly altruism and selfish hoarding (Hall, 1904). Hall's study of adolescence was predicated on the assumption that human development mirrors the evolution of the human species. Hall believed the human species evolved from beast like to civilised beings. Adolescence corresponds to the period in evolution when humans changed from being beasts and therefore adolescence is the time in a person's life where they overcome their beast like impulses (Lerner, 2005).

Although not all developmental scientists subscribed to this view, adolescent research was dominated by the belief that adolescence is a period of developmental disturbance. This view of adolescence is broadly known as a deficit perspective of adolescence. From the deficit perspective adolescents are viewed as problems to be managed because they are inherently prone to negative behaviour. From this perspective a positively developed adolescent is one who does not engage in drug taking, drinking alcohol, unsafe sex, crime, violence, and/or other negative behaviours. As a result, life skills programmes are aimed at teaching life skills to



curb drug use, violence, suicide, teenage pregnancy, and other problem behaviours (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, and Hawkins, 1998). In this respect researchers and practitioners are keen to teach adolescents what to say “no” to. These are important areas of research; however, they assume all adolescents will engage in negative behaviour. As such, they do not help young people who are not engaging in such behaviours and who want to improve upon their pre existing life skills.

Developmental scientists have acknowledged that whilst adolescence may be a time of stress for some young people it is not a universal certainty applicable to all young people. There is great individual variation in the degree of storm and stress that adolescents experience dependant upon many factors, including personal coping resources and social support networks (Arnett, 1999). There are infinite pathways, known as developmental trajectories, across adolescence and only a minority reflect storm and stress (Lerner, 2005). As a result, research has begun to embrace a positive youth development perspective.

*The positive perspective.* Positive youth development is a strength-based conception of adolescence (Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, & Lerner, 2005). From this perspective adolescence is viewed as a time of growth and increasing competence, during which young people develop knowledge of themselves and their place in society. Adolescence also provides a time where habits and skills can be nurtured to allow fulfilment of personal potential. As a period when young people begin to adopt behavioural patterns in education, relationships, health, and leisure pursuits adolescence provides a time of potential positive development and growth.

A key feature of positive youth development is that young people who are problem free may not be fully prepared for adult life (Lerner et al., 2006). That is, adolescents who do not have psychological problems who are not targeted by deficit-



based programmes may not possess the skills, talents, and character strengths to fully survive and thrive in adulthood. As such, positive youth development focuses on developing young people who are safe, happy, moral, and fully engaged in life. One method of achieving this is by improving a young person's life skills.

Over the last 25 years there has been a substantial increase in the number of published articles in the field of positive youth development (see Figure 1). As a result, numerous definitions of positive youth development and questions of how positive youth development is fostered have emerged.

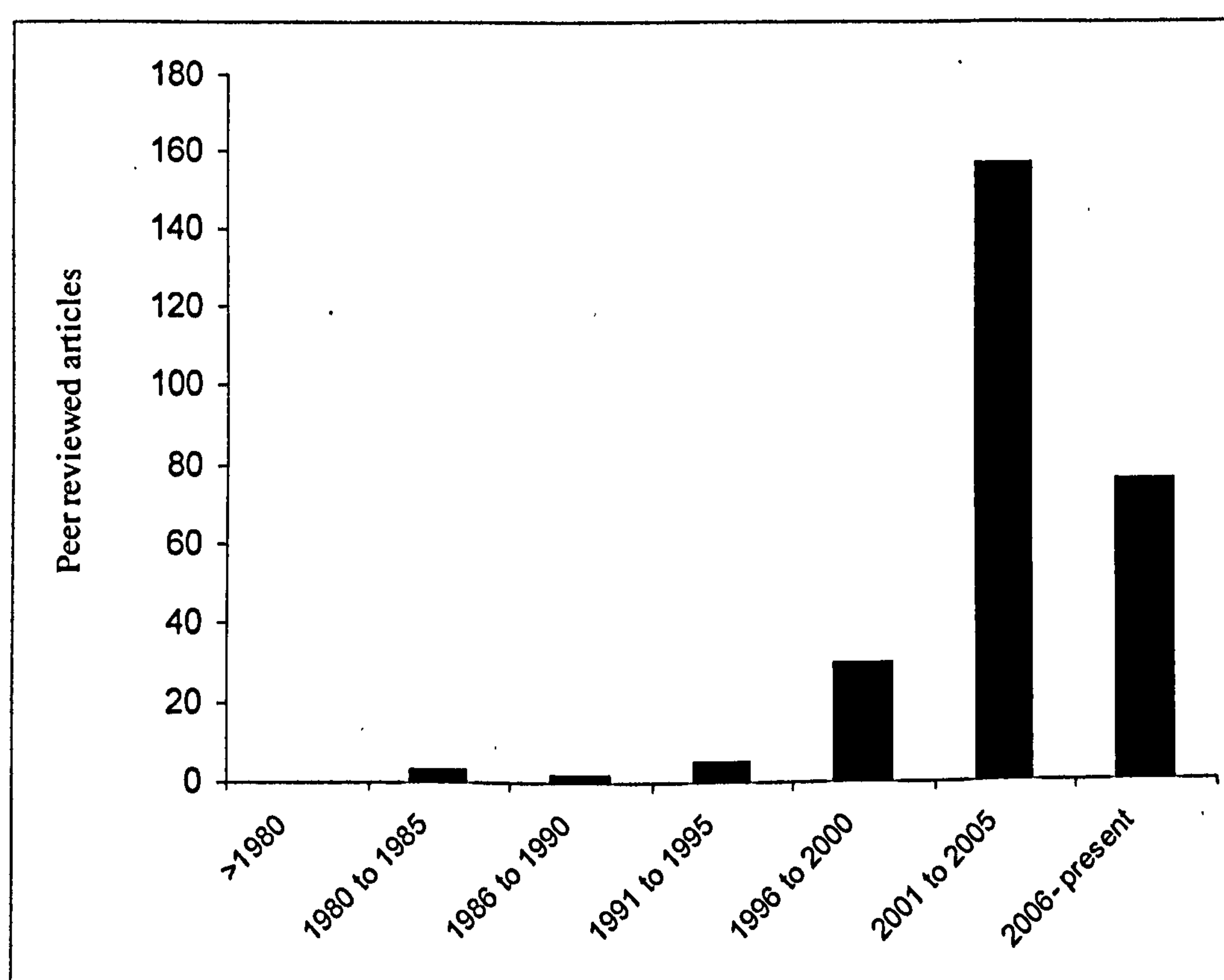


Figure 1: Psychinfo keyword search (Keywords: positive youth development)

The United States Department of Health and Human Services (2003) defined positive youth development as a policy perspective that emphasises providing services and opportunities to support all young people in developing a sense of competence, usefulness, belonging, and empowerment. Damon (2004) defined positive youth development as a new approach to adolescent development that



emphasises the potentialities rather than the supposed incapability of young people, regardless of backgrounds and circumstances. Damon (2004) suggested that positive youth development stemmed from dissatisfaction with a principal view of youth that underestimated the capabilities of young people by focusing on their deficits rather than their developmental potentials, and the belief that preventing high-risk behaviours is not the same as preparation for the future. By turning attention to the limitless potential of youth, young people can be provided with experiences that will not only facilitate the transition into adulthood but will also help them achieve higher life satisfaction and thriving in their adult pursuits (Damon, 2004).

### *Theoretical foundations*

Positive youth development perspectives of adolescence have been integrated and supported by contemporary developmental systems theories (Lerner, 2002). Developmental systems theory is not so much a single theory as a set of theoretical and empirical perspectives on the development and evolution of organisms (Robert, Hall, & Olson, 2003). The developmental systems approach has its roots primarily in developmental and behavioural psychology. Developmental systems theories reject the dualities of development (e.g., nature vs. nurture; organism vs. environment; stability vs. instability). Rather, humans have the potential for change during development because of the integration of a number of developmental systems. The developmental systems theoretical model constitutes a new, non-reductionist, integrative, and multidisciplinary approach to describing, explaining and optimising human development (Jelicic, Theokas, Phelps, & Lerner, in press).

The basic unit of analysis within the developmental system involves a mutually influential relationship between a developing person and a multilevel and changing ecological context (Jelicic et al., in press). This is represented as a person ↔ context



relation. These bi-directional relations constitute developmental regulation. Adaptive developmental regulations emerge when the interactions between the individual and the context advance the well being of both components (Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, & Lerner, 2005).

The potential for change (both individual and contextual), known as plasticity, exists as a consequence of mutually influential relationships between the developing person and his biology, psychological characteristics, family, community, culture, physical and designed ecology, and historical niche (Lerner et al., 2005a). The plasticity of the developing human is a key aspect of positive youth development (Lerner et al., 2005a). Because change is both possible and expected there are means to improve human life. Everybody can achieve this because plasticity is a strength present in all people (Lerner, 2005). The relative plasticity of humans means the levels of the development system (e.g., organised activities, family, community, and psychological assets) can be targeted to design positive youth development interventions (Hansen et al., 2003). This means that improving a persons' life skills can result in positive youth development.

Jelicic et al. (in press) suggested that through the application of interventions to enhance the character of humans' developmental trajectories, the promotion of positive development might be achieved by aligning the strengths of individuals and contexts. As such, developmental systems perspective calls for research that focuses upon uncovering the characteristics of individuals and their ecologies, so that together they can be united to promote positive youth development. In summary, research needs to investigate what young people require in order to match those needs with their context. If Individual contextual matches can be discovered young people are more likely to experience and engage in positive, skill building activities.



### *Positive youth developmental models*

In addition to theories of human development, specific models of positive youth development have been presented that inform applied youth development interventions. Essentially these models describe the characteristics of positive youth development. Three key approaches, Bensons' developmental assets, Lerner's 5Cs and Larsons' domains of developmental experience, are discussed.

*Development assets.* Benson (1997) presented a framework of 40 developmental assets, which represent building blocks for positive youth development. Benson distinguished between more internal and more external asset domains. According to Benson's framework, internal assets refer to an individuals' values and beliefs and include commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity. External assets refer to support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, and constructive use of time. Benson and colleagues (Benson, Leffert, Scales, & Blyth, 1998; Scales & Leffert, 1999) have shown that the more developmental assets youth possess, the greater their likelihood of positive youth development. Specifically, Benson and colleagues suggested that the more assets individuals have the less likely they are to engage in alcohol, tobacco and drug use; to be depressed and/or suicidal, antisocial, or violent; and demonstrate school problems. Furthermore, internal assets play a role in positive psychosocial enhancement. Individuals with more assets are more likely to thrive and be more successful in school, demonstrate leadership and altruism, show care and concern for others, and display optimism regarding their future and success.

There exists some disagreement in the literature about the number of developmental assets that may exist in different social ecologies (Lerner, 2005). For example, Benson suggested there were 40 developmental assets (20 internal; 20



external), however, Theokas Almerigi, Lerner, Dowling, Benson, Scales, and von Eye (2005) suggested there were in fact only 14 developmental assets (seven internal, seven external). Similarly, there are questions related to the measurement of the 40 developmental assets (Lerner, 2005). Alongside these controversies other researchers have demonstrated that the 40 developmental assets are not significantly different to similar variables in other youth development models. For example, Lerner (2005) argued that many of the 40 developmental assets were not conceptually and/or psychometrically independent of the 5Cs of positive youth development.

Finally, all the research related to the 40 developmental assets has been conducted in North America, with North American youth. Thus, it is unclear whether this model would be relevant to youth from different cultures, particularly British cultures. As such, research is needed that investigates British young people so that interventions to improve the lives of young people are specific to their needs.

*The 5Cs.* Lerner et al. (2005b) described and provided evidence for a latent construct of positive youth development through the 5Cs. Essentially, positive youth development is conceptualised as competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring/compassion. Competence is a positive view of ones' actions in domain specific areas. Confidence is an internal sense of overall positive self-worth and self-efficacy. Connection refers to positive bonds with people and institutions. Character is respect for societal and cultural rules. Finally, caring/compassion are a sense of sympathy and empathy for others. Finally, when the 5Cs are present, a sixth C, contribution, emerges. Contribution involves individuals giving back to themselves (e.g., maintaining one's health, being an active agent in one's own development), the



family, community in which they live, and general society (Lerner, 2005), which may include volunteering to participate in research (Kelly & Halford, 2007).

The 5Cs are based on the experiences of practitioners and on reviews of the adolescent development literature (Lerner, 2005). Furthermore, the 5Cs are recognised as prominent terms used by practitioners, adolescents, and parents of adolescents involved in youth development programmes in describing characteristics of thriving youth (King et al., 2005). The participants in King and colleagues study were again all North American and therefore cultural differences between the United States and the United Kingdom may mean that the 5Cs do not represent terms used by British adolescents, parents, and practitioners. Further research is needed with British participants (and from a variety of cultures) to assess the generalisability of North American research and to investigate the perspectives of British participants to produce better suited positive youth development interventions.

The 5Cs model of positive youth development is at a preliminary stage of progress. Despite the limited number of studies of the 5Cs there is growing empirical evidence that the 5Cs and subsidiary hypotheses of positive youth development (e.g., the 6<sup>th</sup> C) are supported. The 4-H Study of positive youth development, conducted by Lerner and colleagues at the Institute for Applied Research in Youth Development, Tufts University, reported initial support for the 5Cs model of positive youth development.

The 4-H study of positive youth development is a longitudinal investigation that began in 2002-2003 to assess the role of developmental assets and individual actions in the promotion of positive youth development, as conceptualised by the 5Cs (Lerner, 2005). A cohort of around 1700 fifth grade youth and their parents, from 13 states across the United States, were studied. Since 2002-2003 additional



waves have been conducted each year tracking existing students and introducing new students to the programme. At the fourth stage (2005-2006) the study involved 3,500 youth and their parents from 25 states across the United States.

Using the data from the first wave Lerner et al. (2005b) provided initial evidence for the 5Cs. Results of an initial structural equation modelling analysis used to test the 5Cs model proved to be adequate. Fit indices were significantly improved in a model that derived from a content analysis procedure regarding the specific substantive character of the items involved in the several measures used to assess the 5Cs and the subsequent modifications made to the model (Lerner, 2005). The fit of the model was improved by allowing residuals of scales within the same latent variable to correlate. Although an ideal model assumes no correlation, conceptually some constructs were expected to overlap (e.g., self-worth and identity) as such the model allowed these correlations (Lerner, 2005).

Lerner et al. (2005b) found evidence that the 5Cs exist as latent constructs accounting for variance in surface traits and their convergence on a second order construct of positive youth development. Evidence was also reported that positive youth development correlated positively with contribution (the 6<sup>th</sup> C) and negatively with indices of risk and problem behaviours. Despite these positive results, Lerner and colleagues suggested the model of the 5Cs was not perfect, and it could be improved. Specifically, they suggested some of the Cs represented the same latent construct and additional levels of latent constructs may also be present.

In addition to these misgivings, the 5Cs model may also be criticised on the battery of tests used to assess surface traits of positive youth development. Several measures were administered that indirectly assessed the 5Cs and ultimately positive youth development. For example, competence was measured as academic, social,



and vocational abilities. Catalano et al. (1998) suggested a major deficit of positive youth development research is that no one measure of positive youth development exists. Rather researchers (e.g., Lerner et al., 2005b) administer batteries of tests to capture an overall measure of positive youth development. As a result, direct comparisons cannot be made across studies. Although the 5Cs represented language used by adolescents (i.e., King et al., 2005) they may not reflect the actual needs of young people. As such, similar research is needed that examines what young people need in order to thrive.

*Domains of developmental experience.* Advocates of the positive youth development perspective of adolescence suggest organised activities provide opportunities and conditions to promote youth's development of fundamental skills and resources, allowing young people to thrive in adulthood (Hansen, Larson, & Dworkin, 2003; Larson, Hansen, & Moneta, 2006). Organised activities offer opportunities for positive youth development if they are voluntary and require youth to be intrinsically motivated, they require attention and elements of challenge, and they require effort over time (Larson, 2000). Sport is believed to be a particularly salient context for positive youth development because it requires attention and effort over time and is voluntary, whereas other contexts, such as school, religious service, and the community, are not always voluntary or may not require attention over time (Larson, 2000).

Larson and his colleagues (Dworkin, Larson, & Hansen, 2003; Hansen, Larson, & Dworkin, 2003; Larson, Hansen, & Moneta, 2006) presented an analysis of internal and social/interpersonal domains of learning experiences that may be associated with positive youth development. Internal domains consisted of: (a) exploration and identity work for identity formation; (b) development of initiative;



and (c) emotional self-regulation. Social/interpersonal growth domains were: (a) developing peer relationships and knowledge; (b) teamwork and social skills; and (c) acquiring adult networks and social capital. These domains of learning represent some of the processes through which adolescents can learn positive developmental outcomes through their involvement in structured programmes.

Dworkin et al. (2003) conducted ten focus groups with 55 high school students from the United States to gain descriptions of their growth experiences in the organised activities in which they participated. Results revealed participants believed they had growth experiences related to both personal and interpersonal processes of development. Personal experiences included role experimentation and identity work, development of initiative skills (e.g., learning to set goals and manage time), and learning strategies for emotional regulation. Interpersonal experiences included acquiring new peer relationships and knowledge, developing group social skills, and developing valuable connections to adults. In addition to these findings adolescents also reported that they were agents of their own development and change. Agency took the form of deliberate exploration, or involved trial and error where adolescents evaluated how things could have gone better and taught themselves from their mistakes. Essentially, organised youth activities were arenas in which youth could explore and conduct trial and error experiments. As agents of their own development young people should be included in the improvement of positive youth development programmes. Adolescents can be asked what they want to learn as well as taking control of their own learning in order to give them control over their own development.

Results from these focus groups were used to develop an instrument to assess developmental experiences of adolescents. In addition to these focus groups the



development of the Youth Experiences Scale (YES: Hansen & Larson, 2002) involved analysis of literature on organised activities, vetting potential items with diverse youth and with a set of adult experts, and assessing item properties (Hansen & Larson, 2002). Hansen and Larson (2005) revised the YES to create a shorter instrument that had stronger psychometric properties. The goal of this process was to reduce the number of items in each scale but retain the scale's conceptual and measurement integrity. The YES 2.0 included positive and negative experiences associated with organised activities. Positive subscales include personal and interpersonal domains of experience. Personal domains include identity work (identity exploration & identity reflection), initiative (goal setting, effort, problem solving, & time management), and basic skills (emotional regulation, cognitive skills, & physical skills). Interpersonal domains include teamwork and social skills (group processes, feedback, & leadership & responsibility), positive relationships (prosocial norms, & diverse peer relationships), and adult networks and social capital (integration with family, linkages with community, & linkages to work). Negative experiences include stress, negative influences, social exclusion, negative group dynamics, and inappropriate adult behaviour.

Validity data for the YES 2.0 (Hansen & Larson, 2005) showed that the correlations between the positive and negative scales were low, which suggests there are two broad dimensions or first-order factors, positive developmental and negative experiences. The positive scales of the YES 2.0 are moderately intercorrelated. Three of the 15 positive scales are correlated at .62 or higher, and the remaining 15 ranged in correlation between .50 and the .60. The negative scales are also intercorrelated, with a range of correlations between scales of .46 to .77. Hansen and Larson reported that high intercorrelations among the negative scales are a concern; however, they



may be indicative of shared programme and individual factors that influence responses to all of these scales (e.g., the effect of negative adult behaviour on youth experience) rather than a lack of conceptual differentiation.

Hansen and Larson (2005) also conducted confirmatory factor analyses to examine the factor structure of the YES 2.0 positive and negative scales. The results indicated that the six positive and the five negative scales were better conceptualised as distinct dimensions of positive or negative experience. Specifically, the separate scales provided distinct contributions to their overall dimensions, positive or negative, and should not be treated as one conceptual dimension.

The YES has been used in two studies that have assessed the developmental experiences associated with organised activities. Hansen et al. (2003) used the YES to inventory adolescents' reports on different developmental experiences in organised youth activities including extra curricular and community based activities. 450 9<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students (55.8 % female, 44.2 % male) from a small city in Central Illinois, with below average education levels, above average families living below the poverty line, and low median household income, participated in the study. Results showed that these youth reported higher rates of positive experiences in organised activities in comparison to academic class work and hanging out with friends. Youth activities were specifically related to initiative, identity work, emotional learning, developing teamwork, and forming ties with community members. Results also highlighted the differences between organised activities. Specifically, service, faith based, community, and vocational activities were associated with experiences related to identity work, prosocial norms, and links with adults. Sports were associated with experiences related to identity work and emotional development.



Larson et al. (2006) also used the YES to examine the developmental experiences of a more diverse sample of adolescents. A sample of 2280 (51% female, 49% male) 11<sup>th</sup> grade students from 19 diverse high schools responded to a computerised version of the YES 2.0. The selection of 19 schools from Illinois was selected to obtain representation across economic strata, urban and rural communities, and ethnicities (from the United States). In addition to describing the developmental experiences associated with a variety of organised youth activities, Larson and colleagues described differences in activities. Results revealed that youth in faith based activities reported higher rates of experiences related to identity, emotional regulation, and interpersonal development in comparison to other organised activities. Sports and arts programmes stood out as providing more experiences related to the development of initiative. Sport was also related to high levels of stress. Service activities were associated with experiences related to the development of teamwork, positive relationships, and social capital. Finally, all organised activities were associated with higher rates of developmental experiences when compared to academic class work.

The results of the YES studies provide initial support that organised activities can be useful contexts for positive youth development. However, the self-report nature of the YES means the accuracy of findings are based on the abilities of youth to accurately report on their experiences and as such should be interpreted with caution. Results also represent a relatively specialised sample from North America, which may not be generalisable to other adolescents. Similarly, each organised activity has been taken as a homogenous experience. It is feasible that contextual differences within activities produce positive effects that may not be true across activities (e.g., the qualities of adults leading the activity). As a consequence Larson



et al. (2006) suggested more in-depth qualitative research is needed that examines the processes responsible for the differences within and across organised activities. More specifically, research is needed with adolescents from a variety of cultures to see whether the developmental experiences are valued across cultures or whether they are specific to North American organised activities and North American youth.

In closing, the 40 developmental assets, the 5Cs, and the domains of developmental experience provide models of positive development providing practitioners and policy makers' guidelines of what to strive for. However, they all use North American research participants and may not represent the experiences and needs of adolescents from different cultures and backgrounds. Future research should address this problem by conducting research with adolescents from cultures outside the United States to broaden understanding of positive youth development so that research is accessible to young people from outside the United States.

The existing models of positive youth development are also potentially limited because they do not offer guidelines of how to achieve these outcomes. The following section aims to highlight the existing research on how to achieve positive youth development through organised activities.

### *Features of effective positive youth development programmes*

Positive youth development theories and models have been used to inform applied positive youth development interventions. Several authors have also described what they view as the features of effective positive youth development programmes. For example, Lerner (2004) described the "Big Three" features of optimal youth development programmes. Lerner (2004) suggested that youth programmes are most likely to promote the 5Cs when they involve a) possibilities for sustained adult-youth relationships, b) youth skill-building activities, and c)



opportunities for youth participation in leadership of community-based activities.

Catalano et al. (1998) found that the majority (about 75%) of effective positive youth development programmes focus on the “Big Three” features of effective positive youth development programmes.

Catalano et al. (1998) classified positive youth development programmes as any youth based programme that promoted bonding, resilience, competence, self-determination, spirituality, self-efficacy, clear and positive identity, belief in the future, provided recognition for positive behaviour and opportunities for prosocial involvement, and prosocial norms. Based on this definition they examined the design and outcomes of youth programmes in a variety of contexts (e.g., school, family, and community). Both published and unpublished programmes were included, provided they met the following criteria:

- Involve youth between the ages of 6 and 20 years.
- Involve youth not selected because of their need for treatment. Only programmes for children in the general population or children at risk were included. Delinquency, drug-abuse, and mental-health treatment programmes were excluded.
- Address at least one youth development construct in multiple socialisation domains, address multiple youth development constructs in a single socialisation domain, or address multiple youth development constructs in multiple domains.

In addition to these programme criteria, the programme’s evaluation also had to meet the following criteria to be included in this review.

- Adequate study design and outcome measures
- Adequate description of the research methodologies



- Description of the population served
- Description of the intervention
- Description of implementation
- Effects demonstrated on behavioural outcomes

A total of 161 programmes were identified as potentially within the scope of the review. Of these positive youth development programmes, 77 had evaluations that appeared to meet the initial criteria for the analysis. The remaining 84 programmes were not included for one of the following reasons: no evaluation existed; the evaluation contained no data beyond a narrative case study; the study sample was an indicated population (symptomatic or in treatment); or adequate evaluation information could not be retrieved.

Of the 77 programmes eight had to be removed from the review because they were sufficiently limited by missing information. Thirty-nine programmes did not have adequate evaluations and five did not have positive effects on behavioural outcomes. The remaining 25 programmes incorporated positive youth development constructs into universal or selective approaches, had strong evaluation designs (experimental or quasi-experimental with viable comparison groups), had an acceptable standard of statistical proof, provided adequate methodological detail to allow an independent assessment of the study's soundness, and produced evidence of significant effects on behavioural outcomes.

The most effective programmes addressed a wide range of positive youth development objectives rather than concentrating on just one area. Similarly, the best programmes were rigourously evaluated, made assessments of positive and problem outcomes, had a structured curriculum, lasted for a minimum of nine months, and had high implementation fidelity.



Catalano et al. (1998) disregarded programmes that did not include evidence of significant effects on behavioural outcomes, which may have produced a biased selection of positive youth development programmes. The 5Cs, the developmental assets, and the developmental experiences all include outcomes that would not be classified as behavioural outcomes. For example, outcomes may be attitudinal, physical, cognitive, and behavioural and as such a variety of outcomes should be assessed to understand whether programmes are effective. As with previous research from North America cultural nuances may also limit the generalisability of this review.

The characteristics of effective positive youth development programmes identified by Catalano et al. (1998) are similar to those identified by Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2003). They noted that effective programmes transcend an exclusive focus on the prevention of risky behaviours to include attempts to instil behaviours that emphasise youth competencies and abilities (e.g., life skills) through increasing exposure to supportive and empowering environments where activities create opportunities for skill-building and horizon-broadening experiences. In addition, Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2003) indicated that effective positive youth development programmes offer opportunities for youth to nurture their interests and talents, practice new skills, and gain a sense of personal and group recognition.

Finally, the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (NRCIM, 2002) outlined four main areas of youth development: physical, intellectual, psychological/emotional, and social. For each developmental area, several developmental assets are suggested. For example, good eating and physical activity habits are assets that facilitate positive physical development. Knowledge of interpersonal skills, vocational skills, and decision-making skills contribute to



positive intellectual development. Mental health, positive self-regard, coping skills, mastery motivation, and conflict resolution skills characterise positive psychological and emotional development. Assets contributing to positive social development include connectedness with parents, peers, and other adults, a sense of social place, and an attachment to society. In addition to the developmental assets the NRCIM (2002) also outlined eight features of settings that are most likely to foster these developmental assets (see Table 1).

Features of positive development settings
1. Physical and psychological safety
2. Appropriate structure
3. Supportive relationships
4. Opportunities to belong
5. Positive social norms
6. Support for efficacy and mattering
7. Opportunities for skill building
8. Integration of family, school, and community efforts

Table 1: Features of positive youth development settings (Adapted from NRCIM, 2002)

*Introducing sport as a context for positive youth development*

In addition to the burgeoning positive youth development research in developmental psychology and developmental science there is a growing body of research that focuses specifically on sport as a context for improving life skills. Alongside the broad participation in sport there is a belief that sport builds character and what is learnt on the field can be transferred to the classroom and the boardroom (Danish, Petitpas, & Hale, 1990). The emergence of the modern Olympic movement championed participation in sport as a vehicle to strengthen character. Pierre Barron de Coubertin, the founder of the modern Olympics, developed Olympism, the



philosophy of the Olympic movement. This philosophy focuses on the lifelong values of participation in sport and cooperation obtainable by everyone.

Additionally, sport is seen as a formative and developmental influence contributing to desirable personal and social qualities (Parry, 1998). The philosophy is recorded in the Olympic Charter. The Olympic Charter (2004) states:

Olympism is a philosophy of life, exalting and combining in a balanced whole the qualities of body, will, and mind. Blending sport with culture and education, Olympism seeks to create a way of life based on the joy of effort, the educational value of good example and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles.

(Fundamental principle 2, p. 10)

The link between participation in sport and positive character, moral, educational, and physical development also has a rich history in scholarly research. For example, a paper by McCloy in the first volume of *Research Quarterly* demonstrated one of the first attempts to outline a process of seeking specific character developments through well-planned activities (i.e., through physical education). Even though this paper is 75 years old many of the points are still relevant today (Weiss & Gill, 2005).

Despite this historical legacy of character research, positive youth development through sport is still seen as an emerging field of research (Petitpas, Cornelius, Van Raalte, & Jones, 2005) as such challenges exist. First, much of the literature represents theorising on the part of authors or reports of professional practice efforts. Empirical research is lacking (especially from the United Kingdom). Second, little of the work in the area has been guided by theoretical frameworks.



There is a substantial body of research that has associated sport with several positive outcomes. For example, participation in sport is associated with academic achievement (Eccles, Barber, Stone & Hunt, 2003; Marsh & Kleitman, 2003), reduced use of illegal drugs (Barnes, Hoffman, Welte, & Farrell, 2006; Kulig, Brener, & McManus, 2003), reduced cigarette smoking (Barnes et al., 2006) engagement in fewer risky sexual behaviours (Jacobs, Lehman, Silverberg-Koerner, 2004; Miller, Barnes, Melnick, Sabo, & Farrell, 2002), emotional regulation (Hansen, Larson, & Dworkin, 2003), increased ego strength (Markstrom, Li, Blackshire, & Wilfong, 2005), reduced social isolation (Eccles & Barber, 1999), increased well-being (Rose-Krasnor, Busseri, Willoughby, & Chalmers, 2006), and initiative (Larson et al., 2006).

It is worth noting that outcomes may not all be positives. There is a similar volume of research that rejects the value of sport. Alongside the positive outcomes there are several negative aspects associated with participation in sport. Negatives associated with sport included increased frequency of violence for girls participating in team sports (Linville & Huebner, 2007), increased delinquency in those with a “jock” identity (Miller, Melnick, Barnes, Sabo, & Farrell, 2007), increased stress and social exclusion (Larson et al., 2006), and increased alcohol consumption (Eccles et al., 2003). These outcomes may represent potential negative developmental trajectories (Lerner, 2005) but may not be true for all people in sport.

The argument that sport cannot be used to promote positive outcomes was typified by Ogilvie and Tutko (1971). Ogilvie and Tutko stated, “We found no empirical support for the tradition that sport builds character. Indeed there is evidence that athletic competition limits growth in some areas” (p. 61). They suggested that positive outcomes in sport are attributed to sportspeople who are



already mentally fit, resilient, and strong in character choose sport as a context to practice their “skills”. Petitpas et al. (2005) made a similar statement. Specifically, they suggested current trends are limited because they fail to take into account that sports people already have these “skills”. This does not mean that these young people in sport cannot still better themselves. Positive youth development is about building on strengths and therefore research is needed that investigates whether these people who already have strong life skills can be improved. Regardless of whether young people have life skills before they start playing sport they should still be given the opportunity to improve themselves. Several sports based programmes have been developed to promote positive development; these programmes are reviewed in the following section.

#### *Organised sport programmes*

Organised activities offer opportunities for improving life skills if they are voluntary and require youth to be intrinsically motivated, they require attention and elements of challenge, and they require effort over time (Larson, 2000). Sport is a particularly salient context for positive youth development because it requires attention and effort over time and is voluntary, whereas other potential contexts, such as school, religious service, and the community, are not always voluntary or may not require attention over time (Larson, 2000).

Petitpas et al. (2005) proposed a framework for youth psychosocial development through sport. The framework is organised into four key areas context, external assets, internal assets, and evaluation. The context in which youth sport programmes exist should be engaging so youth participate because they want to as opposed to because they have to. Young people should be given the opportunity to experiment with new roles and experience the excitement of learning new skills in



physically and psychologically safe environments. Finally, young people should be given the opportunity to challenge themselves to maximise their capabilities.

External assets include caring adults and a positive group or community. These external assets do not focus on reducing problems but on supporting and promoting success. These people provide opportunities to gain confidence in abilities and to use those abilities in non-sport domains (i.e., facilitate transferability). Internal assets include life skills and values that are taught in a systematic manner that also include strategies for transferability. As previously mentioned, Benson (1997) suggested the more assets individuals have the less likely they are to engage in negative and risky behaviour. Furthermore, internal assets play a role in enhancement. Individuals with more assets are more likely to thrive and be more successful in school, demonstrate leadership and altruism, show care and concern for others, and display optimism regarding their future and success.

Petitpas et al. (2005) concluded that there is a dearth of evaluation of sport based programmes research despite the fact that it is an integral part of programme development. Future programmes need well-designed evaluations that assess outcome goals (e.g., acquisition of internal assets and external assets) and implementation to document the efficacy of sport as a context for positive youth development (Petitpas et al., 2005).

Fraser-Thomas, Côté, and Deakin (2005) presented a similar model of sport programming for positive youth development. Their model incorporated talent development research (e.g., Côté, 1999; Côté & Hay, 2002) into a larger framework of positive youth development. Their model suggests successful positive youth development programmes consider youth's intellectual, physical, psychological, and social stages of development. Programmes should be conducted in appropriate



settings and they should foster developmental assets. Furthermore, Fraser-Thomas et al. highlighted the importance of policy makers and sports organisations. They suggested sports organisations need to ensure accessibility of youth sport programmes to all youth and ensure programmes are designed to improve youth holistically rather than simply producing better skilled individuals. Finally, they proposed that it is the responsibility of policy makers and organisations to provide coaches and parents with opportunities to learn and teach internal assets through training, education, and experience so that they can be used as a resource (i.e., external assets). In sum, they promote a multi-agent approach in supporting positive youth development through sport.

Despite these guidelines there are very few programmes that do what Petitpas et al. (2005) and Fraser-Thomas et al. (2005) suggest. Specifically, few programmes build evaluation strategies into the programme design. As such, research is needed that evaluates outcomes and implementation.

### *Improving life skills*

From an overall snap shot (PsychInfo Database search, July, 2007) it is interesting to note that published literature on life skills has increased over the last 25 years with few articles being published in this area before 1980 (Figure 2). Similarly, investigating improvements in life skills through sport participation have seen a substantial growth with only one article published prior to 1990 (Figure 3). However, the paucity of research exploring the improvement of life skills through sport research demonstrates that this is an under served area and there is a potential to broaden our understanding of how sport can be used as a vehicle to improve the life skills of people playing sport.



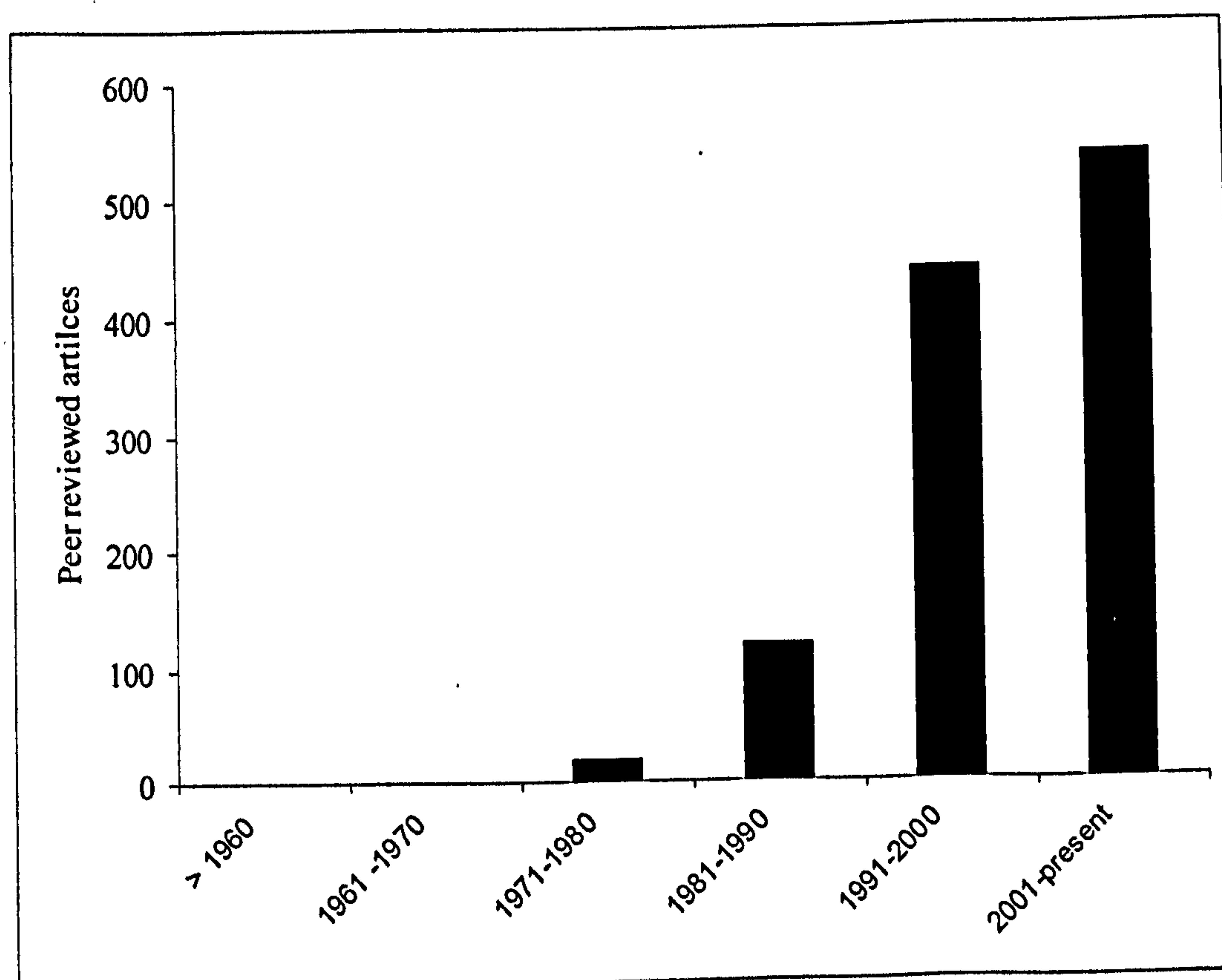


Figure 2: Psychinfo keyword search (Keywords: Life skill\*)

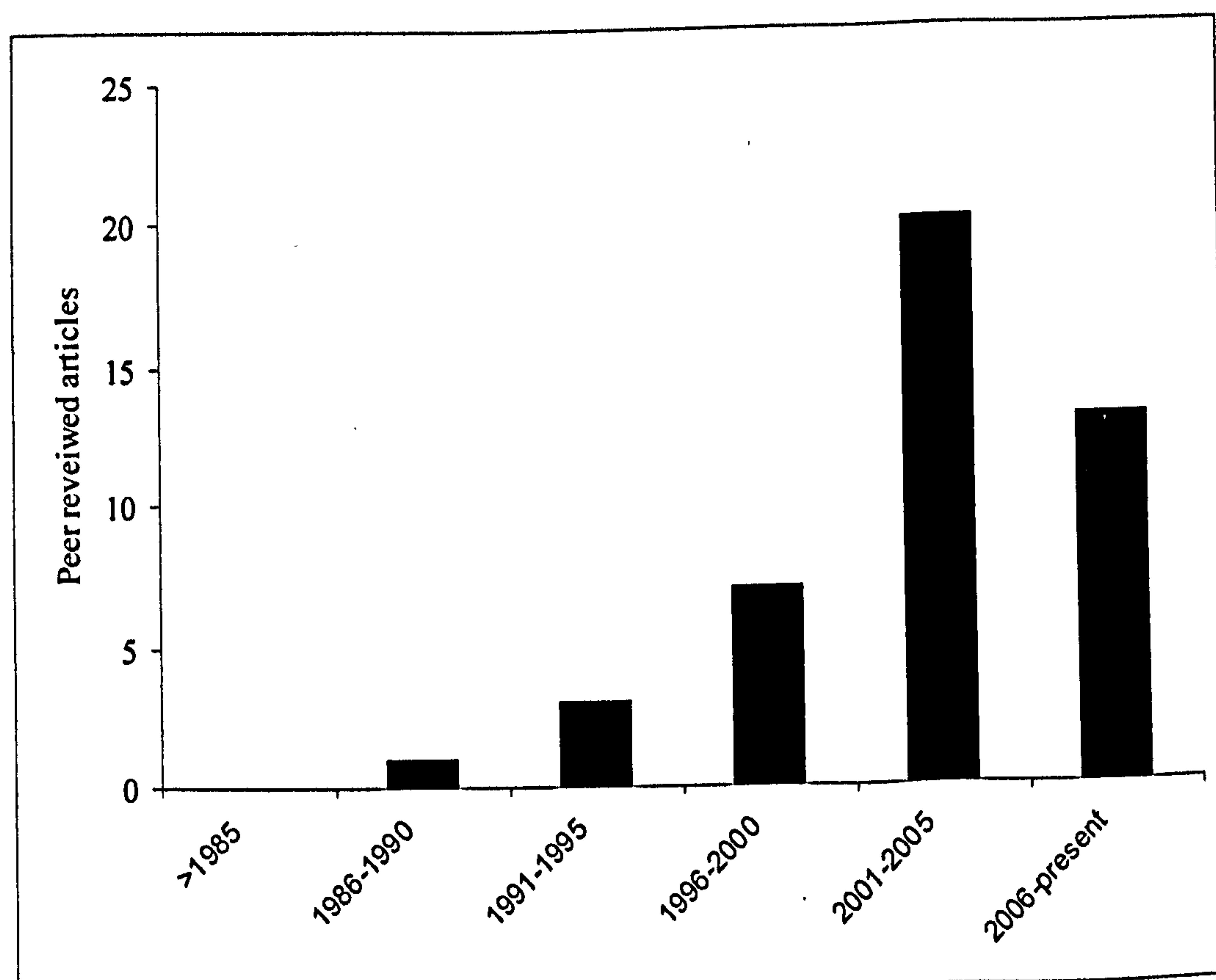


Figure 3: Psychinfo keyword search (Keywords: Life skill\* and sport)



### *Taught or caught?*

A common phrase seen in several articles related to the development of life skills suggests that life skills are taught not caught (e.g., Danish, Petitpas, & Hale 1993; Gould, Collins, Lauer, & Chung, 2005). Whether life skills are taught or caught is a fundamental question because it relates to how interventions are designed in order to improve life skills. If life skills have to be systematically taught to young people life skills interventions need to be developed that teach skills in a systematic manner. Equally if life skills can be caught then alternative methods need to be developed. An additional question may be what does it mean to teach and catch life skills? The traditional view of teaching life skills (e.g., Danish and Nellen, 1997) eschews the belief that young people will learn skills by simply being in the sporting environment and has therefore led to the development of life skills programmes that systematically teach life skills.

The belief that life skills have to be taught and cannot be caught stems from the belief that life skills are learnt in the same way as physical skills; skills are learnt through modelling and repetition (Danish & Nellen, 1997). This approach is essentially an adult led approach to youth development that allows an adult to impart knowledge to the young people participating in the programme (Larson & Walker, 2006). Dworkin, Larson, and Hansen (2003) stated that adolescents see themselves as agents of their own development and therefore should be given the opportunity to develop themselves. Youth driven approaches to positive youth development (i.e., allowing young people to learn through experience) are based on the premise that young people in adult driven situations are in a passive, dependant role and do not have ownership of learning, which can reduce motivation (Larson & Walker, 2005).



Simply following leader instructions may compromise reflection, creativity, and independent decision-making skills of young people participating in the activity.

Walker and Larson (in press) suggested youth driven approaches might be beneficial because they empower young people to become agents of their own development and engage them in the process of discovery. In this respect it could be argued that life skills are not systematically taught, rather young people are learning by doing, discovering by trial and error, and essentially catching the skills by simply being in an environment that places them in a state of dissonance. This state of dissonance is believed to facilitate the learning of life skills because young people strive to return to equilibrium (Lerner, 2006). Specifically, when placed out of one's comfort zone a young person will strive to regain normality by learning and improving their skills to bring them back to a normal state of comfort (Walker & Larson, in press).

Adults may better serve young people by structuring sport experiences so that young people have opportunities for experimentation and self-reflection. This does not mean young people are left unsupervised. Adult leaders provide scaffolding for learning in multiple ways. For example, adults structure practice, provide motivational support, offer encouragement, provide challenge, and steer young people away from potentially frustrating situations (Larson & Walker, 2005). Larson, Walker, and Pearce (2005) postulated that balancing techniques from adult led and youth led perspectives helps young people develop. By using a balance of adult supervision and experiential learning young people can be kept "on track" while maintaining investment and motivation in the activity (Larson et al., 2005).

The two perspectives that have taken precedence in the sport psychology literature are the Life Development Intervention (teaching life skills) and a coach



education approach (structuring sport to catch skills). Both approaches are reviewed in the following section.

### *Life Development Intervention*

Research focusing on the strategies and interventions to develop life skills in sport participants is in its relative infancy. The Life Development Intervention (LDI) was one of the first examples of research to understand how sport could be used to develop life skills and to provide strategies to develop life skills. This approach is grounded in the counselling approach to sport psychology (i.e., It is concerned with non sport related areas of coping and growth in addition to performance concerns) (Danish, Petitpas, & Hale, 1993; Poczwadowski, Sherman & Ravizza, 2004). The LDI embraces sports participants holistically and developmentally by focusing upon dissatisfaction or ambition, goal setting, and skill teaching rather than on diagnosis, therapy, and cure (Danish et al., 1993). In sport, the focus is on ambition or dissatisfaction not mental illness. Moreover, sports participants are generally goal oriented and expect to learn new skills (technical, tactical, physical, and psychological) to achieve their goals.

The purpose of the LDI is to prepare people to cope with critical life events (and non events) for example, adjusting to the transitions of adolescence, coping with injuries, coping with non-selection, changing jobs, retirement from sport, and retirement from work. This is achieved by enhancing self-efficacy and helping people identify, or develop a range of, coping resources that will lead to effective coping with life events. According to Danish and Nellen (1997) the LDI is appropriate for developing life skills through participation in sport because the LDI approach uses sport as a model for promoting personal growth. Although they are assuming that there is something valuable in sport it is important to acknowledge



that they recognised the fact that sport by itself does not enhance personal growth. The LDI suggests some mediating variable is needed (e.g., specially designed life skills programmes). Furthermore, the LDI approach assumes that life skills learnt from sport participation are transferable to other domains of life and as such it caters for the holistic development of the person rather than just the athletic development of sport performer.

According to Danish et al. (1993) sport provides a context in which many of these skills can be developed. Danish and colleagues provided the following examples of life skills that are valuable across life domains:

Life skills
To perform under pressure
To be organised
To meet challenges
To communicate with others
To handle both success and failure
To accept others values and beliefs
To be flexible in order to succeed
To be patient
To take risks
To make a commitment and stick to it
To know how to win and lose
To work with people you do not necessarily like
To respect others
To have self-control
To push yourself to the limit



- 
- To recognise your limitations
  - To compete without hatred
  - To accept responsibility for your behaviour
  - To be dedicated
  - To accept criticism and feedback in order to learn
  - To evaluate yourself
  - To make good decisions
  - To set and attain goals
  - To be able to learn
  - To work within a system
  - To be self-motivated
- 

Table 2: Examples of life skills that are valuable across setting (adapted from Danish et al., 1993, p. 369)

Although Danish et al. (1993) acknowledged that the transfer of life skills developed through participation in sport is not automatic they do suggest several variables that can encourage transfer, including:

- A belief that the skills are valued in other domains
- An awareness of current physical and psychological skills
- A knowledge of how skills were learnt
- A knowledge of the context in which skills were learnt
- Confidence to use the skills in different domains
- A willingness to explore non sport roles
- The desire and ability to seek out sources of social support
- The ability to adjust to initial setbacks or failures



Furthermore, for programmes based on the LDI approach to be successful Danish et al. (1993) stated that they must be sensitive to developmental, environmental, and individual differences. Specifically, individuals from the same environment may differ as a result of their previous experiences as much as people may differ because of the environments from which they come.

*LDI strategies and techniques.* In addition to the theoretical background of the LDI Danish et al. (1993) provided strategies and techniques to teach life skills to cope with future critical life events. Generally LDI strategies can be categorised into three types of strategies: enhancement strategies, supportive strategies, and counselling strategies. According to Danish, Petitpas, and Hale (1995) the type of intervention used by a practitioner must be related to the timing of the intervention in relation to the life event (Figure 4).

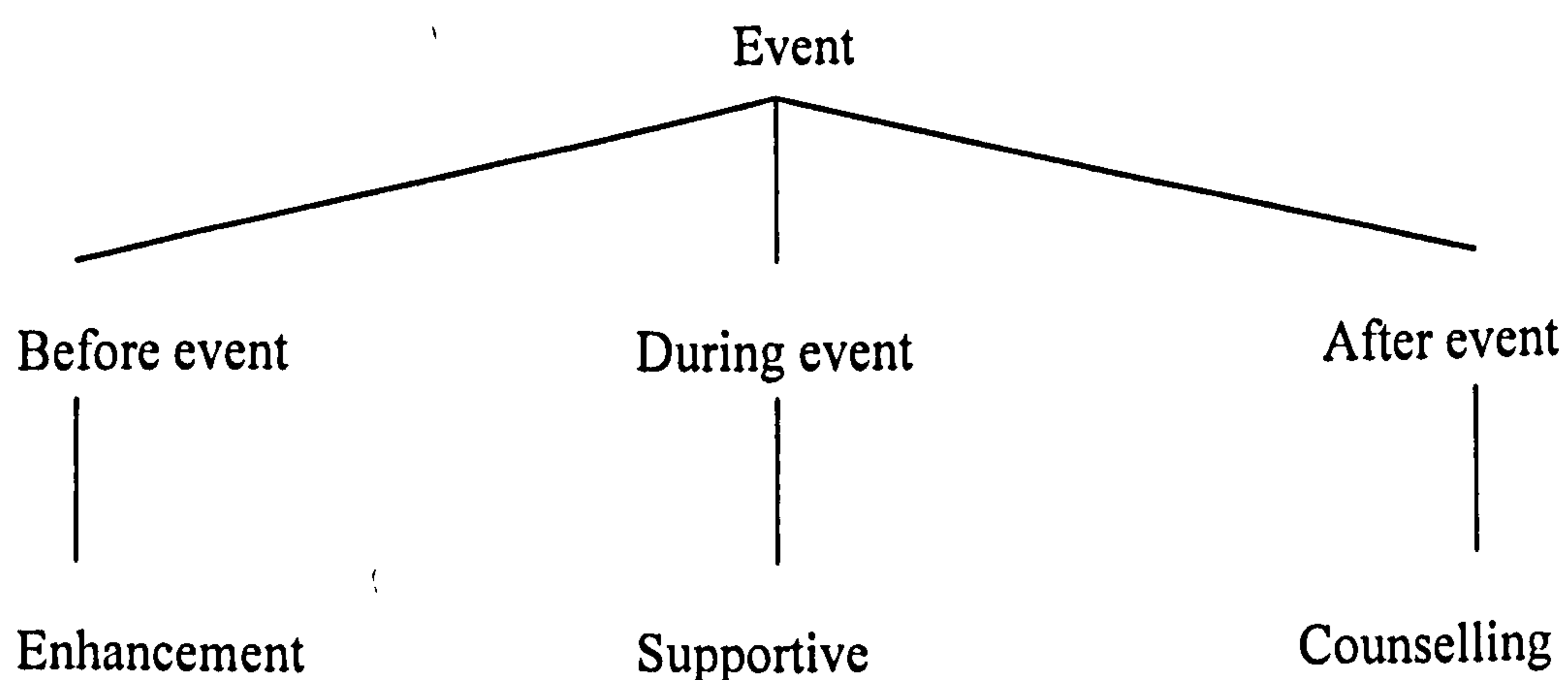


Figure 4: The type of intervention strategies used in relation to the timing of the critical life event (adapted from Danish et al., 1995. p 26).

Enhancement strategies prepare athletes for future events by helping them anticipate normative events, assisting them to recognise how skills acquired in one domain can be transferred into other life domains, and teaching skills that enhance the ability to cope with future events (Danish et al., 1993). Interventions that occur during an event are called supportive strategies. Examples of supportive strategies



may include utilising social support networks to lessen the impact of life stress. This may include friends and family but may also extend to coaches and other prominent members within the sporting context. The final category of intervention strategy is counselling strategies. These strategies assist athletes in coping with difficulties confronting the impact of a life event after the event has occurred. Danish and colleagues suggested that counselling strategies are designed to be more educational than remedial. The primary goal of counselling strategies is to enable individuals to grow through a critical life event by assisting individuals in identifying and developing resources to more effectively cope with critical life events.

As a whole, the three categories of LDI are designed to enhance personal competence in dealing with a number of life events that may, or may not, involve participation in sport (Danish et al., 1995). In theory, if an individual is taught effective enhancement strategies they will have the resources to cope with critical life events provided adequate supportive strategies are present during the critical life event. As such, many LDI programmes take an enhancement strategy approach to developing life skills. Supportive strategies are then used to ensure transfer of skills between life domains (Danish et al., 1993).

*GOAL.* A prominent example of an LDI enhancement strategy is the Going for the Goal programme (GOAL). Since the initiation of the GOAL programme in 1987, it has received more than \$5 million in grant funding from various agencies. In 1992, the programme began national dissemination (throughout the United States) and by the end of 1996 almost 20,000 students had been taught life skills through the GOAL Programme (Danish & Nellen, 1997). Although the GOAL programme was not originally intended to be a programme to develop life skills in sport it provided the



basis for specific sports related life skills programmes including the Sports United to Promote Education and Recreation (SUPER).

The GOAL programme is a 10-hour, 10-session programme (see Table 3) taught by carefully selected high school students, designed to teach middle school or junior high school students, in North America, a sense of personal control and confidence about their future. Older high school students are selected as the most appropriate leaders because they provide strong role models of what younger students can become. Additionally, these students have grown up in the same neighbourhoods, attended the same schools, and confronted and overcome similar obstacles and as such these older students are in the perfect position to be effective teachers providing they are taught properly in how to teach the workshops and receive on site supervision.

The original purpose of the GOAL programme was to develop participant's potential and competence as a means of avoiding risky behaviours such as drug use, alcoholism, violence, and dropping out of school. This was founded on a belief that to be successful in life it is not enough to know what to avoid; people must also know how to succeed. By emphasising these skills participants are believed to increase their sense of control, personal competence, and will ultimately make better decisions and will become better citizens. Although the claim of improved citizenship is difficult to evaluate because of its subjectivity, the other potential outcomes of the GOAL programme suggest that GOAL appears to be a viable approach to teach life skills.



Workshop	Workshop Theme
Workshop 1	<u>Dare to Dream:</u> Introduces the GOAL programme. The group discusses the importance of dreams and learns to dream about the future.
Workshop 2	<u>Setting Goals:</u> Presents the four characteristics of a reachable goal (positive, specific, important to you, and under control). Group members learn that dreams can be turned into goals.
Workshop 3	<u>Making your Goals Reachable:</u> Enables participants to apply the characteristics of a reachable goal to their goal. This goal is something that must be accomplished by the 10 <sup>th</sup> session.
Workshop 4	<u>Making a Goal Ladder:</u> Focuses on the importance of making a plan to reach the goal. Participants place their future goals at the top of the goal ladder and then identify the steps that need to be taken to reach their goal.
Workshop 5	<u>Roadblocks to Reaching Goals:</u> Considers how various roadblocks such as drug use can prevent group members from reaching their goals.
Workshop 6	<u>Overcoming Roadblocks:</u> Presents a problem solving strategy called STAR (Stop and take a deep breath; think of all your choices; anticipate the consequences of each choice; Respond with the best choice).
Workshop 7	<u>Seeking Help from Others:</u> Presents the importance of seeking social support to help achieve goals.
Workshop 8	<u>Rebounds and Rewards:</u> Uses the goal ladders to discuss



how to reward oneself for accomplishing a step on the goal ladder as well as how to rebound when goals are too difficult.

Workshop 9                    Identifying and Building on Your Strengths: Enables participants to identify and build on personal strengths.

Workshop 10                Going for Your Goals: Involves a game and a poem that gives the group a chance to integrate and apply the information covered in the nine other workshops.

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Table 3: Summary of GOAL workshops (Adapted from Danish 2002 p. 10)

Given the popularity, the amount of research grants, and the fact that the GOAL programme is over 15 years old, there have been surprisingly few published systematic evaluations of the programme. The majority of research in this area either looks at adapted versions and derivatives of the GOAL programme (e.g., Heke, 2001) or are unpublished. Danish and Nellen (1997) suggested that the major findings of unpublished research (Meyer, Burgess, & Danish, 1996; Meyer & Danish, 1996: cited Danish & Nellen 1997) conducted on the GOAL programme were:

- Participants learnt the information that GOAL teaches
- Participants were able to achieve the goals they set
- Participants found the process easier then they expected, and they thought they had learnt quite a bit about how to set goals
- Participants had better school attendance (as compared with a control group)



- Male participants did not report the same increases in health compromising behaviours such as alcohol and drug abuse, smoking, and violence as was found in the control group who reported increases in these behaviours
- Participants thought the GOAL programme was fun, useful important, and something that would be helpful for their friends

In addition to these unpublished findings O'Hearn and Gatz (1999; 2002) conducted two studies using the GOAL programme with mostly Hispanic students in the United States. In the first study (O'Hearn & Gatz, 1999) participating students increased their knowledge of goal setting compared to a control group. Furthermore, the participants were able to attain the goals they set. The second study, (O'Hearn & Gatz, 2002) found that participants also improved their problem solving skills.

Although these outcomes appear to be encouraging, it should be noted that the GOAL programme was developed for North American youth and as such the majority of GOAL research has been conducted with young North American participants. There is little evidence to suggest the original GOAL programme would work in countries outside the USA. There is a need to test the assumptions and effectiveness of the GOAL programme across cultures and societies, specifically with British participants and to then adapt GOAL in accordance with the findings.

The GOAL programme is heavily focused upon goal setting and does not provide participants with an opportunity to learn a range of other life skills. Specifically, of the ten GOAL workshops, seven are associated with goal setting, (See Table 3: Workshops 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, & 10). In addition to the reliance of goal setting, the GOAL programme does not integrate sport skills into life skills education. Rather, GOAL attempts to use terms and sport specific metaphors that may reflect sport events, such as goalkeeper (Danish, 2002). Furthermore, the



majority of the “skits” used to set the scene for each workshop do not reflect any connection with sport participation. As a result, additional programmes were developed that integrated the theoretical foundations of the LDI with aspects of sport practice and performance to become viable sport based life skill programmes. Interestingly, the GOAL programme was not included in Catalano’s review of effective positive youth development programme, which would suggest (according to their criteria of effectiveness) it is not an effective positive youth development programme.

*SUPER*. A derivative of GOAL, that is a sport based life skills programme based upon the LDI, is the Sport United to Promote Education and Recreation programme (SUPER: Danish, Fazio, Nellen, & Owens, 2002). SUPER was the product of the series of pilot sports-based life skills programmes developed by Danish and colleagues at the life skills centre at Virginia Commonwealth University that links sports and life skills. SUPER is taught as a series of 18 sports clinics (see Table 4) with participants involved in three sets of activities, learning the physical skills related to a specific sport, learning life skills related to sports in general, and playing the sport. One of the differences between the GOAL and SUPER programmes is how knowledge is imparted. In the SUPER programme skill modules are adapted to fit the specific sport and time. Additionally, most skills require between 20 to 30 minutes to teach and require much less reading and writing and are more action-oriented and related to sport.



Workshop	Workshop Theme
1	<p><u>Developing a Team</u> – The programme and the peer leaders are introduced. Participants engage in several team-building activities designed to enhance communication and understand each others' strengths and weaknesses.</p>
2	<p><u>Dare to Dream</u> – Participants learn about and discuss the importance of having dreams for the future. They then identify career/school and sport dreams they have for 10 years in the future. The peer leaders share some of their dreams.</p>
3	<p><u>Setting Goals (Part 1)</u> - Participants learn the difference between dreams and goals and how to turn a dream into a goal. They identify people who support them in achieving their goals (Goal Keepers) and people who may prevent them from achieving their goals (Goal Busters).</p>
4	<p><u>Setting Goals (Part 2)</u> – Participants learn the four characteristics of a reachable goal (positively stated, specific, important to the goal setter and under the goal setter's control). They practice distinguishing goals that are important to the goal setter and goals that are positively stated.</p>
5	<p><u>Setting Goals (Part 3)</u> - Participants practice distinguishing goals that are specific from ones that are not specific and goals that are under their control from those that are not.</p>
6	<p><u>Making Your Goal Reachable</u> – Participants apply the four characteristics of a reachable goal to their own goals. They set two six-week goals; one for sport and a personal goal.</p>
7	<p><u>Making a Goal Ladder</u> – Participants learn the importance of developing plans to reach goals (called a Goal Ladder) and make plans</p>



to reach the two goals they have set. Making a ladder involves placing the goal at the top of the ladder and identifying six steps to reach their goal.

- Workshop Identifying and Overcoming Roadblocks to Reaching Goals Participants  
8 learn how different roadblocks (e.g., using drugs, getting into fights, and lack of confidence) can prevent them from reaching their goals. They identify possible roadblocks and learn and practice a problem solving strategy called STAR to help them overcome the roadblocks.
- Workshop Seeking Help From Others - Participants learn the importance of  
9 seeking social support when working on goals. They identify people in their lives, a Dream Team, who can provide doing and/or caring help to assist them in achieving their goals.
- Workshop Using Positive Self-Talk- Participants learn the importance of  
10 identifying their self-talk, how to distinguish positive from negative self-talk, and how to identify key positive self-talk statements related to their goals. They then practice making positive self-talk statements.
- Workshop Learning to Relax - Participants learn the importance of relaxation to  
11 reduce tension and how to focus and breathe as a means to help them relax.
- Workshop Managing Emotions - Participants learn that managing their emotions,  
12 both in sport and life, is learning to be smart. They learn and practice a procedure, the four R's (Replay, Relax, Redo, Ready), to help them play smart both inside and outside sport.
- Workshop Developing a Healthy Lifestyle – Participants develop an understanding  
13 of the importance of being healthy in all areas of their lives. They also



learn how to make changes to ensure they are living a healthy lifestyle and are asked to make a commitment to such a lifestyle.

Workshop 14     Appreciating Differences - Participants identify differences among individuals in the group and determine which ones are important and which ones are insignificant in reaching goals.

Workshop 15     Having Confidence and Courage - Participants understand the importance of believing in themselves and learn how to develop more self-confidence.

Workshop 16     Learning to Focus on Your Personal Performance – Participants learn what it means to compete against oneself and understand that competing against oneself to attain personal excellence can enhance performance.

Workshop 17     Identifying and Building on Your Strengths - Participants identify personal strengths and learn how to use the skills associated with these strengths and the skills learnt in the programme in other areas of their lives.

Workshop 18     Goal Setting for Life - Participants learn that goal setting is a lifetime activity and they set two goals to attain over the next three months. One goal is school related; the other relates to home or community. They assess whether the goals meet the four characteristics of a reachable goal and develop a goal ladder for each goal.

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Table 4: Summary of SUPER workshops (Adapted from Danish, Taylor, Hodge & Heke, 2005 p. 26-27)

The SUPER programme was designed to provide each participant with the belief that:

1. There are effective and accessible student athlete role models



2. Physical and mental skills are important for both sport and life
3. It is important to set and attain goals in sport and life
4. Roadblocks to goals can be overcome (Danish & Nellen, 1997; Danish, Nellen, & Owens, 1996).

Successful elements of GOAL were transferred to the SUPER programme. For example, SUPER employed older student-athletes to teach the programme to younger adolescents so that older student-athletes can serve as a positive role model for younger adolescents. To ensure the SUPER leaders can teach the programme effectively they are first taught learn how to teach the GOAL programme. In addition to this grounding in the GOAL programme student-athlete leaders receive between 10 and 20 hours training, including tuition on how to speak in groups, organise a clinic, teach a sport skill and a life skill, be a good listener, transfer skills between different but similar areas, and how to work effectively with teams (Danish 2002).

As with its predecessor, a major limitation of the SUPER programme is the distinct lack of evaluations on the effectiveness of SUPER. Three published evaluations were found however; none of the published studies use the full SUPER programme.

Papacharisis, Goudas, Danish, and Theodorakis (2005) evaluated an abbreviated version of SUPER. Greek schoolchildren, aged between 10 and 12 participated in one of two studies using an eight-session version of SUPER. The first study involved 40 female volleyball players on two teams; the second study involved 32 male soccer players on two different teams. In each study, one team served as the experimental group who were taught the abbreviated version SUPER, and the other as the control group who received no life skills instruction. In both studies measurements of physical skills, knowledge of the SUPER programme, and self-



beliefs about their ability to set goals, to problem solve, and to think positively were taken. Participants taught the SUPER programme showed improvements between pre and post-test in physical skills and programme knowledge compared to the control group.

In a subsequent study Goudas, Dermitzaki, Leondari, and Danish (2006) examined the effectiveness of teaching life skills as part of physical education lessons. Goudas et al. assigned 73 seventh grade students to either an experimental group or a wait-list control group. The experimental group received life skills instruction focused on setting goals, making plans for achieving goals, and positive thinking. Participants were assessed on physical fitness test (i.e., sit and reach and push-ups), knowledge about life skills, and beliefs about effective use of life skills. Results showed gains and retention on physical fitness, knowledge, and self-beliefs regarding goal setting in comparison to the control group. Goudas et al. concluded that school-based physical education was an effective context for life skills education and the SUPER programme was an effective method for teaching life skills. Moreover, these studies provide initial evidence that the SUPER programme (and therefore the LDI) may be applicable to other cultures outside the United States.

Papacharisis et al. (2005) and Goudas et al. (2006) both used a knowledge test, a self-beliefs test, and a sport skills tests (e.g., basketball dribbling and volleyball skill tests). The knowledge test is a 15-item multiple-choice test that evaluates knowledge of how to set goals, achieve goals, and to think positively. For example, "In order to make a dream come true: a) I should dream more and more, b) I must turn the dream into a goal, c) I must sit and wait for something to happen, d) I don't have to do anything. If I want it, it will happen". The self-beliefs test is a 21-item scale measuring self-beliefs for goal setting, problem solving, and positive thinking.



Six items are used to assess perceptions of goal setting ability (e.g., “I am very good at setting goals for myself”); eight items are used to assess perceptions of positive thinking (e.g., “I am very good at thinking positively for myself”) and eight items are used to assess perceptions of problem solving ability (e.g., “I am very good at finding appropriate solutions for the problems that confront me”). A seven-point scale is used (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). Goudas, Papacharisis, and Karabekou (in press) assessed the validity of these questionnaires by administering the tests plus a social desirability questionnaire to one hundred elementary school students (52 boys and 48 girls), aged 10-12 years. Goudas and colleagues reported satisfactory difficulty and discrimination indices for all the items for both questionnaires. Goudas et al. concluded that the results of their research support the possibility of use of these questionnaires for the evaluation of life skills programmes. However, the possibility of using these measures is dependent on the life skills intervention either being an adapted version of the SUPER or GOAL life skills programmes or being based on goal setting. As such, it could be argued that it cannot be used to evaluate life skills programmes, across ranges of life skills.

Brunelle et al. (2007) reported a similar evaluation of a life skills programme based on the Life Development Intervention. Brunelle and colleagues taught an abbreviated five-session version of SUPER to 100 adolescent golfers at a weeklong national golf academy camp. The life skills component included five, 45-minute long, SUPER sessions integrated with sport skill instruction. After the completion of the training camp participants returned to their home sites and initiated one year of community service. This service involved assisting golf professionals and site leaders in the instruction of a life skills programme based on SUPER. Six months after the camp, 42 study participants had the opportunity to be involved in the



community service portion of the programme. The remaining participants were either unable to complete their community service or failed to return follow-up survey data. Results showed that the scores of social interest, social and personal responsibility, and goal knowledge from participants in the SUPER programme significantly increased from pre to post test. Furthermore, involvement in the community service experience continued to enhance the prosocial values of the participants (Brunelle et al., 2007). These results suggest that while life skill interventions have the potential to increase awareness of prosocial values and begin the process of developing these attitudes, maintained use depends upon having the opportunity to put them into practice (Brunelle et al., 2007).

A major limitation of SUPER is that it is based upon goal setting and largely omits other potential life skills that could be learnt through participation in sport. It is unclear why goal setting was needed as a key life skill. As such, SUPER may not be reflective of the needs of adolescents. Although this is a limitation it does not mean SUPER cannot be used in combination with other programmes. It would be beneficial to develop supplementary life skills programmes that develop other life skills, (e.g., interpersonal skills) which can then be used to facilitate existing programmes. Another limitation of existing GOAL and SUPER research is it has not been applied to older adolescents and adolescents from the United Kingdom. As such, additional research is needed that provides life skills programmes across stages of adolescence and for British adolescents.

### *Coach education approach*

The Coach education approach looks to promote improvements in life skills by teaching coaches how to structure their coaching. The rationale for this approach is based upon the presupposition that by educating coaches, young people will have



positive sport experiences and develop the desirable skills and assets that will help them develop. Bronfenbrenners's (1999) Operational Model of Development provides a theoretical foundation to this approach. The model suggests that for optimal development to take place an individual must participate in activities over an extended period and activities must involve long-term reciprocal relationships with others, such as coaches. Similarly, Peterson (2004) suggested that organised activities, such as sport, have the potential to deliver positive youth development, however the personal characteristics of group leaders (i.e., coaches) are critical for success. Finally, Conroy and Coatsworth (2006) stated that coach education is a cost effective and applicable approach to structuring a developmentally enhanced youth sport environment. Thus, it is important to recognise the influence of the coach when using sport as a context for positive youth development.

An example of how coach education has been used to facilitate the development of life skills is the work of the Positive Coaching Alliance (PCA) in the United States. The PCA believe that the drop out rates in youth sport is attributable to the "win at all costs" ethic. This mentality puts adverse pressure on youth sport participants and consequently puts them off playing. By promoting positive coaching the PCA hope to keep young people involved in organised sport. The PCA attempt to accomplish this by providing training to coaches, parents, and youth sports organisation leaders on how to use the youth sports experience to teach young athletes positive character traits and life lessons.

The PCA employ the Positive Coach Mental Model to transform youth sports so that sports can transform youth. In reality, the Positive Coach Mental Model is a job description of a positive coach. The Positive Coach Model states that positive coaches:



1. **Redefines "winner":** Positive coaches help players redefine what it means to be a winner through a task rather than an ego orientation (i.e., the coach encourages participants to focus on effort rather than outcome and on learning and development rather than comparison to others). Additionally, positive coaches set standards of continuous improvement for himself and his players. Positive coaches teach players that a winner is someone who gives maximum effort, continues to learn and improve, and does not let mistakes (or fear of mistakes) stop them.
2. **Fills players' emotional tanks:** A positive coach is a positive motivator who refuses to motivate through fear, intimidation, or shame. Positive coaches understand that compliments, praise, and positive recognition fill emotional tanks. Positive coaches understand the importance of giving truthful and specific feedback and resist the temptation to give praise that is not warranted. When correction is necessary, positive coaches communicate criticism to players in ways that does not undermine self-worth. Positive coaches always treat athletes with respect, regardless of how well they perform.
3. **Honours the game:** Positive coaches feel an obligation to his/her sport. Positive coaches understand that honouring the game means getting to the ROOTS (rules, opponents, officials, team mates, traditions of the game, self) of the matter.

Although the PCA received substantial media attention and testimonials from many top-level coaches in the United States there is little evidence to suggest that the coaching methods of the PCA actually improve the teaching of life skills to young sport participants. There is no published research to support the claims of the PCA



and the PCA does not operate outside of the United States. Hence, claims must be taken with caution.

Several studies have been conducted that highlight the role of the coach in developing life skills. McCallister, Blinde, and Weiss (2000) interviewed 22 volunteer youth coaches to understand how they developed life skills in their athletes. McCallister et al. regarded the coach to be the most significant individual in instilling outcomes of positive youth development such as fair play, respect for others, cooperation, decision-making, leadership, and moral development because coaches are in positions of authority and influence. Furthermore, coaches' principles and philosophies regarding the value of sport will directly influence the experiences of the children and adolescents in their charge. Results suggested that many of these coaches experienced considerable difficulty regarding how they taught life skills to their players and they assumed that life skills would be an automatic by-product of participation.

Similarly, Gould, Collins, Lauer, and Chung (2005) interviewed a sample of award winning coaches recognised for their achievements in developing good citizens, productive individuals, and successful athletes. The aim of the study was to understand the strategies coaches use to develop life skills in actual sports programmes. Results suggested these coaches did not rely on one strategy or technique; rather they talked about a continual process guided by a philosophical base, trust, and strong coach-player relationships. In addition, these coaches implemented specific strategies and follow-up procedures for helping their players develop. Having a coaching philosophy related to positive youth development was critical. Gould and colleagues suggested a win at all costs philosophy could be detrimental to development whereas a philosophy based on advancing psychosocial



development would best serve young sports people. Having strong relationship skills, such as communication, empathy, and rapport building facilitated a strong coach-athlete relationship and developing coach-athlete relationships is one of the most important elements for developing life skills (Petitpas et al., 2005). Employing specific strategies such as treating players with respect and teambuilding augmented life skills development. Finally, utilising resources and environmental considerations such as parents, peers, and societal norms allowed life skills to be cultivated.

In a subsequent study Gould, Chung, Smith, and White (2006) investigated the needs of high school coaches and their perceived role in developing life skills. Gould et al. surveyed 154 North American high school coaches from seven sports on demographics, coaching objectives, the role of sport in character development, problems in sport today, the role of coaches, and coach influences on athletes. The survey was comprised of 99 items with most items requiring Likert rating responses. Coaches ranked “helping young people develop psychologically and socially” as the most important coaching objective and ranked “having a winning team” as least important. Coaches felt that sport teaches many skills and coaches strongly agreed that teamwork, the value of hard work, time management, and goal setting are developed through sport participation. Interestingly, coaches did not agree that sport could teach fairness, accepting defeat gracefully, and not holding grudges after competitions (i.e., moral character development).

Problems associated with sport today included athletes failing to take personal responsibility, lack of motivation, poor communication skills, problems with parents, and poor grades. Coaches felt they most often took on the role of counsellor and athletic trainer, they felt they were prepared to handle these roles, were most successful in fulfilling them, and they felt they were part of their role as a coach.



Finally, coaches reported that they felt they had considerable influence on the values and behaviours of their athletes and they actually influenced the values and behaviours of their athletes. While these results support the notion that coaching positively influences youth development, it is unknown how coaches learn these skills.

Conroy and Coatsworth (2006) highlighted the area of coach education as an avenue for positive youth development by examining education programmes to teach coaches the skills to promote positive youth development. A review of efficacy trials of Coach Effectiveness Training (CET; Barnett, Smoll, & Smith, 1992; Smith, Smoll & Barnett, 1995; Smith, Smoll, & Curtis, 1979; Smoll & Smith, 1984; Smoll, Smith, Barnett, & Everett, 1993) and the Penn State Coaching Training programme (Coatsworth & Conroy, 2006; Conroy & Coatsworth, 2004) revealed that coach education has the potential to change coach behaviour, particularly increases in reward and reinforcement. Coach education resulted in changes in youths' perceptions of coaches, with CET trained coaches in particular being perceived as offering more reward and reinforcement, mistake contingent encouragement, and general technical instruction. CET trained coaches were more likely to have participants report that they liked their coach more and they believed the coach liked them more. Finally, coach education programmes can enhance youth's self-esteem, reduce youth's anxiety, and is linked to optimal achievement goals in youth sport participants. Conroy and Coatsworth concluded that the evidence base indicates that coach education, with an emphasis on psychosocial education, is an efficacious method for promoting positive youth development through sport.

Holt, Tink, Mandigo, and Fox (2007) described similar structuring by the coach. Holt and colleagues examined whether youth learnt life skills through their



involvement in sport. Interview and observation data were collected over a single season with 12 Canadian high school aged student athletes. Results revealed the high school student athletes felt they learnt skills associated with initiative, respect, teamwork, and leadership through sport. Interestingly the coach did not directly teach athletes these skills. Rather, the coach structured an environment whereby athletes were required to demonstrate these skills. For example, the coach created boundaries and expectations that allowed for the expression of skills. Thus, the student athletes learnt through experience. Participants did not believe respect and initiative were transferred to other life domains. Only teamwork and leadership were transferable. Holt and colleagues concluded that it might be that sport provides a context that teaches specific life skills (e.g., teamwork) rather than a range of skills.

Rutten, Stams, Biesta, Schuengel, Dirks, and Hoeksma (2007) investigated the role of prosocial and antisocial behaviour in adolescent athletes. The sample was made up of 260 male and female soccer players and competitive swimmers between 12 and 18 years of age. Participants were recruited from 25 sports teams in the Amsterdam and Utrecht areas of the Netherlands. The participants completed questionnaires on social desirability, anti- and prosocial behaviour, sociomoral atmosphere of the sporting environment, sociomoral reasoning about sport dilemmas, and coach-athlete relationship quality. Multilevel regression analysis revealed that eight per cent of the variance in antisocial behaviour and seven per cent of the variance in prosocial behaviour could be attributed to characteristics of the sporting environment. Results suggested that coaches who maintain good relationships with their athletes reduce antisocial behaviour, and that exposure to relatively high levels of sociomoral reasoning within the immediate context of sporting activities promotes prosocial behaviour. Results highlight the importance of



the coach in promoting specific life skills. In this study coaches structured an environment that encouraged prosocial behaviour and reduced antisocial behaviour.

Mahoney and Statin (2000) investigated the influence of structure on the antisocial behaviour of Swedish adolescents. It was discovered that when adolescents participated in structured activities (such as sport) they were more likely to engage in more prosocial activities, were more likely to have more friends in after school contexts, and were less likely to engage in anti social behaviour. Peers, parents and youth activity leaders provided structure. Mahoney and Statin suggested that structure of activities was related to skills building experiences that built complexity and challenge, regular participation, rule guided engagement, direction by one or more skilled adults, sustained active attention and clear feedback on performance. Adults did not directly teach young people about prosocial behaviour, rather the structure of the activities encouraged them to “catch” these skills.

In closing, it may be more important to show coaches how to structure the environment rather than how to teach skills directly. By learning how to provide opportunities for young people that places them outside of their comfort zones it may be possible that coaches can help young people catch life skills. Both approaches do not provide specific process of how life skills are improved. Therefore, more research is needed that investigates exactly how life skills are improved.

### *Summary and research aims*

The aim of this thesis is to develop an intervention to improve the life skills of British adolescent competitive sport participants, who are in full time education. In order to accomplish this task this review started by examining adolescence from two research perspectives: a deficit perspective and a positive perspective. The positive perspective suggests adolescence is a period of potential and growth. From a positive



perspective of adolescence young people participating in competitive sport would still need life skills training to allow them to improve upon their existing strengths. Sport is described as a good context for positive youth development because it is structured, it requires attention and effort over time, and is voluntary. Despite these claims there is a dearth of research that has examined how sport can be used to improve life skills.

The review described the features of effective programme design. Two perspectives were reviewed. Firstly the research from developmental science, which looked at positive youth development programmes across life domains (e.g., schools, faith based activity, service activities, community). Effective programmes across domains had similar features. Specifically, they involved possibilities for sustained adult-youth relationships, youth skill-building activities, and opportunities for youth participation in leadership of community-based activities. Furthermore, effective programmes included procedural information, and had high procedural fidelity. Programmes were also accompanied by well-designed and implemented evaluation strategies. Within the sporting context two frameworks for positive youth development programmes were reviewed (e.g., Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005; Petitpas et al., 2005). Both models highlight the need for well-designed programmes, based on theory, that are well evaluated. To date life skills interventions in sport have not been well evaluated. It was made clear that programmes based on the Life Development Intervention have received very little attention (only three published evaluations of SUPER were found). Similarly, life skill development as a result of coach education and coaches' actions was not strong. Much of the research was descriptive and exploratory. As a result, it is hard to draw inferences on how to use coach education to improve life skills.



Within sport, life skill training has taken precedence as a leading method for developing positive youth. Several life skills programmes exist, however they are designed for American adolescents that use sport as a metaphor for developing life skills (i.e., they are classroom bound). As such, new life skills programmes need to be developed for British adolescents that use the experience of sport as the method through which life skills can be improved.

Several problems exist when developing such an intervention. Firstly, a clear specific definition of life skills from British young people could not be found. Definitions of life skills from other domains (e.g., WHO, 1999) may not be representative of the needs of British adolescent sport participants. For example, they may have been derived from a deficit perspective of adolescence and therefore do not apply to young people who are not “broken” or at risk but want to improve themselves in order to thrive. Similarly, it was unsure which life skills young people needed. Existing life skill programmes are not participant-centred, which is intriguing given the evidence that young people see themselves as agents of their own development (e.g., Dworkin et al., 2003). As such, young people should be asked what life skills they need to learn.

This review also highlighted methods through which life skills can be improved. Two primary methods, the Life Development Intervention and the coach education approach, were highlighted as methods by which life skills can be taught or caught to improve life skills. Both approaches present promising methods of improving life skills, however; they do not explain how life skills are learnt. As such, it is difficult to know how sport improves life skills and which intervention procedures result in positive change. As a result, research is needed that uncovers the processes of life skills development.



The key points that need to be taken from this review are that:

1. It is unclear whether existing definitions of life skills reflect how British adolescent competitive sport participants define the term
2. It is unclear whether existing models of positive youth development (e.g., 5Cs, 40 developmental assets) reflect the needs of British adolescent competitive sport participants, and more specifically which life skills are needed by this population
3. It is unclear how British adolescent competitive sport participants improve their life skills (i.e., taught vs. caught?).
4. Young people who already have life skills should still be given opportunities to improve their life skills because positive youth development is focussed on building strengths.
5. It is unclear whether existing interventions are applicable to British young people and whether existing interventions can improve a range of life skills.
6. North American research may not be generalisable across cultures therefore research needs to be conducted across cultures, and in particular with British young people.

To this end the specific aims of this thesis are:

1. To develop a definition of life skills that reflects how British adolescent competitive sport participants, who are in full time education define the term
2. To conduct a needs analysis of which life skills are needed by British adolescent competitive sport participants, who are full time education
3. To investigate the processes of how life skills are developed



4. To develop intervention procedures based on the needs of British adolescent sport participants and the processes of how life skills are developed
5. To evaluate the new intervention procedures

These individual aims contribute to the overall aim of the thesis, to develop an intervention to improve the life skills of British adolescents competitive sport participants, who are in full time education.



## Chapter Three

### The Thesis



## The Thesis

This chapter provides an overarching discussion, which sets the aims of the thesis and provides an account of how each of the four studies contributes to the overall thesis aim. Specifically, this chapter provides a clear account of the research aims of each study, explains how the study aims relates to the methodology adopted, identifies the body of knowledge that the study will contribute to advance the overall thesis, and shows how each study builds on the study which follows it and/or feeds into the study that succeeds it.

In addition to this overarching discussion, ethical issues related to working with adolescents are also presented.

### *Thesis aim*

The aim of the thesis is to develop an intervention to improve the life skills of British adolescent competitive sport participants, who are in full time education. In order to achieve this broad aim, more specific aims were:

- To develop a definition of life skills that reflects how British adolescent competitive sport participants, who are in full time education define the term
- To conduct a needs analysis of which life skills are needed by British adolescent competitive sport participants, who are full time education
- To investigate the processes of how life skills are developed
- To develop intervention procedures based on the needs of British adolescent sport participants and the processes of how life skills are developed
- To evaluate the new intervention procedures

### *Structure of the thesis*

Chapter Four (Study One) presents the results of a needs analysis conducted to investigate the life skills needs of British adolescent competitive sport participants,



in full time education. The aim of the study was to investigate how British adolescent competitive sports participants, and those adults involved in their sport experiences, defined life skills and to investigate which life skills competitive sport participants need.

In order to generate descriptions of life skills needs from a variety of perspectives, a methodology that allowed in depth descriptions from a variety of perspectives was selected. A qualitative methodology, namely an inductive content analysis, was selected because it allowed for in personal and shared opinions to be revealed. Qualitative methodologies provide information that a written response may conceal; therefore they can be used to extract rich material, which may not have been addressed in previous literature. Focus group interviews were selected as the most appropriate data collection techniques because they allowed for discussion across participants, which stimulated participants to share experiences, to challenge each other, and to generate a life skills definition and a needs analysis that represented the needs of the population. This data collection technique assumes that reality is socially constructed and meaning exists as a result of social interaction. Therefore, results provide a socially constructed definition of life skills and life skills needs of British adolescent competitive sport participants.

Opinions of those invested in the adolescent sport participant's experience (e.g., coaches) and a panel of experts in youth sport and applied sport psychology were also sought to provide a holistic perspective of which life skills British adolescent sport participants need. Adults who were invested in adolescent competitive youth sport were included along side the opinions of the adolescents themselves to provide additional insights and increase the depth of the findings.



A participant-centred definition of life skills was developed extending the existing research in addition to a list of life skills which participants felt were needed by adolescent competitive sports participants.

Results of Study One contributed to the overall aim of the thesis (to develop a life skills intervention) by providing the targeted life skills for the actual intervention. Study One participants suggested communication and organisational skills were the most important life skills for British adolescent competitive sport participants, who are in full time education, to acquire. As such, these life skills were targeted in the life skills intervention procedures that were evaluated in Study Three.

Chapter Five (Study Two) presents the results of an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of how one young person developed life skills during her adolescent years. The aim of this study was to understand how life skills could be improved. In line with this aim, a research methodology was sought that could access the lived experience of being an adolescent sport participant, whilst understanding the meaning of those experiences. As such, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was selected as the most appropriate methodology, with one-to-one interviews as the most appropriate data collection technique. The capacity within Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis to focus on the structure, meaning, and processes of lived personal experiences made it an appropriate methodology. This methodology assumes that meaning is the result of the participant interpreting her lived experience and the research interpreting those interpretations. Thus, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis assumes that there is a shared reality that can be accessed through conversation (i.e., interviews) and that the interpretations represent that shared reality. The findings from this study provide a



single case exploration of how the participant felt she had improved her life skills through sport.

Results from Study Two contributed to the overall thesis by providing a method by which life skills could be improved. Specifically, the participant felt that while she was an adolescent competitive sport participant she improved her life skills through experiential learning. This process of improving life skills provided the theoretical foundation of the life skills intervention, which was evaluated in Study Three.

Chapter Six presents a description of the development and design of the ELITE life skills programme (Enhancement of Leadership, Intercommunication, Teamwork and Excellence) The ELITE life skills intervention was developed from personal experiences and the results of Studies One and Two.

The aim of the programme description chapter was to explicate the foundations of the ELITE life skills programme and to describe the intervention procedures. Personal experiences are offered alongside theoretical foundations to describe the development of the programme. Procedural information (e.g., description of session content) is included to explain how the intervention was implemented. The ELITE life skills programme aimed to increase participant's awareness of the skills that they had developed by participating in organised sport, which can be used in other life domains. Special attention was given to the improvement of communication and organisation skills given the results from Study One

Chapter Six contributes to the overall thesis by providing information about how the improvement of life skills was achieved. Chapter Six also contributed to Study Three by providing the intervention procedures that were evaluated.



Furthermore, it contributed to Study Four by providing the basis for the reflections on how the life skills intervention was delivered and evaluated.

Chapter Seven (Study Three) presents the results of the ELITE life skills programme procedures evaluation. The aim of Study Three was to evaluate whether life skills could be improved by participating in the intervention procedures developed for the ELITE life skills programme. The study adopted a multiple baselines, across behaviours, single subject design and social validation interviews to evaluate the ELITE life skills programme. A single subject methodology was selected because it was deemed unethical to conduct a group-based, with a control group who did not to receive the treatment (i.e., intervention procedures). Thus, single subject research was selected because all participants received the treatment. Single subject research is appropriate for evaluating intervention strategies because of the capacity to scientifically evaluate interventions with a focus on the individual (Hrycaiko & Martin, 1996). Furthermore, single subject research methods provide a level of experimental rigour beyond that found in traditional case studies (Horner, Carr, Halle, McGee, Odom, & Wolery, 2005). Qualitative data collection techniques were then used to elaborate on issues uncovered in the single subject data.

Study Three contributes to the overall thesis by providing an evaluation of whether the ELITE life skills intervention procedures (i.e., reflective practice) can be used to improve the life skills of British adolescent competitive sport participants, who are in full time education.

Chapter Eight (Study Four) presents a confessional tale documenting my reflections between September 2006 and June 2007 as I developed, implemented, and evaluated the ELITE life skills programme.



The aim of the study was to supplement the evaluation in Study Three by providing in depth descriptions of my experiences of conducting intervention research to uncover the process of conducting intervention research with adolescent sports participants. A confessional tale was selected as the most appropriate methodology because of the capacity to present personalised forms of writing that take the reader behind the scenes of the research process in order to present what really happened (Sparkes, 2002). Therefore, the confessional tale allowed the lived experience of doing an intervention to be described and evaluated in greater detail.

Study Four contributed to the overall thesis by supplementing Study Three and providing additional insights into the ethical issues and practical issues related to developing an intervention to improve the life skills of British adolescent competitive sport participants, who are in full time education.

Chapter Nine summarises the major findings of the thesis. The aim of Chapter Nine was to bring together the findings of the four separate studies and to relate these findings back to the discussion points highlighted in the literature review. Additionally, the aim of Chapter Nine was to show how the research from the four studies fulfilled the overall aim of the thesis, to develop an intervention to improve the life skills of British adolescent competitive sport participants, who are in full time education.

The theoretical and practical implications of the research are discussed in addition to limitations, delimitations, methodological considerations, and future research directions.

### *Ethical Issues*

Ethical research practice is needed so that participants are protected from violations of human rights and the researcher is protected from litigation (Jago &



Bailey, 2001). It is paramount that the human rights of the participants are protected. The Belmont Report (Report of the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioural Research, 1988) suggested three principles to ensure ethical practice when conducting research.

The first principle is respect for personhood. Research should always honour the dignity inherent in every human. Research therefore requires the acknowledgement of the right of self-determination. People need freedom of choice, and autonomy over personal decisions regardless of age, sex, race, skin colour, physical or mental ability, language, religion, political view, and national or social origin. The second principle is beneficence. The principle of beneficence is related to the dictum, “first, do know harm”. Research must not violate this fundamental dictum. The third principle is justice. Justice demands that we give all persons what is their due. Researchers should deal honestly and fairly. Specifically, distributive justice requires that persons receive benefits to which they are entitled (i.e., no prejudice towards gender, race, or socio economic status). Contributive justice requires that the burden of research participation not be imposed in away that affect some participants unfairly.

When working with young people the key question is which young people have the same rights as adults and / or should they be treated differently as research participants (Jago & Bailey, 2001)? It is also worth considering whether children and adolescents have the same rights. Lothen-Kline, Howard, Hamburger, Worrel, and Boekloo (2003) stated that existing codes research for conducting research with young people do not distinguish between children and adolescents. Rather, they categorise all young people under the age of 18 as a child, which could be problematic given the unique nature of adolescence as a period of growth and



development and the potential that adolescents do not see themselves as children. Adolescence is a period of cognitive, physical, social, and moral development (Lerner, 2005). During this time, adolescents also have a compelling need for privacy and develop a sense of identity (Lerner, 2005). Therefore, this period of development also needs careful consideration.

The suggestion that young people need to be treated differently as research participants assumes that young people do not have the capabilities to make informed choices about participating in research and understanding the potential benefits and risks (i.e., they are not mature enough: Kelly & Halford, 2007). When referring to the first principle of ethical research, that people must be given the chance to make an informed decision on whether to participate in research, Kelly and Halford (2007) stated that undue emphasis is placed upon obtaining parental consent before adolescents can participate in research. This is associated with unnecessary limits being placed on important psychological research. This problem is especially prevalent for low risk psychological research assessing prevalent and hazardous behaviours in adolescents.

If young people do have the maturity to make informed decisions about participation, or legal requirements stipulate that young people under the age of 18 cannot give consent parental / guardian consent is required. Parental consent therefore assumes that parents have their child's best interests in mind when "signing up" their children to research, which may not always be the case. Specifically, in sporting settings it has been shown that differing parenting styles may lead to different reasons for participation in research. Holt and Black (2007) stated that parents exhibiting an authoritarian parenting style are demanding, directing but not responsive, expecting of orders to be obeyed, placing high expectations on their



children, and are strict. Moreover, they are very involved (and potentially over involved) in their child's sport involvement (Côté & Hay, 2002). As such, they may not have their child's best interest in mind; it may be that they have their children's sporting success in mind. Similarly, parents with low involvement in their children's lives are less likely to provide consent for their children (Kelly & Halford, 2007). In addition to these issues adolescence is a period of development that is characterised by a progression from reliance on parents, to more peer influence, finishing with more autonomy, and self-reliance (Larson, Peace, & Sullivan, 2007; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Consequently, adolescents may differ from younger children in ethical issues related to parental consent because they are striving for autonomy from adults and wish to take responsibility for themselves. Kelly and Halford (2007) also suggested that seeking active parental consent for adolescents to participate in research often results in low recruitment rates, and biased samples that compromise the scientific integrity of studies (Fissell, McCarthy, D'Amico, Metirk, Ellingstad, & Brown, 2004).

If adolescents are capable of making rational decisions about the long and short-term impact of involvement in research they should be given the opportunity to make their own decisions. However, how do researchers decide whether a young person is able to make rational decisions? Research suggests that young people develop cognitive abilities of formal operations in Piaget's stages of cognitive development at approximately 12 years of age (Vasta, Haith, & Miller, 1995) and as such could be in a position to make decisions related to short term and long term benefits and risks of participation in research. However development may be age related not age dependant and therefore using ages to determine whether young people can make rational decisions may be problematic. Jago and Bailey (2001)



suggested that the decision ultimately lies with the researcher as to whether a particular adolescent is capable of making rational decisions.

Age of consent is also a difficult area. Legally, for non-therapeutic research (i.e., when no physical benefits are available through participation) participants under the age of 18 must have parental consent. In therapeutic research (where physical benefits are available) participants aged 16 and over can legally give consent for participation. The current thesis can be potentially categorised as both therapeutic and non-therapeutic. Specifically, Studies One and Two are non-therapeutic, however, the possibility of improving life skills (and the associated theoretical connections between life skills and positive youth development outcomes: Benson, Leffert, Scales, & Blyth, 1998) means Study Three has benefits for participants and is therefore therapeutic. Younger participants (i.e., those unable to legally give consent) could be given the opportunity to give assent. Assent is not legally binding but does provide acquiescence (Jago & Bailey, 2001).

#### *Ethical issues and the thesis*

In the current thesis all research participants were over the age of 15 years of age and were capable of making rational decisions. As such, those under 18 years were asked to give assent in addition to gaining parental consent (in line with University Ethical Committee Requirements). Jago and Bailey (2001) suggested gaining participant assent (which is not legally binding) shows that young people have been involved in the consent process, they are aware of what will take place, and they are willing participants in the research. Having additional parental consent ensures it is legal participation.

The process of gaining consent (and assent) is a complex procedure requiring a great deal of contemplation. Several issues exist. Firstly, is consent needed? Jago and



Bailey stated that consent must be obtained if the research invades any part of the participant's body or mind. This includes psychological testing and any form of questioning that requires introspection. Studies One, Two, and Three all require introspection from the participants and therefore consent was required for participation.

Secondly, is consent provided freely? Consent cannot be obtained by any kind of physical or mental pressure. This includes options of preferential treatment for those participating in the research. This issue was addressed in the current thesis by asking for volunteers from sports teams from the local area. In the participant information packs and consent forms (Appendices A, B, & C) it was explained that participation was voluntary, participants were free to withdraw at any time, and participation (and refusal to participate) was not related to selection and would not be punished by coaches. No pressure was placed on participants and no financial rewards or other incentives were offered. Rather, the potential benefits of participating were stressed. Jago and Bailey (2001) suggested that in addition to stressing the educational, health enhancing, and enjoyable aspects of participation other motivational concepts such as sibling or peer competition could be promoted to promote participation; however, these strategies were not employed.

Thirdly, issues of power can influence the integrity of the research. Power relations relate to whether young people are truly free to give consent and to withdraw from research. These issues usually occur if coaches conduct research with their own players or teachers with their own pupils. If participants feel obligated to participate they may not be willing participants. Similarly, undergraduate students participating in research funded by a University (in which they study) may feel pressure to participate. There was no pressure intended in the current thesis, however



participants may still have felt pressure (particularly if they were enrolled in sport science programmes and are asked to participate in sport science research). In the current thesis, power issues were addressed by selecting participants from sports clubs which I had no involvement as an applied practitioner or coach. I also endeavoured to select participants whom I had not taught during my time at the University. Additionally, it was explained at length, both verbally and in writing, that consent was not related to any academic concerns and would not affect their status in the university. The key issue, related to consent, was that participants were given the freedom to withdraw and it was explained that withdrawal would have no negative connotations. As such, if participants were unhappy at any stage they could withdraw from the research and request to have their data withdrawn with no further ramifications.

Finally, accurate information on the benefits and risks of the participation must be included in participant information. Details of research procedures (e.g., focus group procedures, intervention procedures), potential risks, benefits, purpose of the research, and specific and general aims were explained to participants in participant information packs and verbally during face to face meetings. The participant information letters were written using readability statistics on Microsoft Word to ensure the text was understandable to the level of the participants. The youngest participant was 15 years of age, as such participant information and consent forms were written to a grade ten level.

Once consent had been achieved, confidentiality and anonymity were ensured. All names were replaced with codes or pseudonyms so that participants could not be identified. Information from participants was used in the thesis (e.g., interview data), however it was explained that if participants wished anything to be kept confidential



it would not be used in the thesis. The relationship between researcher and supervisor was set in place so that ethical issues could be discussed if they presented themselves during the research (e.g., disclosing illegal behaviours). Furthermore, training in research methods and counselling skills was undertaken prior to the commencement of the research to ensure the researcher had adequate skills in designing research studies and conducting research. Finally, a full ethical proposal was submitted to the University Ethics Committee and was given clearance prior to the research (Appendix L).



## Chapter Four

### Study One: Assessing the life skills needs of adolescent competitive sport participants



## Abstract

### *Problem*

The problem exists that it is unclear whether existing definitions of life skills reflect how British adolescent competitive sport participants, who are in full time education define the term. Furthermore, it is unclear which life skills are needed by British adolescent competitive sport participants, who are in full time education. As such, it is difficult to know which life skill should be included in a life skills programme to improve the life skills of this population.

### *Aim*

The aim of this study was to develop a definition of life skills that reflects how British adolescent competitive sport participants define the term and to examine the life skills needs of British adolescent competitive sports participants.

### *Methodology*

Eighteen adolescent sports participants, fourteen coaches, and four experts in sport psychology and youth sport participated in a series of focus group interviews to gain the opinions of the sport participants themselves in addition to opinions for those invested in the young peoples sport experiences. An inductive analysis revealed how participants defined life skills and which life skills British adolescent sports participant's need.

### *Results*

Life skills were defined as ranges of transferable skills needed for everyday life, by everybody, that help people thrive above and beyond the normal requirements of



everyday existence. Participants described the need for interpersonal skills including social skills, respect, leadership, family interactions, and communication. Personal skills including organisation, discipline, self-reliance, goal setting, managing performance outcomes, motivation, and identity were also reported.

### *Contributions*

The findings contribute to existing research by adding an alternative definition of life skills and provide an insight into which life skills should be built into youth sport programmes for British adolescent competitive sport participants, who are in full time education. The findings contribute to the overall thesis by providing a clear definition of life skill that can be used to describe the term in future studies.

Furthermore, the findings provide a list of life skills, which need to be included in a life skills intervention. Specifically, findings demonstrate that a life skills intervention for British adolescent competitive sport participants, who are in full time education, should aim to improve communication and organisation skills.



## Introduction

Adolescence is a critical period of growth and development in which young people can acquire, and build upon, the skills, attitudes, and behaviours that provide the foundation for thriving in adulthood (Lerner et al., 2006). These skills, attitudes, and behaviours are what Danish, Nellen and Owens (1996) call life skills. If young people are to be allowed to thrive in life it is important to know which life skills young people need. Life skills can be physical (e.g., proper posture), behavioural (e.g., effective communication), or cognitive (e.g., effective decision making) (Danish & Donohue, 1995; Danish & Nellen, 1997).

A problem of existing research that has investigated the positive benefits of sport participation is that it has not considered the fact that people with life skills choose sport as a context to demonstrate their skills. In essence, the argument is that sport does not teach life skills but rather reveals them. From a positive perspective of adolescence it is irrelevant whether young people have skills before entering a sporting context. Positive youth development is based on the principle that young people should be given the opportunity to improve and build upon their strengths. As such, research should still take these young people participating in sport into account. They may already have some life skills however they should still be provided with means to further improve the skills they already have.

The problem exists that the majority of life skills research has been conducted in North America with North American youth and as such may not be generalisable to young people from outside the United States and Canada. Therefore, there is a need for research with young people from different cultures to understand how young people can be helped to improve their life skills.



Life skill training has been used in a variety of contexts to reduce negative behaviours and to promote positive behaviours (Pan American Health Organisation, 2001). Within the sporting context, there has been a propensity for life skills training to promote positive youth development (e.g., Danish, Fazio, Nellen, & Owens, 2002; Gould, Collins, Lauer, & Chung, 2005). The Sport United to Promote Education and Recreation (SUPER; Danish et al., 2002) provides an illustration of a sport based life skills programme. SUPER is an 18 session, peer-led programme, which integrates sports skills and life skills. SUPER aims to provide participants with the skills to set and achieve goals, overcome obstacles, and think positively. Several studies have shown that SUPER is an effective programme to increase knowledge of goal setting and self beliefs regarding the ability to set goals, to think positively, and to overcome obstacles to achieving goals (Brunelle, Danish, & Forneris, 2007; Goudas, Dermitizaki, Leondari, & Danish, 2006; Papacharisis, Goudas, Danish, & Theodorakis, 2005). Moreover, derivatives of SUPER and associated life skills programmes (e.g., Danish, Forneris, Hodge, & Heke, 2004; Petitpas, Van Raalte, Cornelius, & Presbury, 2004) have been developed and delivered in different sports, cultures, and settings strengthening the applicability of the life skills approach.

Petitpas et al. (2004) developed the Play It Smart programme to enhance adolescent athlete's academic, athletic, career, and personal development. The programme, based on the Life Development Intervention (LDI; Danish & D'Augelli, 1983), was designed to create a team environment where young people could learn about themselves and develop life skills. Two hundred and fifty two male high school student athletes, from three inner-city North-eastern American high schools, participated in the pilot phase of the programme. The two year pilot phase included an evaluation of the following three primary outcomes goals of the Play It Smart



programme: improve grade point averages and graduation rates; increase participation in community service activities; and increase knowledge and use of health enhancing behaviours. Results from the pilot programme revealed that participants' grade point averages increased from 2.16 to 2.54, 98 per cent of the seniors (n=59) graduated from high school on schedule, and 83 per cent of this group went on to higher education. Additionally, participants engaged in a total of 1,745 hours of community services activities.

An example of a culturally specific life skill programme that teaches life skills through participation in sport is the Hokowhitu programme (Heke, 2001). Hokowhitu was specifically developed for the indigenous people of New Zealand, the Maori. Hokowhitu literally translates as "20 times 7" which is believed to refer to the number of Maori warriors assigned to a travelling warring party. In modern times Hokowhitu was used to name the Maori battalions that participated in WWI and WWII and has also been used to name Maori sports teams.

This programme is based on SUPER; however, it was made specific for New Zealand Maori by using Maori language and culture both in programme development, implementation, and evaluation (Danish et al., 2004). The overall aim of the programme was to teach life skills such as goal setting in an attempt to increase academic success and healthy behaviours and to decrease drug and alcohol abuse amongst the Maori in New Zealand.

The Hokowhitu life skills programme is made up of 10, two hour life skills workshops that uses sport as a metaphor rather than including actual sport skills. As with previous LDI based life skills programmes (e.g., GOAL and SUPER) Hokowhitu is taught by senior high school students (*Tuakana*) to younger junior students (*Teina*). Additionally, the Hokowhitu programme recruits life skill coaches



(*kaiwhakawaiwai*) who train the older students in communication, group management, and the teaching skills necessary for running the Hokowhitu programme.

Heke (2001) stated that although there is little published research regarding the teaching of life skills through sport from an indigenous perspective, there was evidence to suggest that interventions for adolescent Maori required a different approach from mainstream interventions. In the Hokowhitu programme Maori culture is integrated into the teaching of life skills by adopting a Maori preferred learning style and adopting several important cultural concepts. These concepts included: *He Kanohi kitea* (meeting face to face rather than via phone or email), *manaaki ki te tangata* (providing funding for travel to and from events including food and supervision for school age participants), *kaua e takahia te mana o te tangata* (ensuring appropriate respect for participants and the importance of obtaining informed consent), *kaua e mahaki* (sharing all information with participants so that the community is able to get direct benefit) and *tuakana /teina* (older students assisting younger students) (Danish et al., 2004).

Unfortunately there is a paucity of published evaluation research. Danish et al. (2004) stated that the Educational Review Office (Ministry of Education of New Zealand) evaluated the programme, which was conducted at an intermediate school. They concluded that the Hokowhitu programme was successful in facilitating positive changes in academic self-esteem for both the junior and senior student participants. Additionally, Danish and colleagues stated that after the programme none of the participants disliked school. Moreover, participants improved their coping skills and developed positive attitudes regarding future outcomes. Although these are anecdotal reports of the efficacy of the Hokowhitu programme they do



suggest that there is an opportunity to expand upon the existing research in culturally specific life skills interventions.

Despite the propensity to improve life skills through sport, it is unclear which life skills are needed by young people. Research that espouses the need for certain life skills (e.g., identity exploration, goal setting) is potentially limited because it is based on retrospective analysis of what was needed by adolescents in the past, is based on outdated conceptions of adolescence, and may not be applicable across cultures and settings (Lerner et al., 2006). To advance basic knowledge and the quality of the applications aimed at enhancing youth development, research should be directed to developing interventions specific to groups' developmental and environmental circumstances (Lerner & Steinberg, 2004). Given that adolescents are so different from each other, one cannot expect any single intervention to suit all adolescents or to influence everyone in the same way (Lerner, 2005). As such, there is a need to investigate the needs of individuals and specific groups to enable the tailoring of life skills interventions to the needs of specific populations (e.g., British adolescent competitive sport participants).

It is clear from Chapter Two that previous research has yet to specify how adolescents themselves define life skills and to uncover the life skills needs of adolescent competitive sport participants, who are in full time education, from the United Kingdom. As a result, life skills interventions may not accurately reflect the needs of adolescent competitive sport participants from the United Kingdom. Theokas and Lerner (2006) stated that individuals are more likely to thrive when their developmental needs are matched with resources in the environment. Thus, research is needed that examines the life skills needs of British adolescents competitive sport participants to enable matching with environmental resources, to



ascertain the on-going validity of previous North American research, to gain a better understanding of what today's young people need to thrive in adulthood, and to develop appropriate life skills interventions.

To this end, the aims of the current study were to develop a participant-centred definition of life skills from people involved in a sporting context and to provide an analysis of the life skills needs of British adolescent competitive sport participants.

These aims contribute to the overall thesis by providing a life skills definition specific to how the current sample define the term, and provides a potential curriculum for the intervention to improve the life skills of British adolescent competitive sport participants, who are in full time education.

## Methodology

### *Participants*

Participants were selected from a range of sources in England. Sources included sports teams and clubs, national governing bodies of sport, and members of staff from an English University. Participants either met face to face or were contacted via mail (Appendix A). Participants were asked to read and sign a participant information pack (Appendix B) including an informed consent form (Appendix C). Individuals were selected on the following criteria: they coached British competitive sport participants, who were in full time education between the ages of 15-22; were British and were participating in competitive sport, were in full time education, and were between the ages of 15-22 years; had conducted youth sport research or had consulted within the context of competitive youth sport in the United Kingdom as a sport psychologist. Competitive sport participants were defined as people training in their sport at least once a week with the intention to compete. In total, 38 participants participated in one of nine focus groups (one panel of experts



group, one graduate student group, three coach groups, and four sport participant groups). As outlined in Table one, participants represented the sports of figure skating, ice dance, tennis, soccer, rugby union, gymnastics, athletics, hockey, and basketball.

Focus group	Male to female ratio	Age range	Mean age (S.D.)	Sports represented
Pilot study	4:1	N/a	N/a	N/a
Panel of experts	3:1	N/a	N/a	N/a
Coaches	3:1	26-57	35.48 (14.38)	Hockey, rugby union, basketball
Sport participants	2:4	15-18	16.78 (0.58)	Figure skating, ice dance
Coaches	3:0	26-66	48.02 (19.92)	Track & field athletics, tennis, gymnastics
Sport participants	2:1	20-22	21.72 (0.81)	Figure skating, ice dance
Coaches	1:2	31-53	39.27 (11.83)	Figure skating, ice dance
Sport participants	4:0	15-17	15.62 (0.46)	Tennis
Sport participants	6:0	16-18	17.23 (0.56)	Soccer

Table 5: Participant details

*Procedure*

Focus groups were selected as the most appropriate data collection technique because of their capacity to provide rich data from a variety of perspectives. Group discussions facilitated the emergence of the shared perceptions of what young people



need and facilitated corroboration of a life skills definition. Focus groups were scheduled at the convenience of the participants and were moderated by the primary researcher. Based on the suggestions made by Krueger and Casey (2000), the primary researcher moderated the focus groups because of his extensive knowledge of the topic of discussion, ability to place comments in perspective, and ability to follow-up on critical areas of discussion.

### *Focus groups*

Focus groups ranged between 32 and 111 minutes, averaging 75 minutes (SD=29 minutes, 34 seconds). Focus groups were moderated using a semi-structured questioning route (Appendix D) developed from a review of life skills, positive youth development, and focus group literature. Two experts knowledgeable in qualitative research methods checked the route to ensure the questions were understandable and that questions encouraged discussion. Finally, pilot interviews with individual members from the focus group populations and a group of sport psychology graduate students refined the route.

Opening, introductory, key, and closing questions provided structure. Opening questions consisted of demographic questions (e.g., date of birth, sport, number of years coaching) and sought to break the ice and encourage active participation. Introductory questions were used to introduce the general topic of discussion of the life skills needs of adolescent competitive sport participants and to provide participants the opportunity to reflect on their involvement and experience with the overall topic. Key questions were the main questions that drove the research and were then given the most attention in the analysis (Krueger, 1998). Key questions focused the discussion of the needs of adolescents in different life domains. For example, participants were encouraged to discuss the needs of adolescents in



sporting contexts, academic contexts, and in the workplace. Finally, closing questions were used to bring the discussion to an end, gain advice on how to develop future focus groups, and ensure participants felt they had had an adequate opportunity to talk about issues they felt relevant.

### *Data analysis*

Focus groups were recorded and transcribed verbatim, yielding 192 pages of transcript. Analysis was conducted over two phases. The first phase was conducted immediately after transcription and before the subsequent focus group. This process helped strengthen the data by developing the next focus group and allowed the 192 pages to be broken down into manageable sections over a period of months. To supplement this analysis, a second phase was conducted toward the end of the investigation. QSR NUD\*IST software (Non-numerical unstructured data indexing searching and theorising: <http://www.qsrinternational.com/>) was employed to facilitate rigour and inter-rater reliability checks, as well as organise data electronically. Facets of NUD\*IST included instant retrieval of data, augmented management of data, and easy comparison of themes. Finally the use of NUD\*IST meant transcripts could be sent to multiple people via email for the inter rater reliability check.

Initially the transcripts were organised into meaningful themes. Raw data responses, such as quotes or paraphrased quotes that represented a meaningful thought, were established and coded with a meaning unit. Meaning units were then revised and refined by making several more cycles through the transcript. Similar meaning units were organised into patterns of comparable responses to create larger more inclusive groupings. These groupings were assigned an “essence phrase” that conveyed the essential meaning contained in the category. Once this had been



achieved, the next focus group was conducted and analysed. When no new themes were emerging from the analysis it was decided that saturation had been achieved. The second phase of computer assisted analysis then began, with the option of conducting more focus groups if it appeared that the saturation decision had been premature.

This phase was used to re-analyse the data and ensure rigour by comparing and contrasting quotes across focus groups, ensuring quotes had been placed in the correct groupings, and to revise and refine the coding framework as necessary. Once both phases of analysis had been completed, a random selection of transcripts and themes were checked by two independent researchers to gain consensus in the interpretations made.

#### *Methodological rigour*

Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, and Spiers (2002) stated that by solely focusing on processes of verification at the end of the study rather than integrating strategies throughout, the investigator runs the risk of missing serious threats to the reliability and validity until it is too late to correct them. Furthermore, post hoc strategies only evaluate rigour, they do not ensure rigour. As such, both constructive and evaluative methods of ensuring rigour were employed. Iterative interaction between data collection and analysis served as a constructive method of ensuring rigour. By collecting and analysing data simultaneously, potential threats to the rigour of the research were identified and rectified before conducting the next focus group (Morse et al., 2002). Evaluation of methodological rigour was also achieved by implementing inter-rater reliability checks. Three graduate students were given one third of un-coded interview transcripts. Hurley (2005) stated one third of focus group transcripts give an adequate representation of responses collected during the focus



groups. Raters were asked to code the transcripts to form a series of raw data themes. These themes were compared with the raw data themes from the initial analysis, which were revised as necessary.

Following this review the raw data themes were organised into first order and higher order groups. The research supervisor was then given a full print out of raw data, first order, and higher order themes. The process of showing the development of the coding framework as well as initial coding decisions facilitated the transparency of the analysis process.

### Results

The analysis procedure resulted in 96 final raw data themes, 17 first order themes, and three higher order themes related to life skills as a general dimension (see Figures 1, 2, & 3). The higher order themes included life skills definition, interpersonal life skills, and personal life skills. In the following sections, actual quotes are included to provide a coherent level of description, augment the interpretations drawn from the data, and enable the reader to judge the researchers' interpretations and draw out possible alternative interpretations.

#### *Life skills defined*

The focus group participants were asked about what they understood by the term life skills. As outlined in Figure 1, four categories of responses emerged from the data that were related to this initial question. One of these themes was the belief that there is ambiguity in how life skills are understood. For example, one coach said, "life skills are kind of fuzzy, in terms of what it means . . . . The term is banded about without clearly defining what they mean". This definitional ambiguity or inability to articulate what was understood by the term was evident in many of the responses made by the participants. Specifically, participants articulated examples of



life skills in addition to defining the term. For instance, when asked what was understood by the term life skills one graduate student said, “Maybe they are the things that we expect as minimum from people. Like we expect people to be able to communicate and work with each other to a certain extent”. Similarly, one of the athletes said, “it’s the things you need across everyday life, things like communication”.

Raw data theme	First order theme	Higher order theme
Skills used in everyday life	General definition	Life skills definition
Range of life skills needed		
Life skills needed in multiple life domains		
Essential skills for life		
Life skills needed by everyone		
Dealing with everyday events		
Skills needed for entire life		
Dealing with unknowns of life		
Life skills linked together		
Skills to prosper in life		
Belief of transfer between domains	Transferability	
Assumption that sport teaches transferable life skills		
Assumption that transfer occurs	Life skills examples	
Basic life skills		
Examples of other life skills	Definitional ambiguity	
Definitional ambiguity		

Figure 5: Life skills definition coding framework

The general definition theme was made up of ten raw data themes, many of which overlapped with one another. For example, one coach said:

I think they [life skills] are the multitude of skills that allows you to have a comfortable life, for your entire life, to live well, to cope well with the unknown things of life and to be able to be able to pass through the difficult moments.

A point emphasised by participants was that life skills are not just the skills needed to be a successful athlete, they are the skills that can help in many areas of life. For



instance, an athlete said, “I think everyone should learn them really because everyone needs these things in everyday life, not just in sports”. Participants also talked about life skills to thrive and prosper, one of the athletes said, “I think life skills are skills that help you generally in life and get by but also the skills that help you cope with what life throws at you and enables you to prosper”. Participants talked about various skills in combination, and that skills are linked. For example, another athlete said, “I think they are not stand alone skills, they are skills that are very much linked together. Like communication is linked to respect”.

Participants talked about the transferability of life skills from different perspectives. Specifically, some participants firmly believed that transfer between life domains was possible. For instance, when asked what was understood one athlete said, “I think transferable, possibly being able to use skills in different domains”. Similarly, one of the graduate students said, “if you are naturally sporty and you have spent a lot of your life and your upbringing that’s where you have learnt the skills but then you can take them into your work or into other areas”.

Finally, one of the coaches gave a definition of life skills:

I would say life skills as a whole are skills you need in different domains that you can take into different domains . . . I think that they are skills that you can take into other areas; they are not just limited to one area. I’m not saying every skill can be applied to every domain but there are certainly ones that apply to many life domains.

### *Interpersonal life skills*

Interpersonal life skills were made up of five first-order themes including social skills, respect, leadership, interactions with the family, and communication skills. Participants talked about the importance of social skills helping them in



multiple life domains (e.g., sport, workplace, relationships, and school). Social skills reported by participants included the ability to make friends, to interact with others, and to get along with people in general. A member of an athlete group referred specifically to making friends as follows: “when you stop playing tennis you have got to be able to socialise with people and make other friends”.

A common theme was the issue of teamwork and the ability to work with others. For instance, one coach said, “qualities like reliability, being able to communicate with people and gradually building self-confidence through teamwork are important”. Participants talked about working together in order to accomplish a certain outcome. For instance:

Quite often in free skating side, many people who train together on the same piece of ice are competing against each other. You have got people going for 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> spots on the same pad . . . there is a potential there for issues . . . . You don’t have to like them but you have to learn to work with people even if you don’t...like them.

One of the coaches voiced a similar opinion:

That’s something they are going to come across when they are working. They are going to have to deal with other people who they don’t really know. I think they learn those situations through sport; it gives them the confidence to deal with it.



Raw data theme	First order theme	Higher order theme
Getting along with people	Social skills	Interpersonal life skills
Interaction skills		
Making friends		
Socialising skills		
Learning social rules		
Social life through sport		
The awareness that one needs a social life		
Learning how to be diplomatic		
Empathising skills		
Relationship skills		
Commitment to team		
Responsibility to others		
Working with others		
Contributing to a team		
Accepting roles in teams	Respect	
Respect for others advice		
Accepting criticism		
Treating team-mates with respect		
Respect for others		
Respect for managers / coaches	Leadership	
Respect for officials		
Leadership skills		
Delegation skills	Interactions with family	
Appreciation of family		
Support from family		
Pressure from parents	Communication skills	
Impact of parents		
Verbal communication skills		
Listening skills		

Figure 6: Interpersonal life skills coding framework

Related to working as a team was the issue of respect, and particularly, respecting the opinions and actions of coaches, managers, team-mates, officials, and family members. For instance, one athlete described why respect was an important life skill as follows: “you need the right attitude and respect. That’s important because you get some players who only respect themselves and don’t respect other people around them and they don’t ever reach their potential”. Similarly, one coach said:

I would say that respect is the thing we should focus on. You need respect for your coaches, for the opposition, and for your team-mates. Turning up on time



and looking after yourself and making sure you train regularly, and even respect for the facilities that you are using.

Respect also involved taking criticism and accepting roles within a team. For example, a member of an athlete group said, “you need to be able to take criticism. Like someone might be telling you that you might be doing something wrong then you have to respect them and listen to them and take their advice positively”.

Athletes and coaches reported the theme of family interaction. For example, an athlete said, “you need to appreciate your parents because they do loads for us. Some mums live and breathe skating”. In terms of transferring into different life domains an athlete talked about the impact of parents in helping their own parenting skills in the future as follows: “you need to appreciate what your parents do for you. You would be a better parent because your parents have sacrificed so much for you that you would put your child ahead of you”.

Communication skills were highlighted numerous times as people defined life skills. For example, an athlete defined life skills as, “just like core things like being able to communicate with people”. Communication skills were also described as integral skills in achieving many of the other interpersonal skills. For example, “life skills are things like your discipline, your organisation, your communication, and the way you react with people. I think it all comes down to communication in the end”. When referring to socialising another athlete said, “I think being able to talk to people really . . . you can’t just walk around on your own. If you don’t talk with anyone you don’t make any mates, it’s important to be able to do that”. Similarly, communication skills were important in being able to work with others and becoming a better athlete. For example, one of the athletes said, “If you are trying . . . to be the best tennis player you can then you have to communicate with your coach



to find out what he is seeing". Another athlete talked about respect and communication:

Something that ties in with respect is communication and listening to other people. We talked about communication as a two-way thing, you need to have respect to listen to somebody and to hear his or her point of view and then react to it in a diplomatic fashion.

### *Personal life skills*

Personal life skills were made up of organisation, discipline, the ability for self-reliance, goal setting, managing performance outcomes, motivation, and identity.

One organisation skill was the ability to be punctual. For example, one of the athletes talked about the importance of punctuality in the sporting context, "punctuality, like arriving on time. It's important because if it's a tournament you might just get scratched, or if it's here your coach is going to get mad". One of the coaches supported the importance of punctuality by stating: "something like punctuality is an important life skill because if you didn't have it at all you wouldn't get anywhere". Linked with the issue of punctuality was the ability to manage time. The issue of time management was seen as a crucial skill when organising multiple life domains. For instance, one athlete said, "you have to organise your time so that you know where you have to be . . . so you have the time to do all your work and football without getting behind". Similarly, one of the coaches talked about what life skills adolescent sport participants need: "I think time management . . . I think how to spend your day. Especially the children that are coming in the morning and training before school. They have to be able to balance their lives in order to fit it all



in". A member of the coaches group also introduced the theme of learning to prioritise and making sacrifices:

Time management and those things come into play . . . these kids have to juggle so many things like playing first team at school and having to juggle their education. How do you cope with that? How much time do I spend out there? When do I say no?

Planning was also reported as an important organisational skill. The ability to plan for everyday events, such as training, homework and competitions was reported, for example, "You have to be able to think ahead. If you have homework and you have skating you have got to plan ahead". When asked what adolescents need to be successful sports performers one of the coaches said, "Just planning really, if you know they have got a competition coming up six months away. There is no good saying a week before I need new [ice skating] boots". Participants also talked about the need to plan for the future, specifically planning for life after sport. One athlete group member said:

You have got to realise that everything comes to an end and you have to prepare yourself for what you are going to do when it does end. Like most of us now, not many of us if any will make it as a professional footballer. So we need to be working on something to fall back on.



Raw data theme	First order theme	Higher order theme
The ability to be punctual Time management skills The ability to plan for life after sport Prioritising Multi tasking to balance multiple life domains Planning skills General organisation skills Financial organisation skills Discipline Determination Commitment / dedication Ability to sacrifice Ability to sacrifice social life Persistence /perseverance Ability to work hard Managing distractions Self responsibility / reliance Maturity Overcoming peer pressure Self awareness skills Goal setting Ability to achieve your goals Breaking down goals Learning from mistakes Bouncing back Dealing with setbacks Dealing with injury Dealing with pressure Dealing with stress Dealing with fatigue Motivation to succeed Self motivation Motivation /drive The ability to enjoy what you do Drive to thrive Empowerment /autonomy Motivation to improve Learning the value of effort Role experimentation Learning an awareness of Identity	Organisation skills Discipline Ability for self-reliance Goal setting Managing performance outcomes Motivation Identity	Personal life skills

Figure 7: Personal life skills coding framework

One of the coaches also talked of the issue of post sport career planning, “they have to plan ahead and be realistic and say, OK I have come to the end of this part of my skating career as an amateur but I have opened a door in a different direction”



Discipline skills were described as important personal life skills. Participants talked about determination, commitment, persistence, perseverance, and dedication as elements of discipline. For example, a member of the athletes group said, "You have to be determined because if you want to make it in anything you have to give it 100 per cent". Another member of the same group gave the following quote, "you have to be committed to the sport. Like if you like drinking [alcohol] then you have to stop to get the most out of football. You have to get your priorities straight". Another athlete talked about the need for dedication, "you obviously need to be dedicated . . . all through life but then it's also essential in your sport."

The theme of sacrificing social lives to pursue sporting interests and the need to make sacrifices in general were deemed necessary skills for young people to have. For example, a member of an athletes group said, "sacrifice is an important one [life skill] because when you think about it a lot of us have sacrificed many parts of our social lives to be here". Also, when talking about sacrificing social lives one coach said:

I have an example in my mind of one of my gymnasts . . . He has told me at Christmas I had a few drinks but after I had no drinks at all and I will not drink at all until the trial. I think this is a skill for life to be able to stop what you want.

When relating sacrifice in sport to broader life contexts one of the coaches said, "its part of sport to do things that you don't want to do but you have to do . . . maybe later you realise it is a lesson for life because I have to do things that I don't like". Finally, sacrifice was linked with maturity:

You have to be mature enough to say no to going out and having a drink and smoking and you have to be mature enough to want it and organise it. You



have to be mature enough to recognise that you are in it to win it. You have to be mature to make sacrifices.

Maturity, alongside self-responsibility, self-reliance, overcoming peer pressure and self-awareness skills made up the theme of the ability to rely on oneself. The issue of being able to rely on oneself was deemed important by many of the coaches and athletes alike. One of the athletes said, “You have to be responsible for yourself. Sometimes it [sport] has to teach you to train on your own, I think self-responsibility is a big thing”. The ability to overcome peer pressure was deemed an important facet of relying on oneself. Participants referred to the need to overcome peer pressure. For example, “you do have to fight against peer pressure . . . I was fully used to just saying no to things, you have got to say no and you have got to be strong enough to say no”.

When referring to managing performance outcomes participants talked about the ability to learn from mistakes, bounce back from adversity, deal with setbacks, deal with injury, deal with pressure, deal with stress, and deal with fatigue. For example, a member of an athletes group said, “you need to learn from your mistakes. You can’t learn from things that you haven’t experienced. Like when you miss penalties, you learn from it”. It was also deemed crucial that people learn how to bounce back from perceived failure and adversity. For instance, one of the coaches said:

Individuals have not only qualified through their national championships and through the heats and semi finals, performance wise to get there [major championships]. They have qualified through the championships and the heats and semi finals of life. The illnesses the injuries, the setbacks . . . so the ones that are there on the start line need to be the most self-contained, assured,



single minded, self-focused, self-centred, assertive, bastards on the face of the planet.

Motivation skills were reported as important life skills that people need in sport and other life domains. Specifically, participants talked about motivation in relation to having the ability to work hard, enjoy what you do, be self-motivated, and have the drive to succeed in sport and to thrive in life. For example, when talking about self-motivation an athlete said:

You have to drive yourself . . . There is no point in just doing it for the sake of doing it you have to want to do it. You have to be able to motivate yourself to get the best out of yourself.

One of the other needs voiced by the participants was identity development. Identity was still viewed as an essential for young people. For instance, one of the experts said:

It goes back to the point about having a broad multi dimensional self. It's the old table leg analogy. You can't have a solid table on one leg. If that leg is sport, if they never get out and socialise, if they lose that leg the table collapses. They are not getting any other experiences. Yes they are getting an education but it is a very narrow social context and they are not learning those broader skills.

There was also talk of the need to experiment with different roles. For example, another of the experts said, "the healthiest adults I know have had a range of things in their lives . . . I think for young people they need to experience lots of different aspects of life so that they are grounded as an adult".



## Discussion

The aims of the current study were to investigate how British adolescent competitive sport participants, who are full time education, defined life skills and to investigate which life skills this population need. This information was uncovered by interviewing adolescents and those associated with adolescents in a series of focus groups. The findings of this study contribute to the overall aim of the thesis (e.g., to develop a life skills intervention to improve the life skills of British adolescent competitive sport participants, who are full time education) by providing a curriculum of life skills for a life skills intervention.

A range of definitional terms, interpersonal life skills, and personal life skills were identified in the current study. These general findings provide support for existing life skills and positive youth development research. Specifically, many of the life skills identified in the current study could be classified in Catalano et al.s' (1998) definitional characteristics of positive youth development, Lerner and colleagues' (Lerner et al., 2005; Lerner et al., 2006) 5Cs (competence, confidence, connection, character and compassion) of positive youth development, Benson's (1997) developmental assets, and Larson and colleagues' (Dworkin et al., 2003; Hansen et al., 2003) learning experiences associated with positive youth development. Moreover, many of the life skills identified also feature in Danish, Petitpas, and Hale's (1993) description of potential life skills that could be improved through sport participation.

### *Life skills definition*

Existing research has produced several life skills definitions. For instance, UNICEF (n.d.) define life skills as a large group of psychosocial and interpersonal skills, which can help people make informed decisions, communicate effectively,



and develop coping and self-management skills that may help them lead a healthy and productive life. The World Health Organisation (1999) defines life skills as the abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. Finally the life skills centre (n.d) defines life skills as the skills that enable us to succeed in the environments in which we live (Life Skills Centre, n.d.). The problem with existing definitions is that they are researcher driven and are mainly of North American origin. As such, existing definitions might not accurately reflect what British adolescent competitive sport participants, and those working closely with these adolescents, understand by the term.

Lerner et al. (2006) stated that research driven definitions grounded in the deficit model of adolescence might be very dispiriting for young people who learn that they are regarded by adults as someone who is likely to be a problem. Dworkin et al. (2003) stated that adolescents see themselves as agents of their own development and adults should focus on helping young people teach themselves. Thus, gaining adolescents' opinions and views is critical in facilitating optimal development.

A range of definitional terms was identified in the current study. Results suggested that life skills were sometimes hard to define. Furthermore, rather than providing a definition of life skills per se participants provided examples of skills. When participants were probed for a more inclusive definition, results suggested life skills could be defined as ranges of transferable skills needed for everyday life, by everybody, that help people thrive above and beyond the normal requirements of everyday existence. Although some participants talked about assumptions of transfer, rather than an assurance of transfer across life domains, transferability was a



central tenet when defining life skills. A key difference between existing definitions and the current definition is the issue of transferability. Participants suggested that skills had to be transferable across life domains for it to be classified as a life skill. If adolescents only used skills in one life domain they were context specific and not life skills. By developing a participant-centred definition we supplement existing research and provide a unique perspective of how British adolescent sport participants define life skills.

### *Life skills needs*

Participants identified a range of interpersonal and personal life skills that are needed by British adolescent competitive sport participants. Interpersonal skills have been defined as “those skills that involve developing social connections to others and learning skills for cultivating these social connections” (Hansen et al., 2003 p. 28). When categorising potential developmental experiences, previous researchers have used the overarching grouping of interpersonal skills to classify ranges of these experiences (e.g., Hansen et al., 2003; Larson, 1994; Youniss, Yates, & Su, 1997). Results from the present study suggest that participants needed several interpersonal skills. Participants talked about the need for effective communication skills, social skills, respect, leadership, and family relationship skills. These results show support for existing positive youth development research highlighting the importance of interpersonal skills. For example, Lerner et al. (2005) described, and provided evidence for, the latent construct of positive youth development through the 5Cs. Of these 5Cs four can be categorised as interpersonal skills. Specifically, competence refers to a positive view of one’s actions in domain specific areas, including social areas; confidence refers to positive bonds with people and institutions in which both parties contribute to the relationship; character refers to respect for societal and



cultural rules; and finally, caring and compassion refers to a sense of sympathy and empathy for others. Results also show similarities with Benson's (1997) model of developmental assets. This model suggests there are 40 developmental building blocks of healthy development that help young people grow up healthy, caring, and responsible. These assets are categorised into external assets and internal assets, and further sub-categorised into support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, constructive use of time, commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity. There are several assets and skills evident in the current results and the developmental assets model, including family support, positive family communication, other adult relationships, adult role models, positive peer influence, interpersonal competence, responsibility, and conflict resolution.

Previous research also highlighted the potential for sport to teach many of these skills. Danish et al. (1993) stated that several of the following interpersonal skills could be learnt through sport participation: to communicate with others; work with people you do not necessarily like; respect others; accept others' values and beliefs; work within a system; and compete without hatred. Similarly, several studies have demonstrated that participation in sport can have positive outcomes in terms of developing such interpersonal skills (e.g., Barber, Eccles, & Stone, 2001; Danish, Fazio, Nellen, & Owens, 2002; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Hansen et al., 2003; Hellison, 1995).

Personal skills have been defined as those skills and developmental processes that are occurring within the individual (Hansen et al., 2003). As with interpersonal skills, many previous studies have used the grouping of personal skills to describe the potential outcomes of organised youth activities (e.g., Hansen et al., 2003). The personal skill grouping was made up of the following skills: organisation skills;



discipline skills; the ability to rely on oneself; goal setting; managing performance outcomes; motivation skills; and identity awareness. Several of these personal skills have been reported in previous life skills literature using sport. For example, Danish et al. (1993) highlighted the development of planning skills, specifically goal setting, as an integral element in the GOAL and SUPER life skills programmes. Danish and colleagues described numerous personal skills, which could be developed by participating in organised sport, which participants discussed. These skills included the ability to perform under pressure, make good decisions, set and attain goals, have self-control, evaluate yourself, be organised, handle both success and failure, recognise your limitations, and be flexible to succeed, push yourself to the limit, be committed, be dedicated, accept responsibility for your behaviour, and be self-motivated.

Positive youth development literature has also espoused the value of many of the personal skills described by participants. Catalano et al. (1998) stated the following personal skills could be used to classify a programme as a positive youth development programme: fostering resilience; promoting emotional, cognitive, behavioural, and moral competence; fostering self-determination; fostering self-efficacy; fostering a clear and positive identity; and fostering belief in the future. Several personal life skills also appear in Benson's (1997) developmental assets model. These include motivation, personal responsibility, planning and decision-making, resistance skills, personal power, self-esteem, and sense of purpose. The main difference between the developmental assets model and the current sample was the use of sport as a context for development as opposed to school, homes and communities (i.e., motivation to do well in sport vs. motivation to do well in school). Finally, Larson and colleagues (e.g., Dworkin et al., 2003; Hansen et al., 2003;



Larson, Hansen, & Moneta, 2006) reported several personal developmental processes needed for optimal youth development. Personal developmental experiences believed to lead to optimal development included the development of initiative, identity work, and emotional regulation. When comparing organised activities (e.g., sport, performing arts academic clubs, community oriented activities, service activities, and faith activities) sport was reported as a context in which young people could experience opportunities for self-knowledge, emotional regulation, and physical skills (Hansen et al., 2003). Moreover, sport was found to be the best context for developing initiative (e.g., sport was found to be best for developing goal setting skills, time management skills, and sustaining effort over time: Dworkin et al., 2003; Larson et al., 2006).

#### *Limitations and future directions*

While focus groups were effective in getting participants talking, the chosen methodology may have inhibited some participants from talking about life skills that were more personal, socially undesirable, and/or potentially embarrassing. Similarly, quiet participants may not have had an equal input in the discussion if another participant dominated the group. Dworkin et al. (2003) suggested that focus groups might not be the best method for investigating information and developmental processes that are less conscious. For example, Eccles and Barber (1999) suggested internalising group norms is a less conscious process which would be less likely to come up in a focus group discussion, yet may still be considered an important life skill. Thus, it may be that some life skills not included in the current results may be important for adolescent sport participants. Finally, some of the participants appeared to talk about the life skills they had learnt through their experiences in sport rather than the life skills adolescent sport participants need. Although personal



experiences were sought during data collection to provide depth, it became evident that some participants diverged from the main topic. A strength of concurrent data collection and analysis procedure meant that this issue could be confronted early in the investigation before validity could be compromised.

There is potential for further research on life skills needs, life skills development, and using sport as a context for positive youth development. Further needs assessments should be carried out that differentiate between gender, sport, and developmental stage to increase our understanding of the life skills needs of adolescent sport participants and how needs change across adolescence. The present results should be integrated into an applied life skills programme where the life skills needs identified in the current study are improved through participation in sport. These programmes should then be subjected to rigorous evaluations to strengthen sport as a context for positive youth development. When defining life skills participants mentioned the idea that life skills are linked and that some skills are related to others. Thus, future research should investigate the effect of teaching specific life skills (e.g., verbal communication skills) and the associated changes in other life skills (e.g., teamwork). Given the potential limitations of using focus groups it may be worth employing different data collection techniques to uncover the opinions of the British adolescent competitive sport participants. For example, one-to-one interviews would provide a different perspective of which life skills are needed. It may also be worthwhile conducting similar needs analyses with parents and schoolteachers to gain more information on which life skills this population need.



## Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings highlight the opinions of British adolescent competitive sport participants, coaches, and youth sport experts in defining life skills, and assessing which life skills are required by British adolescent competitive sport participants, who are in full time education, in order to survive and thrive in society.

Findings contribute to existing life skills and positive youth development research by adding support to existing life skills and positive youth development models of what young people need (e.g., 5Cs, 40 developmental assets). Findings also add an alternative insight into which life skills should be built into applied life skills programmes to improve the life skills of this population (i.e., British adolescent competitive sport participants who are in full time education).

Findings contribute to the overall thesis by providing a clear definition of how British adolescent competitive sport participants define life skills. Results of the needs analysis provide guidelines of which life skills should be targeted in a life skills intervention for this population. As such, these results provide a significant contribution to the overall thesis aim of developing a life skills intervention to improve the life skills of British adolescent competitive sport participants who are in full time education.



## Reflections

This study took place over a period in my first and second years of my PhD. The decision to conduct this study was based on the premise that in order to develop a life skills intervention it would be crucial to know what to put in such an intervention. Major limitations of existing research were that they were from North America and may not have been appropriate to British young people but more importantly existing life skills programmes had been developed by researchers and had not accessed the opinions of the young people who were participating in these programmes. I sought to rectify this problem by asking a sample from the population who will participate in the final life skills intervention which life skills they need to improve.

The actual research was by no means straightforward. In addition to the aforementioned limitations of focus group research, it became evident early on that focus groups may not have been the most practical data collection technique. Focus groups were selected because of the capacity to facilitate discussion amongst group members and therefore access shared opinions whilst allowing people to bounce ideas off each other. In reality several problems existed.

Firstly, the organisation of the focus group interviews was not straightforward. It became increasingly difficult to organise a time and a place when all participants could meet. As such, there were several "non starters" where only one person would turn up. It was decided that a focus group had to consist of at least three participants. If less than three attended the arranged group the decision was made to rearrange. The long-term result of this process was it was 18 months into the PhD before this study was finished. The initial aim at the outset of the PhD was to have it finished by the end the first year.



In addition to these logistical difficulties it became clear that during the actual focus groups not all participants were discussing issues amongst each other. Rather they were directing their conversation back to me. Changes in my moderation style and an explanation that the aim of the focus group was to talk amongst each other helped to generate more discussion amongst participants; however, in future studies I would be less likely to use focus groups. This is due to a range of issues including the logistical issues and the nature of the data collected. If I was doing similar needs analysis I would use one-to-one interviews because of the depth of the data gained and the access to individual, subjective accounts of reality. Focus groups would be better suited to evaluating programmes and getting information about particular issues (i.e., as used in market research).

Similarly, on reflection I felt this study reflected the norms of qualitative research in sport psychology. For example, Gould et al. (2005) talks about a pragmatic research philosophy, which underpins the qualitative research. The limitation of this approach is that it does not provide a sound philosophical position from which to conduct the research (cf. Grounded Theory, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, Discourse Analysis, and Ethnography). The result is that when analysing the results they are very descriptive without getting to the issues of meaning.

The experiences from this study have shaped the rest of the research in this thesis by shaping how the other studies were conducted by moving toward the analysis of the individual and looking at meanings as opposed to using group based data collection that simply describes. The next study used a series of one-to-one interviews and an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis to gain in depth descriptions of the lived experiences of one British adolescent competitive sport participant.



## Chapter Five

### Study Two: Developing life skills through sport



## Abstract

### *Problem*

The problem exists that is unclear how young people improve their life skills through their experiences in sport.

### *Aim*

The aim of the current study was to investigate how life skills could be learnt and improved through experiences in sport.

### *Methodology*

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a single participant to investigate the lived experience of improving life skills through sport. Resultant transcripts were subjected to Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

### *Results*

Findings point to an integration of processes, which resulted in the improvement of life skills. Dispositional factors, situational requirements of the sport, and the family worked together to promote life skills. Sport was described as a context with high importance. Therefore, the participant strove to develop life skills to be the best that she could be in the sporting domain. Skills were considered transferable providing the participant was familiar with the new domain, had confidence in applying skills, and the new domain had high importance.

### *Contributions*



Findings contribute to existing life skills and positive youth development research by providing an alternative insight into the processes of life skill development. Findings contribute to the overall thesis by providing methods by which life skills can be improved, to be used in a life skills intervention. Specifically, findings highlight experiential learning as a method of improving life skills that can be integrated into a life skills intervention to improve the life skills of British adolescent competitive sport participants, who are in full time education.



## Introduction

Organised sport provides favourable conditions for adolescents to engage in positive psychosocial development (Larson, 2000). Unfortunately, healthy adolescent development is an abstract process, occurring over long periods, and partly occurring within the private thoughts and feelings of the individual (Larson & Walker, 2005). As such, positive youth development and improvement in life skills are not easily observed. Typically, adults are unaware of development occurring until a young person demonstrates a positive outcome. Therefore, it may be difficult to identify how and when to intervene to augment development. In order to understand how and when to intervene research is needed that investigates the process of how life skills are developed and improved.

To date the majority of research has been quantitative, focused on the outcomes of positive youth development, without focusing on how outcomes were cultivated. For example, Larson and colleagues (Hansen, Larson, & Dworkin, 2003; Larson, Hansen, & Moneta, 2006) investigated the types of developmental experiences that youth encounter in different categories of extracurricular activities (including organised sport). Hansen et al. suggested sport was associated with higher rates of self-knowledge, emotional regulation, and physical skill experiences (compared with service, faith, community, and vocational activities). Sport was also associated with higher rates of negative peer interaction and inappropriate adult behaviour. Larson et al. suggested sport was associated with the development of initiative (i.e., high rates of sustained effort and setting goals). In contrast to Hansen and colleagues, students in sport did not report significantly higher rates for any other developmental experiences when compared with hanging out with friends or working at their job. Interestingly, students in sport reported lower rates of identity



work and positive relationship experiences compared to hanging out. A significant limitation of this research was there was no information on processes of these developmental experiences. As such, practitioners do not know how young people participating in sport develop and improve upon their initiative, self-knowledge, emotional regulation, and physical skills. Without providing procedural information, it is hard to distinguish how life skills were developed and how future interventions can use this information.

There are contrasting opinions on the processes of developing life skills through sport. Some researchers suggest that life skills are “taught not caught” through sport (Gould, Collins, Lauer, & Chung, 2005) whereas others believe the structure of sport can be used to facilitate learning and therefore life skills may be caught (Holt & Jones, 2007). Existing life skills programmes (e.g., GOAL & SUPER) subscribe to the view that life skills need to be systematically taught. However, recent research has suggested that “teaching” may be more about structuring the sport environment so that life skills are caught. From this perspective adults and adolescents work alongside each other. That said, development is a process in which adolescents are conscious and deliberate producers of their own development (Larson, 2000; Lerner, Theokas, & Jellic, 2005) and as such they should not have to rely on adult leaders.

Larson and Walker (2006) investigated the processes of positive youth development in an organised art context. The analysis of young peoples’ experiences in the Art First youth project revealed that the process of developmental change involved initial conflict followed by stimulated adaptive learning. Young people encountered real-world challenges posed by the situations encountered in the programme. For example, demands for professional behaviour, tedious tasks, and



having their work criticised and re-worked. Larson and Walker stated that in this situation young people's initial reaction was often surprise, aggravation, or disappointment. In time young people actively accommodated and assimilated to the norms of the professional setting. They described gradually coming to understand how and why things were done and gained confidence in exercising agency in that setting. This was not a simple process. Participants often reported multiple cycles of learning as they responded to different challenges during the six weeks of the programme. Larson and Walker stated that in these developmental accounts, young people represented themselves as active participants in the process of adaptive learning in both identifying challenges in the setting and learning from them.

In a similar study Larson (in press) investigated the processes of how young people learnt teamwork as a critical life skill for adult life. In this theory generating study Larson investigated how youth in a ten-week programme, aimed at helping high school aged youth develop high tech skills in using computer software and video equipment, developed. Three different viewpoints were employed to investigate the phenomenon. One observer who conducted participant observations once per week and wrote detailed field notes. The second perspective was interview data from the adult programme leaders. The final perspective came from eight representative youth participants who were interviewed every second to third week of the programme (35 total interviews). Results revealed that youth learnt teamwork in three ways. Firstly, youth said they learnt from experience. A second change process involved learning through taking others' perspectives. The final process of change involved growing trust leading to the development of collective norms.



Larson et al. (in press) reviewed the results of a series of studies that investigated the process of positive youth development across a variety of context. They concluded that:

The important finding of our research was that the youth responded to these environments as active agents in the dialectic process. They made choices, pursued goals, and changed how they thought about and acted on the world. They were active producers of their own development, across multiple domains of learning. They responded to obstacles and challenges by developing insights that allowed them to better reach goals. They actively drew on adults to develop knowledge and find their way in adult career worlds. Through collaborative interactions with youth from different backgrounds, they gained understanding and learnt modes of communication for bridging these differences. And through successful experiences in taking on responsibility they progressively changed their self-concepts to that of being responsible persons. Organised youth programmes . . . can be a fertile context for active processes of positive development in multiple domains (p16).

The problem exists that extant research has not investigated sport as a context for improving life skills. As such, it is unclear whether existing theories of how young people develop positive skills through organised activities is applicable to young people participating in sporting activities. Moreover, all of the research investigating the process of positive youth development has been conducted with North American youth and as such may not reflect how British adolescents develop and improve their life skills. Research is therefore needed to identify the characteristics of sport experiences (Perkins, Jacobs, Barber, & Eccles, 2004) to extend our understanding of the structure of organised sport and the quality of



British adolescent's sport experience. Researchers have suggested that young people's sporting experience should be addressed using qualitative techniques to generate alternative, in depth accounts of development (Dworkin et al., 2003; Holt & Jones, 2007). As such, there is a need for this type of research that investigates this problem.

To this end, the aim of the current study was to investigate how life skills were developed and improved through participation in sport. This aim contributed to the overall thesis by proving methods, which could be used to develop an intervention to improve the life skills of British adolescent competitive sport participants, who are in full time education.

## Methodology

### *Conceptual context*

The aim of the current study was to investigate how life skills were developed and improved through participation in sport. To capture these experiences and understand participants' accounts of these procedures, semi structured interviews and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA; Smith & Osborn, 2003) were selected as an appropriate data collection technique and methodology.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis explores personal, lived experiences, and individual perception of reality. The process of interpretation in Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis is coined a "double hermeneutic." The participant is trying to make sense of their world and the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants making sense of their world (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis is of particular use when exploring the context of individuals' beliefs and experiences and illuminating processes (Smith, 1999). Given that the purpose of this study was to investigate how life skills were developed and



improved through participation in sport, the capacity within Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis to focus on the structure, meaning, and processes of lived personal experiences (Brocki & Wearden, 2006) made it an appropriate methodology.

### *Participant*

J. A. Smith, the originator of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, stated, “Most IPA studies are of a small number of participants. However, it is possible to push the idiographic logic further and conduct an IPA analysis on a single case and I think such work is important” (Smith, 2004, p.42). Additionally, Smith stated, “I think this is an important area for development and would encourage PhD students, for example, to be bold and consider conducting detailed analyses of single cases” (p. 42). By focusing on single cases, researchers can develop elaborate, detailed studies of great depth. Given that there are no two developmental trajectories alike (Lerner et al., 2006) it stands to reason that that the topic of life skill development warrants single case exploration.

In accordance with the suggestions of Smith and Osborn (2003), a purposive sampling strategy was employed to recruit a participant with life skills, who was willing to share experiences of life skills development, and who was able to articulate those experiences. The participant was not selected as a representative of adolescent sports participants and young adulthood in general. Rather, she represents a particular case of an athlete’s response to organised sport in order to help gain a more detailed picture of this phenomenon.

All identifying information has been altered to protect confidentiality. The participant was a female tennis player named Linda. Linda was a 22-year-old full time graduate student at a British University. As a full time student, she was still



financially dependent on her parents and she was yet to fulfil an adult role in society. As such, she was classified as an adolescent, moving into young adulthood. Both parents were employed as teachers. She had grown up in an area of the United Kingdom with a total deprivation score of 25108, which means she grew up in an area of the United Kingdom which was less deprived than three quarters of the country (1 = maximum deprivation, 32482 = minimum deprivation: Neighbourhood Statistics, n.d). Linda had experience of hockey, skiing, and rounders but specialised in tennis aged 13. As a junior, Linda had achieved success at both regional and national level. At age 18, she secured a full athletic scholarship to a North American university. After one year, she returned to study in the United Kingdom. Whilst in America she obtained a 4.0 grade point average (highest classification in the North American education system). In the United Kingdom, she gained a First Class Honours degree (highest classification in the British education system) and finished top of her class. In addition to her tennis and academic career, Linda had volunteered to work with children with physical and mental disabilities, at separate schools. In addition to these indicators of positive development, Linda completed seven copies of an adapted version of the Youth Experiences Survey (YES; Hansen & Larson, 2005) over a week long period before the interviews began (see Appendix F).

Adaptations focused on removing negative experiences, re-wording questions and changing the four point Likert scale to a visual continuum upon which participants placed a mark depending on how much they agreed with a statement. The marks were then transposed onto a ten-point scale (10 being yes definitely, 0 being no not at all). Within the interpersonal domain, Linda scored 9.67 (+/- 0.31) for teamwork and social skills, 9.67 (+/- 0.27) for positive interpersonal relationships, and 9.29 (+/- 0.34) for adult networks and social capital. Within the personal domain, Linda



scored 9.26 (+/- 0.26) for identity development, 8.86 (+/- 0.13) for initiative, and 8.84 (+/- 0.21) for basic skills.

### *Data collection*

Smith, Jarman, and Osborn (1999) commented on the iterative nature of analysis in Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, in which data is collected and analysed repeatedly in the light of insights obtained from other data sources. This process could theoretically continue ad infinitum, as it is always possible that the next interview will be the one to produce confounding evidence (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). Therefore, rather than striving for saturation, Elliott, Fischer, and Rennie (1999) suggested researchers should strive to achieve “understanding represented in a way that achieves coherence and integration while preserving nuances” (pp. 222–223). It is when the researcher feels their analysis has achieved these goals, whilst telling a suitably persuasive story, that the analysis may be considered sufficiently complete. In the current study, this was achieved after five phases of formal interviews. Collecting more data at a later stage, should the decision to terminate data collection prove to be premature, was kept as an option. Formal interviews ranged between 31 minutes and 63 minutes and lasted an average of 48 minutes. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim resulting in 125 pages of transcript.

In addition to the formal recorded interviews around 30 hours of informal discussions were carried out across the period of formal data collection. Informal discussions were not recorded. These discussions were used to build rapport, to elaborate on interpretations and details disclosed during formal interviews, to get background information, and to generally get to know Linda as a person. By getting to know Linda as a person and building a friendship, trust, honesty, respect,



commitment, mutuality, understanding, and acceptance were built into the research process and strengthened the data (Tillmann-Healey, 2001). Specifically, the formal interviews became a collaborative interview whereby both researcher and participant engaged in intimate and joint sense-making regarding the phenomenon of improving life skills (Tillmann-Healey, 2001).

The first formal interview began the process of building rapport and trust with the participant (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Additional aims were to give a general overview of the research, to stimulate reflection, and giving procedural information (e.g., required commitments, location, expected duration). Finally, the first interview stimulated descriptions of Linda's general lived experience of tennis before probing for specific information in subsequent interviews (e.g., describe your day to day involvement in tennis?). The terms life skills and positive youth development were intentionally avoided, as they may not have been terms that represented Linda's experience in sport. Rather Linda was told the study aimed to highlight how sport had contributed to making her the person she is today.

The remaining interviews explored Lindas' experiences of developing life skills in greater depth. An interview schedule was created for each interview to help guide the discussion (see Appendix E), whilst allowing the participant to talk about her individual lived experience and for the interviewer to probe and follow-up on interesting areas. Each interview schedule was created based on the findings from previous interviews in order to fill gaps and gradually build understanding of Linda's story. Interviews typically began with broad, open questions regarding the experience of life skill development (e.g., how would you describe yourself as a person?). Probes and follow-up questions funnelled the interview (Smith & Osborn,



2003) to gain specific information about experiences of developing life skills (e.g., how has tennis contributed to you being that person?).

### *Data analysis*

Analysis in Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis is essentially a hermeneutic circle because the researcher is drawing upon their interpretative resources to make sense of participant's language, whilst at the same time constantly checking interpretations with what is actually being said. Smith (2004) stated, in practice the research process involves interplay between induction and deduction, with the inductive stance in the foreground. However, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis is not entirely inductive (Smith, 1999). A symbiotic relationship exists between the individual case and the knowledge and experience of the researcher. Thus, pre-existing assumptions influence the interpretation of the participant's experience and were therefore included in memos (Smith, 1999).

- The analysis of the interview data followed the guidelines of ideographic case study analysis (Fade, 2004; Smith & Osborn, 2003). Analysis started by writing up field notes immediately after the first interview, listening to recordings, and reading transcripts several times to ensure immersion in the data. Whilst listening and reading, notes were made in the left hand margin of transcripts. Notes attempted to provide answers to answer the question "what does this statement tell me about the process of developing life skills"? Once the whole transcript had been accounted for, initial notes were transformed into concise phrases that capture the essence of what was reported in the text. These phrases were listed so that the process of grouping could begin. Connections between emergent themes were established so that themes grouped together into higher order themes. Higher order themes were then given names that represented the subordinate themes within that grouping. All groupings



were checked with the primary transcripts to ensure higher order themes reflected the actual words of Linda. Time was taken to check themes with Linda to ensure results provided an accurate representation of her experiences that were grounded in the data. It also helped minimise the perceived distance between researcher and participant, and augmented trust and rapport. Once Linda had agreed the interpretations were accurate, the next phase of interviewing could be conducted. Themes were grouped into a master table (Appendix M & N), which was then transformed into a narrative account, supported by verbatim extracts from the interviews.

### Results

Two contrasting issues were apparent in Linda's description of her lived experience. Linda noted several examples of skills learnt and how she learnt them; however, her language and sentence construction suggested a lack of confidence. In addition, Linda talked about individual, subjective experiences shaping existence, yet she rarely referred to herself. When describing her experiences she often said "you" or "we". This suggests that she believes many of the skills she described are required by everyone, therefore suggesting an objective sense of reality. This is intriguing because she also talked about the differences in individual experiences, suggesting a subjective sense of reality. This apparent ambiguity on the subject sets the tone for the next issue, that Linda had not developed a full repertoire of life skills.

Linda used "kind of", "I guess", and "you" across interviews. She rarely referred to herself, even when she talked about her personal experiences and often said, "This makes no sense" when describing her experiences. It was clear she felt confident on a tennis court; however, this confidence had not transferred into all settings. She attributed this non-transfer to a lack of confidence and familiarity of the



context. She had spent hundreds of hours in tennis contexts so she felt comfortable and familiar. When she was faced with a new context, where she was not comfortable or familiar she did not feel confident and did not apply skills.

Although she felt tennis had shaped her existence and taught her many skills she did not learn everything. She felt she did not have certain skills, specifically confidence in social situations; and although tennis had taught many valuable lessons it was clear, in her case, sport was not a panacea for positive youth development.

She felt skills learnt were a reflection of the requirements of the sport and the individual experiences lived through the sport. For example, Linda said, "I would assume that different environments and different structures of sport would mean that different sports would emphasise different skills and obviously that is why not all athletes end up exactly the same". Therefore, not all people will develop a full repertoire of life skills. Similarly, people will not develop the same skills in the same way, even if they participate in the same sport.

Linda had learnt many skills through tennis, including, hard work, communication, concentration, relationship building, leadership, and organisation. The remainder of the analysis focuses on how Linda developed these specific life skills through her dispositions and experiences. The influence of her family and transfer of skills are also highlighted.

### *Dispositions*

Linda talked about skills, which she was born with, that were reinforced through her experiences in sport. She used the term dispositions to describe these skills. This is the beginning of Linda's developmental process. Her dispositions lead her to act in certain ways and encouraged her to develop specific skills. For example,



Linda talked at length about being born with a hard work ethic. Here is an extract from one of Lindas' interviews that highlights this theme:

I think you probably are going to have to have a personality trait to allow you to be hard working and disciplined and all those kinds of things. Some people are just never going to be like that whatever situation you put them in. I guess I have those traits.

Linda talks about "you" needing to be hard working. Therefore, Linda believes hard work values are a social imperative. She believes everyone needs these skills but not everyone has them. She then suggests that she is not one of those people who are never going to be hard working. However, she demonstrates her lack of assurance in saying "I guess I have those traits".

Her personality also played a role in developing skills. She felt that being a perfectionist was not a bad thing, it had helped her achieve and was associated with striving to be the best and working hard. The following extract describes how sport helped her adopt this view of perfectionism and the management of her perfectionist tendencies:

A massive thing for me is having perfectionist tendencies and dealing with failing. In tennis, you are always going to lose. . . . So kind of being in a situation that goes against my personality means I have developed skills that I wouldn't have. Had I been in situations all my life where I hadn't had to face up to aspects of my personality then I wouldn't have developed the skills to deal with it.

Here, the situational requirements of having to manage failure directed her to learn the skills to manage that experience. What she is saying is that had she not played tennis she would not have developed the management skills, and her opinion of her



perfectionism may have been much more maladaptive. Therefore, an integration of dispositions and situational requirements appear to have developed these skills.

### *Experiential factors*

Linda talked about a range of experiences that reinforced her dispositions and taught her new skills. She said, "The whole make up of tennis as a sport and all the experiences I had within my own tennis playing life just demanded that those skills developed". The key point Linda made was that skills were learnt because the situation required them. For example, she said, "The life skills and the values and how I have developed as a person have occurred through tennis because of the situations and the environments you encounter in the sport". Similarly, she followed up with, "If you are going to have a tendency to work hard and you are put in an environment which rewards and values hard work then you are going to increase your hard work".

If she was to balance her life as a student athlete she had to be organised. She believed this process was implicit, no coach, parent, or peer had ever taught her these life skills.

I never consciously thought I needed to learn to communicate and I never consciously thought I am learning to communicate . . . I never sat down and learnt the skills I needed for tennis. Like, I just, [pause] gained them because I needed them for that environment.

She felt she had a high level of dispositional self-awareness and knew what was required of her to succeed. Once she knew what she needed to do, she developed specific skills in order to do her best. The following extract describes the requirement and development of organisational skills:



I knew that I needed to fit in my work . . . and I wanted to fit tennis in. I knew that I couldn't waste time watching TV or whatever. I knew what I had to do. . . . I knew exactly when I was going to fit it in. . . . I was in a situation where I had to do my work and I had to do my tennis so I kind of worked out how I was going to do it.

The self-awareness of Linda is evident throughout this extract. She talks at length about what she needed and what she had to do. This self-awareness appears to drive the development of life skills. Once she is aware of the situational requirements she works out what skills needed to be initiated and then employs these skills in order to manage the demands. Whilst checking my interpretations Linda said that during the actual experience she was unaware of what she was learning, it was not until she was required to think about her experiences that she realised she had learnt specific life skills. In the following interview she followed up that discussion by saying, "You are not necessarily thinking I need to develop these skills. It is just you are in situations where they are required and the environment requires, and the situation requires them of you". In essence Linda talked about two phases of learning, unconscious and conscious learning. It is the interaction of experience and reflection that taught her the skills and highlighted that she had these skills.

### *Family*

She described how her parents structured her sporting experience to stimulate her to learn life skills. For example, her parents encouraged her to plan her tournament schedule and fill in entry forms therefore facilitating organisation skills. She talked about how her parents had supported her during her tennis career whilst reinforcing her perceived dispositions and newly acquired skills. For example, "I was very much brought up on the idea that whatever you do you've got to do to your



best ability . . . and that, kind of, is what I've always lived by". Here she talks about being brought up, which would suggest it is her parents that have encouraged these skills. She also says, "Always lived by" which would suggest that this particular value is something that was present before initiation into sport. While Linda acknowledges the role of sport in her development, she firmly believes that development is the result of interactions across different developmental systems (e.g., family, dispositions, sport, school, peers). For instance, she talks about the interaction of education, her values, and the family, "My experiences in terms of my family values and the values placed on education alongside the value placed on sport means I was probably developing different skills because I was very much balancing". She talks about balancing two activities (i.e., sport and education) and the interaction of the two activities in her life. The specific requirements placed on her because of this interaction required her to develop organisation skills.

Her family also provides meaning to her experiences in sport. This meaning altered as her circumstances changed. For example, in her early teens the meaning of tennis was associated with spending time with her father, "Tennis meant I could spend time with my dad. . . . That wasn't about me being a tennis player. That was about me being a teenage kid away having fun with my dad". By developing skills to succeed in sport she could spend more time with her dad. Therefore, it was very important for her to develop the skills to enable success. As she progressed the meaning of tennis changed. When she secured a university scholarship the meaning shifted to giving something back to her parents:

I also felt that my parents had invested a lot of money and a lot of time in playing tennis and I felt that it was a way in which tennis could give something



back. . . There was an opportunity to have a scholarship so my parents wouldn't be funding college . . . so I felt like that tennis was really important. Again, developing the skills to succeed in the sporting context enabled her to receive an education and saved her parents money. Thus, it is the importance she attached to a situation that contributed to life skill development.

### *Transfer*

Linda believed life skills could be transferred between domains. She specifically talked about transfer from tennis into academia. She said, "I've always very much believed that they are mainly transferable. I think I'm good at academics because I used to play a lot of tennis". She described several factors that helped her transfer skills. Linda talked about similarity of contexts, confidence in applying skills, successful application of skills, and the meaning and importance of the new context. She said:

For me developing communication and similar skills, once I felt that they were successful then I felt confident enough to do the same sorts of things in other domains in life. But things like being hard working and stuff, I don't really know. I just think . . . you realise they work so you just do them in other things.

It emerged that Linda has different classifications of life skills in terms of transferability. She describes how some skills, like communication, are transferred by building confidence across contexts. She then talks about other skills, such as her hard work in a different light. Thus, transfer is dependent on the type of skill one is transferring across domains.

Meaning and importance were key to transfer. She talked mostly about transfer of skills from tennis to academia, whilst at the same time describing a change in the importance of the context. As academia became more important she invested more



time and effort to her academic goals and used the skills she had developed in tennis.

The following quote highlights this shift in importance:

I have always been very realistic with my tennis and I knew that pretty early on [pause] well you always dream that you are always going to get as far as you can with your sport but I always knew that in the end, well from the age of 15, 16 that academics was as important to me.

The shift was the result of a realisation that she was as good as she could be in tennis, however, this would not lead her anywhere (in terms of a career).

Alternatively, being as good as she could be in academia could result in a viable career. As such, she changed from being an athlete-student to a student-athlete. Over time, academia became even more important and tennis became a recreational activity.

### *Summary statement*

Towards the end of the interviews, Linda was asked to reflect on previous interviews and articulate how she felt she had learnt life skills. The following extract provides a summary statement of how Linda felt she developed life skills:

I was quite late starting and I don't know if that meant that because I was behind all my peers when I started that I had to be more hard working, and dedicated to catch them up and then eventually overtake them. . . . I guess it goes back to having those personality traits and being in a situation that demanded it, me perceiving that it demanded those things of me, and being in a family environment where only your best is good enough. . . . So I guess it's a combination of my personality, the environment, the sporting environment, and now the academic environment, and my family values.



## Discussion

The participant in this study described how she developed and improved her life skills through her participation in competitive sport. Findings drew attention to the role of dispositional factors, experiential factors, and the family as key elements in the development of life skills. The participant described how she believed that she was born with certain skills that enabled her to succeed in sport. Sport also developed new skills that were required in order to do well in the sport. Finally, her family and her experiences within the sport reinforced her born with skills so that she could use them in other life domains, namely academia.

This qualitative study complements previous quantitative, outcome driven studies of life skills (e.g., Brunelle et al., 2007; Goudas et al, 2006; Hansen et al., 2003; Larson et al, 2006; Papacharisis et al, 2005) by examining the processes of life skill development experienced by one young person while she was an adolescent sport participant. Jellicic, Theokas, Phelps, and Lerner (in press) stated how we understand development is dependant on the methodological tools of developmental science and researchers' theoretical proscriptions and prescriptions. Different "windows" provide diverse exposures to the observed world. Therefore, conducting a study of life skill development using alternative research methods and philosophical foundations (i.e., Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis) broadens understanding of the reality of human development. Furthermore, Smith (2004) stated, "The very detail of individual brings us closer to significant aspects of shared humanity" (pp. 42-43). Therefore, in depth examination of the processes of life skill development of a single case has broader implications for positive youth development and life skill development.



Firstly, Linda showed some inconsistencies in developing life skills. She described many examples of skills she had learnt and how she felt she learnt them. However, there was an undertone of low self-confidence throughout the study. It became apparent that Linda had not developed every life skill. She was not comfortable in social situations and felt she had little confidence in certain aspects of her life. Gould et al. (2005) suggested that it is not possible to teach all life skills. They suggested that you could not teach all skills because of many outside factors that influence life skill development such as peers, parents, and societal norms. Similarly, Holt et al. (2007) suggested that life skills are a reflection of the requirement of the sport. As tennis is an individual sport, which does not require social interactions to be successful, it understandable that social skills were not learnt to the same extent as other life skills.

Current findings suggest development of life skills through sport result from the interaction of different systems. Our findings indicated that Linda's life skill development resulted from an interaction of a personality that encouraged specific dispositions (e.g., hard work and perfectionism), her parents bringing her up to encourage these values and supported her choices throughout her life, and sport providing a structure that encouraged dispositions and development of new skills. Sport, also had great meaning and importance to her so she strived to achieve and subsequently learnt skills to thrive in that context. As academia became equally important, she began employing previously successful skills in the academic contexts. Finally, successful application of these skills across domains built confidence, reinforced their use, and cemented them as life skills (i.e., transferable).

It is apparent targeting one area of the sport experience is unlikely to produce positive changes in young people. Results suggest the interaction of individual and



contextual influence results in life skill development. Petitpas, Cornelius, Van Raalte, and Jones (2005) provided a framework of positive psychosocial development through sport based on a similar premise. Specifically, they suggested that building character is associated with the philosophy of the sport organisation, quality of coaching, nature of parental involvement, and participants' individual experiences and resources. Development can occur when young people participate in activities that encourage self-exploration of personal values, needs, interests, and skills and offers experiences that help youth make important decisions about their personal identities (Petitpas & Champagne, 2000; Petitpas et al., 2005). As such, programmes that attempt to use sport to enhance the psychosocial development of youth must plan carefully and consider a large number of factors.

Relating present findings to previous process research and theory proved complex because, to our knowledge, no other studies had investigated the processes of life skill development in a sporting context with British adolescents. The field of positive youth development provided a broader scope for discussion.

Developmental systems theories provide a model of human development, which is supported by current findings. Developmental systems theories provide a theoretical foundation to positive youth developmental research. All developmental systems theories share similar characteristics. Specifically, they transcend the dualism of splitting development into discrete categories and replace these dichotomisations with integrations. All levels of organisation within the ecology of human development are integrated. These influences range from the genetic, physiological, cultural, and historical (Jelicic et al., in press).

Current results highlight similar processes. Specifically, Linda talked about her dispositions being reinforced through her experiences in sport. She also described



how her dispositions were matched with her environment (i.e., she was able to succeed in tennis because she felt she was naturally hard working). Her dispositions influenced how she behaved in the tennis context, which in turn influenced her own life skills. Also, by working hard and achieving success her actions influenced her tennis environment. Similarly, her family influenced her development and she influenced how her family functioned.

Another aspect of developmental systems theories is the probability of change in a developmental trajectory occurring in relation to variation in contextual conditions. This probability of change is known as plasticity. Developmental trajectories will change across time and place as a consequence of plasticity. Linda described key events during her life, which she associated with significant shifts and the development of different skills. For example, at the age of 13 she changed coaches and clubs and developed a range of skills in association with this change. When she went to the USA, aged 18, she again developed a range of new skills to match the changes in circumstances. Finally, upon returning to the United Kingdom she developed new skills that matched her assets with the requirements of being a student-athlete. Her development was a result of the interaction of her individual assets (e.g., her dispositions, her burgeoning repertoire of life skills, and her potential for change) and the contextual plasticity (e.g., the changes in situational requirements).

There was no mention of anyone teaching her these skills. In this respect, Linda described life skills being “caught”, not taught. Previous research focussed in improving life skills through sport participation has suggested that skills need to be systematically taught to young people (e.g., Gould et al., 2005). If life skills are not taught, positive outcomes are likely to be coincidental rather than intentional.



Current results suggest it is possible that young people can intentionally “catch” life skills, providing they have the awareness to understand what is required of them and they are motivated to develop themselves. Perhaps, it is here that coaches, parents, and significant others can play a role in the development of young people. By encouraging self-awareness and structuring experiences, in line with positive development, young people can “catch” life skills. These results support the findings from the Larson research (Larson, in press; Larson and Walker, 2006, Larson et al. in press). Specifically, Linda talked about situational requirements and alluded to experiential learning whereby she was placed out of her comfort zone by new challenges experienced in the sporting domain. She then responded to obstacles and challenges by developing insights and improving her skills. She also actively drew on adults (e.g., her coach and parents) to develop knowledge and find their way in the world.

Linda talked about an unconscious process of life skill development. She had rejected the idea that she needed to be told what skills to learn. She said she had learnt unconsciously and had only realised she had the skills after the event. In terms of adherence, and motivation this could be a critical element of “teaching” life skills. Specifically, Petitpas et al. (2005) stated youth sport participants in mastery climates are most likely to foster intrinsic motivation to develop life skills (Larson, 2000). There is limited research that examines the relationship between motivation and life skills. We suggest learning life skills to please the coach and not giving young people perceived autonomy over which skills to learn, how to learn, and when to learn them will result in more extrinsic motivation. As a result, they will be less likely to invest effort in developing life skills. This presupposition needs testing.



Previous research has explored the influence of the experience in developing positive youth. For example, Holt, Tamminen, and Jones (2007) proposed the Teaching Games for Understanding Model (Werner, Thorpe, & Bunker, 1996) as a practical method of structuring physical education experiences to foster positive developmental. Teaching Games for Understanding is a model whereby learners begin by playing a modified game first and then develop game knowledge and skill proficiency within representative game activities. The model is designed to create more knowledgeable and proficient game players and to motivate participants. Young people learn skills because they are required in order to succeed in that context. As they become more proficient within the adapted games context skills can begin to be introduced across domains. Holt and colleagues described situational and personal factors that could be used to create an environment in which young people can learn about positive youth development. Situational factors include providing young people with choices and decision-making responsibilities within appropriate lesson boundaries and expectations. Personal factors include the promotion of reflection, strategic thinking, and planning activities that are conducive to demonstrating good character (e.g., respect for rules, respect for team-mates). As such, it is the structured environment that “teaches” skills opposed to the teacher directly teaching skills.

Hellison’s (2003) model of Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility includes elements of experiential learning through sport. Hellison, Martinek, and Walsh (in press) suggest that while the Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility model predates the positive youth development movement it does have close links with positive youth development. The Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility model utilises strong relationships accompanied by gradual empowerment and



reflection as tools to help young people take more personal responsibility. Although life skills are not the explicit outcomes of the model per se, the method by which personal responsibility is taught is mirrored in the current findings. Specifically, responsibility is facilitated through reflection and awareness talks (with teachers) where students are encouraged to reflect on their involvement and how their involvement helped others and themselves. Finally, participants are encouraged to reflect on how their experiences can be transferred across domains (Hellison et al., in press).

Transferability is a fundamental characteristic of a life skill (see Study One). If a skill cannot be transferred, it is essentially a sport skill not a life skill. Linda enforced the belief that skills learnt through sport could be transferred; however, this was a complex process. Transfer was based on the type of skill, confidence in applying skills in different domains, the familiarity and security of the new domain, and successful application of the skill. As such, transfer is not assured, rather transfer is a process distinct from the development of skills and therefore requires further investigation.

Other approaches to developing life skills have considered life skills transfer. The Life Development Intervention (i.e., SUPER, GOAL, the First TEE) approach assumes that life skills learnt from sport are transferable to other life domains. While maintaining a sceptical stance on automatic transfer, Danish et al. (1995) suggest several factors that can induce transfer. Linda described several of these factors. For example, transfer is facilitated by belief that the acquired skills and qualities are valued in other settings; having an awareness of current skills; and confidence in the ability to apply skills in different settings.



Linda had said her parents had brought her up in an environment that encouraged certain values and her parents had supported her throughout her sporting career. Holt and Sehn, (2007) suggested parents play an important role in providing a foundation for positive youth development among early adolescents, whereas peers and coaches are more important during middle and later adolescence. Current results provide support for this suggestion. Linda started playing tennis aged ten; however, it was not until aged 13 that Linda talked about the influence of her coach (and life skill development). Between the ages of 13 and 18, it appeared that her coach played more of a role in her development by structuring her experience. During this period, her parents supported her but her descriptions of her experiences suggested they played more of an acquiescent role during this period. When Linda went to University in the United States she began to talk about her peers and coach in structuring an environment that required skills development however her parents were rarely mentioned. Holt and Sehn suggested that effective intervention strategies for early adolescents would include parents, because they play a key role in structuring adolescents' developmental experiences in sport. Interventions targeted at older teenagers should focus on coach and peer interactions. Current findings provide agreement with this suggestion.

#### *Limitations and future research*

We want to be cautious in the claims we make from this study. The study is a single case and was not meant to be representative. It should not be assumed that similar findings would come from all sports participants in similar situations. If generalisability were the aim of future research, it would be useful to conduct a subsequent study with carefully selected participants in order to help test the breadth of possible applicability. A study purposively selecting in terms of age, class,



ethnicity, sport, and region would provide a logical next stage and offer useful direct comparison with the results in this study (Smith & Osborn, 2007).

The selection of the participant allowed for a detailed analysis improving life skills. However, the participant was 22 years old and was not competing at the time of the interviews. Findings came from retrospective recall of what had happened in the past and may have been obscured by memory. Future investigation may choose to examine the process of life skill development by interviewing young people in adolescence that are still actively involved in competition. Furthermore, conducting longitudinal research following a set of participants from initiation into sport, through adolescence, and for two or three years after adolescence would highlight additional processes.

The participant had strong indicators of positive youth development (e.g., YES scores, academic achievements, low self reported negative behaviours, altruism). The participant had also had 13 years of competitive sport experience. Future investigations may take a different approach to process of life skill development by studying people with low indicators of positive development and who may have dropped out of sport to see whether they had learnt skills, to see whether sport had played a role in that development, and to provide grounds for comparison with the current participant.

Findings from the current study have implications for intervention research. To date the majority of life skills programmes have favoured a direct approach to teaching life skills, however findings suggest skills can also be learnt through experiential learning (i.e., caught). Therefore, future research should test the efficacy and effectiveness of experiential learning interventions with adolescent sports people. Furthermore, research needs to be conducted to expand our understanding of



family issues in promoting life skills at different stages of adolescence (Holt & Sehn, 2007).

### Conclusion

In conclusion, findings from the current study suggest development of life skills does not necessarily happen because of systematic teaching strategies. Direct teaching methods can be used; however, life skills are developed through an interaction of factors. Experiential factors provided the trigger for skills to develop. The requirements of an experience, coupled with an awareness of these requirements left Linda feeling as though she needed to learn these skills in order to be successful in the contexts she valued. As other contexts increased in their value, Linda began to transfer previously successful skills across domains. Her dispositions of high self-awareness, working hard, and wanting to be the best drove her through this process with her family providing support to facilitate her navigation through the world of competitive sport.

The findings from this study contribute to the existing literature by providing an alternative insight into the development of life skills through participation in competitive sport. The findings also provide examples of how adolescents from outside of the United States develop life skills and therefore increase awareness of the nature of adolescent life skills development across cultures and nations.

The findings contribute to the overall thesis by providing methods by which life skills can be improved in a sample of British adolescent competitive sport participants, who are full time education. These methods can then be integrated into a life skills intervention to improve the life skills of British adolescent competitive sport participants that can be evaluated in Study Three and Study Four.



## Reflections

The multiple interview format of this study provided a great deal of information that would not have been uncovered from a one-shot interview procedure. By interviewing the participant five times and taking time to talk to the participant about her experiences and her life in general in between interviews we were able to converse much more openly (as opposed to me just asking questions and her answering questions). As the study progressed the interviews were much more two sided conversations as we shared experiences.

The main difference between using an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis and the content analysis employed in the first study was the meaning associated with the conversation. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis is related to discourse analysis and symbolic interactionism and therefore it is interested in the meaning associated in the text and how the meanings which individuals ascribe to events are only obtained through a process of social engagement and a process of interpretation.

Analysing this text was a considerable challenge as I had not paid so much attention to the actual words before and I had never spent so much time trying to understand exactly what was meant during any particular conversation. Luckily having Linda close at hand during analysis of the interviews meant I could get her elaboration on my interpretations and therefore brought the results back to her actual lived experience.

What became clear was that it was less important what was said, what was more important was what was meant by what was said. This principle was a key learning point as a qualitative researcher.

In conducting this study it became apparent that the philosophical foundations of



science are of crucial importance and if I am going to use a particular methodology is it is critical that I also understand the underlying philosophical foundations.

The experiences from this study have shaped the rest of the thesis because I recognised the importance of building rapport with participants and how reducing the perceived distance between research and participant can result in more conversational interviews and more realistic description of the lived experiences. Specifically, I felt that by removing a power hierarchy of me as interviewer and her as participant we were able to discuss the lived experience more accurately without issues of social desirability affecting the discussion. Moreover, conducting more than one interview can uncover a much deeper understanding of the lived experience. I feel conducting just one interview would not allow you to elaborate on interesting areas and build upon understanding as the research progresses.

On reflection this was the most enjoyable of the studies conducted during this the PhD – mostly because of the closeness that developed and the ability to move beyond the superficial responses of a one shot interview.



## **Chapter Six**

### **ELITE life skills programme description**



## Abstract

### *Problem*

Existing life skills interventions have been designed for North American adolescents by North American researchers and as such may not reflect the needs or preferred learning strategies of British adolescent sport participants. Furthermore, many existing interventions are not developed from sound theoretical foundations

### *Aim*

The aim of this chapter is to provide a description of the life skills intervention designed to improve the life skills of British adolescent competitive sport participants, who are in full time education. A secondary aim was to provide the theoretical foundation for the ELITE life skills programme and to explain why the intervention procedures were developed this way

### *Methodology*

A reflective account of experiences and personal biases alongside contributions from Study One and Study Two provide the basis for discussion which elucidate the theoretical foundations

### *Contributions*

This chapter contributes to the general literature by providing a new life skills intervention based on theory that reflects the needs of the target population.

This chapter contributes to the overall thesis by using the findings from Study One and Study Two in order to develop a life skills intervention to improve the life skills of British adolescent competitive sport participants, who are in full time education.



The intervention procedures are then evaluated in Study Three. This chapter also provides discussion points addressed in Study Four.



## Introduction

The aim of this chapter was to provide a description of the life skills intervention designed to improve the life skills of British adolescent competitive sport participants, who are in full time education.

The ELITE (Enhancement of Leadership, Intercommunication, Teamwork, and Excellence) Life skills programme was developed over a period of two years. The programme curriculum was influenced by a needs assessment of which life skills British adolescent competitive sport participants need (Study One). Results from Study One revealed British adolescent competitive sport participants need ranges of interpersonal and organisational skills. Participants of the needs analysis specifically talked about the need for communication skills and organisational skills. Thus, communication and organisation were targeted as the primary life skills. Results from Study Two revealed that life skills could be improved through experiential learning and therefore provided guidelines of how life skills could be improved.

Before, detailing the theoretical foundations of the programme it is important to acknowledge my own experience of implementing a life skills programme and other pertinent experiences that have shaped my beliefs and biases. The following section will highlight some of my reflections, thoughts, and feelings about designing and delivering life skills programmes.

### *SUPER*

During 2005 and 2006, Dr. Steve Danish, the developer of GOAL and SUPER, gave me permission to implement an adapted version of the SUPER programme with a group of adolescent tennis players who were training at a regional academy in the East Midlands region of the United Kingdom. Ten tennis players aged between ten and fifteen years participated in the 18-session programme. Throughout the



programme I reflected on my involvement as the programme leader, the session content, delivery style, the participants workbook, tone of the group, observed behaviour, participant drop out, and parent and coach feedback. I also engaged in discussions with an applied sport psychologist (with five years experience of working with young people in sport), graduate students, and members of staff on faculty.

Overall, the experience of delivering the SUPER programme was very positive. The adolescent tennis players appeared to enjoy the majority of sessions and while no formal evaluation of the programme was undertaken informal discussions with parents and coaches suggested the participants had learnt new skills and had begun to put things into practice during training and matches. The main life skill that underpinned the programme was goal setting. Goal setting was interwoven into virtually all sessions, either through direct tuition or by referring to previous sessions. Although goal setting was clearly an important skill to learn for both sports performance and performance in non-sporting life domains, it was unclear whether it was actually needed by these participants. Specifically, the tennis players came into the sessions with a good knowledge of goal setting and if asked could recite the SMARTER (specific, measurable, agreed, recorded, timed, enjoyable, realistic) principles of goal setting and gave examples of their short term, intermediate term, and long term goals. Furthermore, all participants of the tennis academy were encouraged by the head coach to set goals with their individual coaches at the beginning of the season and to review these goals regularly. The result was a group of adolescents who appeared quite bored during opening sessions, with some participants dropping out before the programme finished.



A limitation of the SUPER programme was that the programme guidelines could not be adapted to teach other life skills. For example, if it were evident that the tennis players were particularly deficient in social skills filling out sheets on goal setting would not help them. Although the programme also sought to teach leading a healthy lifestyle, overcoming obstacles, and problem solving, because goal setting was so intertwined in the programme it became hard to distinguish which life skill was being targeted at which time. As such, the boredom factor associated with learning goal setting transferred across to other skills, which potentially had not been learnt by the participants. Therefore, limiting what the participants learnt.

When reflecting on how the programme was developed there were definite strengths and areas of improvement that were integrated into the development of the ELITE life skills programme. Firstly, it is worth noting that the sessions were delivered in a small room separate from the main building. After a couple of sessions I found out this room was used by the participants as their school. The year I started the programme the academy had developed an education programme so that the tennis players could receive their education on the grounds of the tennis centre. With hindsight this was a critical element in the successful delivery of the programme. It became evident that the participants associated being in the room with school and therefore potential negative connotations associated with school could have explained negative reactions to the SUPER programme. Thus, the location of where the programme is delivered is a crucial, yet often over looked element, of successful programme delivery.

Secondly, the programme used a variety of methods to teach the skills. Primarily, direct skills teaching methods were used to teach the skills where participants filled in worksheets in a "player's workbook". This was supplemented



with some role-play activity and some life skills games. It was clear after the first few sessions that the participants did not enjoy filling in their workbooks. The phrases "Why are we in here, why aren't we on court" encapsulated the feelings of the group during these early stages. As the sessions progressed I made the decision to replace the workbook with "hands on" experiences through which participants could learn the skills. The reaction of the group was positive, however on the down side when the workbook was used for skills that could not be taught experientially it seemed like the group were being punished by replacing fun activities with dull activities.

Wherever possible I tried to replace the workbook session with games and activities that could be done outside the classroom. These included simple team building games, icebreakers, treasure hunts around the academy grounds, and case studies. I felt these worked well as I found I had other members of the academy joining in my sessions even though they were not in the original group and the participants smiled and seemed to enjoy playing the games. This experience helped forge the belief that experiential learning was definitely beneficial when working with adolescents. Moreover, if the life skills could be taught on the court there would be less talk of "why are we here, why aren't we on court?"

Finally, the SUPER programme was comprised of 18 sessions, which lasted for around 30 minutes each. I found the duration to be a double-edged sword. On one hand the participants started to lose attention after 30 minutes or so. On the other hand there was a lot of information to fit into the 30-minute session and as a result I often felt rushed to get the session completed ready for the next session. On reflection, I felt a slightly longer session would be easier to fit everything in. The skill would be to fit everything in whilst keeping the participants attention over a



longer period. This was much easier when playing the games and doing non-classroom based work, as the time appeared to go much quicker, and the participants maintained focus for the full session. In addition to the duration of the sessions, the overall length of the programme was quite long. Research from the positive youth development (e.g., Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 1998) suggest youth programmes should last for a minimum of nine months in order to result in positive change. Similarly, Bronfenbrenners's (1999) Operational Model of Development suggests that for optimal development to take place an individual must participate in activities over an extended period and activities must involve long-term reciprocal relationships with significant others, such as coaches. I agree that for maintained behaviour change young people should be exposed to positive experiences and mentoring over a prolonged period (i.e., they should participate in sport for prolonged periods). However, in the case of the SUPER programme I felt that 18 sessions was too long. In the case of sport based life skills interventions the duration of the programme is linked to the previous engagement in sport, and therefore the life skills programme serves to initiate change which happens in the months after the programme as a result of coach, peer, and parent reinforcement (Danish, 2002).

The participants had structured their tennis around set periods in the year. They had training periods, pre-competition periods, competition periods, and holiday/ rest periods. With each period came new and different training sessions, targeting different areas of the game. Ideally, I would have liked to see the SUPER programme fit into one of those training periods so that the participants had continuity across their tennis programme. In reality, the 18 sessions crossed over three training periods. It also became evident towards the end of the programme that



some of the participants had become bored of goal setting and wanted to try different things. On reflection, I feel that it is not the duration of the SUPER programme that needs changing rather it is the structure of the sessions that resulted in boredom. I feel that life skills should be taught through short contact using teachable moments as and when they appear during normal sport participation. If longer sessions are required (e.g., when employed as a part of a broader sport science support system) I feel the overall length of the programme should be reduced so that participants do not become overly bored. In essence, the contact time would be the same; the difference would be whether that contact occurs over months and years or weeks.

### *Additional experiences*

Additional experiences throughout my PhD and in my life have also influenced my beliefs about how to best teach life skills. As previously mentioned, several researchers suggest life skills are taught not caught in sport (e.g., Danish, Petitpas, & Hale 1993; Gould, Collins, Lauer, & Chung, 2005). Being in a sporting environment will not result in positive youth development unless there is someone there to systematically teach life skills. Therefore, if life skills are to be learnt coaches, parents, and peers must systematically teach life skills. However, based on the results of Study Two and my own experience participating and coaching in youth sport I do not subscribe to this belief.

My own experiences in youth sport lead me to believe that you can learn life skills in the absence of systematic teaching strategies. Specifically, the characteristics of the sport often require young people to take up certain roles and behaviours in order to participate in that sport. For example, if a doubles team do not learn and practice communication, they will not perform and if they wish to stay in the sport they will have to learn communication skills. Similarly, individual



experiences within the sport will also create scenarios where young people need to learn skills. For example, a young person may be required to learn time management skills to manage the requirements of being a student athlete; if they do not learn these skills, their athletic and academic performance will inevitably suffer. I believe if young people do not learn the skills required by the sport and the situations, which they find themselves in they will not perform to their potential in the sport, will change to sports that require skills they already have, or they will drop out of sport all together.

This belief does not mean that coaches, parents, and peers do not have a role to play in developing life skills. I have found that significant others can play a major role in positive youth development. Skilled coaches can engineer situations that require adolescents to learn skills and behave in specific ways; similarly, parents and peers can model and reinforce life skills. In essence this approach is a collaborative action between the adolescent and significant others where the young person is an agent in his/her own development whilst being supported by others to facilitate this process.

### *Lessons learnt*

My experience of teaching the SUPER programme, my own beliefs about how to develop life skills, and my understanding of life skills and positive youth development literature (see Chapter Two) has led me the following guidelines for designing an applied life skills programme:

1. Life skills education should be as experiential as possible. Where possible the experience of playing sport should be used to teach life skills rather than using direct skills tutoring where young people are removed from the sporting experience to learn life skills.



2. If a participant workbook is used it should be used to augment experiential learning rather than being the focus of the programme.
3. The location of where the programme is delivered should not have negative connotations (e.g., if it also used as a school or area where participants are put to take a punishment time out)
4. Life skills programmes should be tailored to the needs of the participants.
5. The duration of a life skills programme should be carefully considered so that participants do not get bored. This may mean interventions last less than nine months, however parents, coaches, and other significant adults should reinforce life skills over prolonged periods as part of broader participation in sport.
6. Where possible the sporting experience should be tailored to teach life skills. Specifically, sport participants should be required to demonstrate life skills in order to be successful in that environment (e.g., learning teamwork in order to play a team sport).
7. Life skills programmes should be evaluated using quantitative and qualitative methods to capture the experience of being a participant in the programme as well as the overall effects.
8. Positive youth development is an individual experience and not all people will develop in the same way at the same time. Therefore, evaluation should focus on the individual not the group.

#### *ELITE life skills programme: Introduction*

It is important to describe in detail the specific elements of a programme and how they were delivered in order to understand and interpret the results of any outcome analysis (Catalano et al., 1998).



Process research identifies and examines the specific programme features that are related to programme outcomes. In terms of the framework, this research identifies the particular external assets and features of the context that are related to the development of specific internal assets. This research is essential for programmes that are evolving. As programmes change over time, it is necessary to know which external assets are directly related to programme success and which components can be discarded or modified without any significant impact on outcome.

The ELITE life skills programme was developed as an eight week life skills programme that aimed to increase participant's self-awareness of the skills they have learnt through their experiences in sport and how they can be used in other contexts. The programme was set at eight weeks because two life skills were targeted. Based on the results of the needs analysis (Study One) it was decided to target communication skills and organisation skills. It is worth noting, however, that the intervention procedures were designed so that any life skill could be targeted. The programme could be extended if additional skills were taught (e.g., three skills over 12 weeks, four life skills over 16 weeks, five life skills over 20 weeks). The programme was developed so that the participants learnt through experience rather than spending hours in a classroom. The programme implemented two four-week phases. The first phase targeted communication skills, the second phase targeted organisation skills. Each phase used the same intervention procedures, specifically the first session involved looking back on what one had learnt in training, the second week focused on what had been learnt in competition, the third week focused on planning for the future, the fourth and final phase aimed to give participants an opportunity to use the targeted skills in non sport settings.



The ELITE life skills programme was informed by two theories: The Life Development Intervention (Danish, Petitpas, & Hale, 1993) and Experiential Learning Theory, specifically Reflective Practice (Schön, 1987). The following section describes these theoretical foundations.

### *Life Development Intervention*

The Life Development Intervention suggests sport can be used to teach life skills because it is a context that people freely choose to participate and it is closely tied to other life domains. One of the unique points that this model claims is that skills learnt from sport can be transferred into other life domains. Danish et al. (1993) stated one of the barriers to skill transfer may be that athletes are not aware of the skills they have developed through sport that are transferable to other areas of life. They suggest several factors and characteristics that can encourage transfer of skills. Life skills could be transferred to other life domains if athletes increase their awareness of the skills they have acquired through their experiences in sport, knowledge of how and in what context skills were learnt, and awareness that these skills are valued in other life domains and that these skills can be applied in other life domains. Mayocchi and Hanrahan (2000) also suggested self-awareness was a critical element in developing life skills. Although, like Danish and colleagues they admit skills transfer is not guaranteed, they drew upon research from organisational psychology and sport psychology to develop a set of methods to enhance skill transfer. They identified individual characteristics including perceived value and level of skills awareness, motivation, and enthusiasm, and self-efficacy in moderating skills transfer. In order to facilitate transfer they also suggested athletes should be encouraged to increase their awareness of the skills they possess, when to use skills, and how skills were learnt. Furthermore, athletes should be provided with



feedback about their attempts to transfer skills and help in developing action plans for use of skills in the future. Mayocchi and Hanrahan concluded:

Without an understanding of the value of the types of skills that they possess, and an awareness of when certain skills may be applicable in different settings . . . it is likely that skill transfer will occur by chance or unintentionally, if at all. Therefore, the challenge is to help athletes realise and identify what skills they have developed through sport so that, where relevant, these skills will be applied in different settings (p. 101).

The objective of the ELITE life skills programme was therefore to create a way of increasing a sport participant's awareness of the skills they have developed through sport, why these skills are useful in other life domains, and ultimately to improve upon the life skills they already have. Because of my experiences in teaching the SUPER programme experiential learning theory was examined.

#### *Experiential learning: Reflective practice*

Experiential learning involves learning by doing and then reflecting on the process. Experiential education is based on the belief that active learning is more valuable for the learner because they are directly responsible for, and involved in the process. Proponents of this approach believe that learning is a result of direct experience, and includes the premise that people learn best when they have multiple senses actively involved in learning (Crisp, 1998). Individuals learn when placed outside their comfort zones and into a state of dissonance. Learning is then assumed to occur through the changes required to bring the individual back into balance and achieve personal equilibrium (Crisp, 1998).

Reflective practice is located within the older tradition of experiential learning. Experiential learning theorists, including Dewey, Lewin, and Piaget, maintained that



learning is most effective, most likely to lead to change when it begins with experience. Marsick (1988) suggested reflection was aimed at increasing personal awareness and self-understanding. Furthermore, Edwards (1999) stated reflection is the mechanism by which people learn through experience. As such, reflective practice was used to inform the development of the ELITE life skills programme. Schön (1987) presented a theory of reflective practice as a method of learning that emphasised looking to our experiences and connecting with our feelings. Schön's theory of experiential learning and reflective practice has been suggested to stand apart from the other theories due to the fact that it centres on the construction of domain specific knowledge, through the context of professional practice (i.e., learning via personal experiences). Schön denounced technical rationality as the grounding of knowledge, suggesting it is an inappropriate practice in a dynamic world. Schön compared learning through technical rationality to the charging of a battery. He suggested this positivist epistemology of practice, which aimed to charge people up with information in training so that the information can be discharged in practice, is not an accurate representation of how people think and act (Schön, 1987). As such, Schön presented an alternative epistemology of practice in which knowledge is gained through experience.

Schön's (1987) theory suggested people learn in two different ways. Firstly, people gain knowledge through what he called reflection in action. Reflection in action, also known as thinking on your feet, involves developing new understandings to inform our actions in the situation that is unfolding. Schön suggested that when individuals go about the spontaneous, intuitive performance of actions of everyday life, they demonstrate specific knowledge. However, often this knowledge cannot be articulated; individuals cannot say what they know, they do what they know (i.e.,



knowledge is in action). For example, a child will be able coordinate the multiple bodily movements involved in throwing a ball and judge the distance of a target, however it is unlikely that they would not be able to articulate how they did this. Similarly, people will learn life skills by being in a sporting environment but they may not be able to articulate which skills they learnt or how they learnt them.

An individual restructures his/her understanding of the situation and invents new strategies of action. New strategies are then tried out as and when similar situations present themselves. Overall, reflection in action is non-cognitive knowing (Van Manen, 1999) in which knowledge resides in the actions that are lived and experienced by individuals. As such, if young people have been involved in organised sport programmes it is reasonable to conclude that they will have been exposed to a range of skill building experiences. However, young people may be unaware of knowledge in action that they have acquired during their sporting experiences (i.e., the life skills they have learnt and the applicability of these skills across domains).

In order to highlight what people learn in practice and to prevent individuals becoming narrow, repetitive, conservative and unreflective another type of reflection needs to be employed. Reflection on action can be used to explore why we acted as we did, what was happening in a situation and why, what we have learnt, and how we can use this knowledge in the future. The outcome of reflection on action is a repertoire of thoughts and ideas, based on successful response strategies, and outcomes that one can draw upon when confronted with new scenarios. Schön (1987) posited that this repertoire is central to reflective thought. Specifically, when an individual makes sense of a situation they perceive to be unique they relate it to previous experiences. The familiar experience (i.e., sport) functions as a precedent, a



metaphor, or an exemplar for the unfamiliar one (i.e., a non sport life domain) therefore allowing one to function when in unfamiliar scenarios (Schön, 1987). The true value of reflection on action is revealed when questions arise that cannot be answered in the present. The process of reflection on action after an event allows us to approach these questions.

Reflection on action can take the form of retrospective reflection on action, in which one thinks back to experiences, and anticipatory reflection on action, in which one anticipates what future scenarios one may face. Specific strategies to engage in reflection on action include journaling, group discussions, and one-to-one meetings. It is important to have structured reflection so that appropriate questions are asked to ensure the reflection goes somewhere meaningful. This structure formed the backbone of the ELITE life skills intervention.

#### *ELITE life skills: Programme description*

During the final week of baseline the participants were invited to attend a presentation outlining the intervention procedures (Appendix H). Participants were told what to expect over the next eight weeks and were given a copy of their reflection journal so that they could familiarise themselves with it (Appendix I). The journal included week-by-week instructions, progressions if participants chose to work on their life skills between sessions and spaces to make notes. Participants were given options regarding how they used the workbook. Participants were asked to read the questions and discuss amongst themselves, make notes, or discuss with me. It was made clear that the journals belonged to the participants, that I did not expect to read their notes, that I did not want the journals back at the end of the programme, and that notes and discussions would remain confidential unless instructed otherwise.



The sessions were guided by the ELITE life skills workbook, which specified the learning objectives for each session, predicted length of the session, explanations of key terms, key teaching points, equipment lists, progressions, and any other comments (Appendix J).

Session one engaged the participants in reflection on action regarding their experiences in training scenarios, session two engaged the participants in reflection on action regarding their experiences in competitive scenarios, session three engaged the participants in anticipatory reflection where they planned for the future, finally session four gave participants the opportunity to use there skills in non sport domains (i.e., reflecting in action). The same procedure was then used to target different life skills (i.e., organisation). Once the final reflection in action session had been completed participants completed a social validity interview / focus group.

It is now important to test whether these reflective practice techniques can be used to improve the life skills of British adolescent competitive sport participants before efficacy trials of the ELITE life skills programme can be tested as a whole.



## Reflections

The development of the ELITE life skills programme and the choice of Experiential Learning Theory, specifically Schön's (1987) Reflective Practice Theory, was the result of several years of experiences in youth sport and sport psychology in addition to the results from Study One and Study Two. Thus it was difficult to capture all these experiences in one chapter. As I began this research I spent considerable time thinking about my own involvement in sport and thought about how I had learnt skills and how I had improved. I also spent time coaching tennis and conducted a series of trial and error experiments in my own coaching style and the types of things that were delivered to so how young people responded. This critical mass of experience inevitably influenced my decisions to develop experience based intervention techniques. On reflection these experiences may have also influenced my interpretation of Linda's sport experience in Study Two. In phenomenological studies (as opposed to interpretative/hermeneutic phenomenology) these assumptions are bracketed out so that the lived experience of the participant comes to the fore without the biases of the researcher affecting the results. While I do not think I lead Linda into describing experiential learning I think it is worth acknowledging that I shared her opinions before the research was conducted.



## **Chapter Seven**

### **Study Three: Improving life skills through the ELITE life skills programme**



## Abstract

### *Problem*

The problem exists that no research has tested whether Experiential Learning Theory, specifically Reflective Practice (Schön, 1987) can be used to improve the life skills of British adolescent competitive sport participants, who are in full time education.

### *Aim*

The aim of the current study was to evaluate reflective practice intervention procedures as a method of improving the life skills of a sample of British adolescent competitive sport participants, who are in full time education.

### *Methodology*

The participants were six male field hockey players and three female tennis players from a British University. A single subject, multiple baselines, across behaviours design was used to examine the effects of the ELITE life skills programme procedures on communication skills, organisation skills, and composite developmental experiences.

### *Results*

The results demonstrated that a life skills intervention based on reflective practice could improve the life skills of British adolescent competitive sport participants. Single subject findings pointed to differences in skill improvement across participants. During post intervention interviews and focus groups participants described that the targeted life skills were important, the intervention procedures



were acceptable and enjoyable, and participants felt by taking part they had increased their self-awareness, leading to increased reports of developmental experiences.

### *Contributions*

Results from the current study contribute to the existing literature by demonstrating that life skills intervention can employ experiential learning practices to improve the life skills of British adolescent competitive sport participants. The study contributes to wider positive youth development literature by demonstrating that sport can be used as a context in which life skills can be improved. Results from the current study contribute to the overall thesis by providing an evaluation of life skills intervention procedures that shows that life skills of British adolescent competitive sport participants can be improved. The current study also provides the basis for discussion in Study Four.



## Introduction

There is a commonly held belief that sport can be used as a vehicle to teach positive character and life skills to young people (Danish & Nellens, 1997).

However, it is unclear how participating in sport can improve these life skills. Young athletes who become involved in sport, and stay involved, may do so because their values are consistent with the types of experiences that sport provides (Petitpas et al., 2005). This involvement does not necessarily mean they are thriving in sport. They may just have the skills to survive in this environment. Moreover, those who have skills that are valued in sport may not have the skills that are valued across domains. The field of positive youth development is predicated on the belief that young people who are problem free are not necessarily enabled to thrive in life (Damon, 2004). As such, it is important to improve these life skills and build upon pre existing strengths so that these young people can thrive beyond the normal requirements of sport and life.

Carefully designed studies will enable researchers to establish what types of sport based interventions work, with which populations, and under what conditions (Holt & Jones, 2007). Glynn and Cullen (1989) suggested five phases of translational research that can be used as a guide for developing interventions: basic research, methods development, efficacy trials, effectiveness trials, and dissemination trials. Phase one involves the generation of explanatory models and findings that can inform the design of intervention components. Phase two incorporates the development of research and intervention methods that are needed to harness basic concepts in an applied setting. This can include the feasibility testing of novel interventions based on basic science findings. Phase three involves efficacy trials, which determine whether an intervention produces the expected result under



ideal circumstances. Phase four involves effectiveness trials, which is the implementation and testing of intervention programmes in real-world conditions. Phase five involves the evaluation of conditions that facilitate or impede the widespread distribution and adoption of the intervention. Therefore, before efficacy trials can be conducted it is important to develop and evaluate interventions strategies in phase two.

The ELITE life skills programme has been developed as a method to improve the life skills of British adolescent competitive sport participants. This intervention is grounded in basic research that investigated the life skills needs of British adolescent sport participants and the types of learning strategies that could be used to improve these life skills. Results showed that British adolescent competitive sport participants, who are in full time education, require communication skills and organisation skills. Additionally, results demonstrated that experiential learning strategies have been used to improve life skills. This initial research (i.e., Study One and Study Two) can be classified as phase one research in line with Glynn and Cullen's (1989) framework. Phase two includes the development of intervention methods (see Chapter Six) and testing the feasibility of these intervention methods before broader efficacy, effectiveness, and dissemination trials can begin. As such, before the ELITE life skills programme can be tested in efficacy, effectiveness, and dissemination trials it is important to establish whether reflective practice intervention techniques can be used to improve the life skills of British adolescent competitive sport participants. To this end, the aim of the current study was to evaluate the reflective practice intervention strategies, employed in the ELITE life skills programme, to see whether they could be used to improve the life skills of British adolescent competitive sport participants.



Evaluations of intervention strategies can be conducted at group and/or individual levels. Lerner et al. (2006) stated that because of the multiple levels of organisation in developmental systems (e.g., genetic, biological, physiological, cultural, & historical) and the interaction of these levels, there are limitless developmental trajectories young people can follow. Moreover, no two people will develop in the same way at the same time. As such, group based interventions may not reflect the needs of the individual and may not capture how individuals improve their life skills. When averaging group results and relying upon statistical significance to evaluate data important idiographic nuances of how individuals progress through an intervention may be missed. For example, individuals may learn skills at different stages and rates. Similarly, there may be no significant differences but there may be practical significance for the participant, which would aid the individual in real life. There are also practical and ethical problems associated with using a group intervention for the current investigation. Specifically, it would be unethical to leave a no treatment group without the life skills programme, and time constraints of PhD research make it difficult to offer a waitlist control group.

Single subject research is appropriate for evaluating intervention strategies because of the capacity to scientifically evaluate interventions with a focus on the individual (Hrycaiko & Martin, 1996). Furthermore, single subject research methods provide a level of experimental rigour beyond that found in traditional case studies (Horner, Carr, Halle, McGee, Odom, & Wolery, 2005). As with group designs, single subject research designs compare performance under two conditions. However, rather than comparing two separate groups of subjects, single subject designs compare the same subject across different periods of time (i.e., at baseline before the intervention and then during the intervention). Thus, the subject acts as his



or her own control. As such, ethical issues of having waitlist control groups and issues related to group averages are removed.

It was hypothesised that by employing reflective practice participants would improve their communication skills and organisation skills. It was also hypothesised that the process of reflection would also increase reports of other developmental experiences associated with participation in sport (e.g., teamwork and social skills, interpersonal relationships, adult networks and social capital, identity experiences, initiative experiences, and basic skills).

### Methodology

#### *Participants*

Nine male field hockey players and three female tennis players participated in this study. Head coaches and participants were emailed and approached at normal practice sessions and asked to participate in the investigation. It was explained that participation was voluntary, participants were free to withdraw, and choosing not to participate would not influence future selection. Participants were asked to read and sign an informed consent form (Appendix C). Participants had a mean age of 20.31 ( $\pm 1.03$ ) years and 12.17 ( $\pm 2.87$ ) years of playing experience in their chosen sport. All participants were training and competing throughout the intervention. No participants had previous experience of life skill programmes.

#### *Experimental design*

A single subject, multiple baselines, across behaviours design was used to examine the effects of the ELITE life skills programme intervention techniques. With a multiple baseline, across behaviours design the same treatment variable is applied sequentially to separate, independent target variables (e.g., life skills) in a single subject (Barlow and Hersen, 1984). Baseline data were collected until the data



were stable or in the opposite direction hypothesised as result of the treatment (Johnson, Hrycaiko, Johnson & Halas, 2004). Once stability was achieved, the treatments were given to the participants sequentially. Specifically, the treatment of the first targeted behaviour (communication) was introduced followed by the second targeted behaviour (organisation).

### *Measures*

Developmental experiences (including communication skills and organisation skills) were assessed using a modified version of the YES 2.0 (Hansen & Larson, 2005). The instrument was designed to obtain reports on the types of developmental experiences encountered in organised activities. The adapted YES items focused on positive developmental experiences within four domains of personal development (identity work, initiative, basic skills, organisation skills) and four domains of interpersonal development (teamwork and social skills, positive relationships, adult networks and social capital, and communication skills). In addition to adding communication and organisation domains modifications to the YES included removing negative domains and replacing the four point Likert scale with a sliding scale. Participants marked a line ranging from "yes definitely" to "not at all". Marks were then assigned a number between 1-10 dependent on their position along the scale. Permission was gained to adapt the YES 2.0 (Appendix F). All new items were supported by existing research and were examined by a group of graduate students, the research supervisor, and faculty staff. The adapted YES scale can be found in the appendices (Appendix F).

### *Procedure*

All experimental procedures were incorporated into the normal training and competition schedules of the athletes over a period of 17 weeks. The intervention



was delivered to two separate groups. In the field hockey group no one attended all sessions. Field hockey participants attended an average of 75.8 per cent of sessions. In the tennis group one tennis participant had 100 per cent attendance with the remaining two participants missing just one session. The average attendance in the tennis group was 92 per cent. Both groups of participants were asked to attend training sessions one hour early to participate in the research. Squad members who were not participating in the research were also invited to participate in sessions at their discretion.

### *Baseline*

Baseline data was taken over a period of six weeks. Participants filled out the YES before each training session.

### *Introduction presentation*

On the seventh week, participants were given an introduction presentation where the intervention procedures were explained to them. Essentially this was the final baseline measurement before the intervention proper started.

### *Intervention*

It was decided to stagger the introduction of intervention procedures for targeted behaviours, rather than staggering the introduction of individual participants to the intervention, because communication skills are essentially interpersonal life skills. Therefore, to enable participants to use communication skills during normal practice and competition it was necessary for all participants within the group to start at the same point.

The intervention was split into two distinct phases targeting separate life skills. Each phase was characterised by two sessions of reflection on action, one session of



planning, and one session of reflecting in action (Schön, 1987). Once the first phase had finished the second life skill was targeted.

### *Follow-up*

Study participants were invited to attend a focus group interview and/or individual interview to assess the social validity of the research. Additionally, participants completed final questionnaires to assess the maintenance of self-reported behaviours at one and two weeks after the termination of the intervention.

### *Treatment of the data*

The traditional approach to analysis of single subject research involves systematic visual comparison of the results (Hrycaiko & Martin, 1996). Participants' scores were plotted for baseline, introduction presentation, communication intervention, organisation intervention, and follow-up phases. Data was subjected to a visual inspection to identify whether a significant effect occurred because of the intervention. The following criteria was used: a) the baseline was either stable or in an opposite direction to that predicted for the treatment, b) an effect has been observed with few overlapping data points between baseline and treatment phases, c) an effect has been observed sooner following the introduction of treatment and, d) an effect observed is larger compared with the baseline (Johnson et al., 2004; Rogerson & Hrycaiko, 2002).

Additional means of establishing whether treatment effects were a function of the intervention were included. Specifically, six additional YES subscales were included to evaluate whether the intervention influenced non-targeted life skills. The six subscales were grouped into interpersonal domains (teamwork & social skills, adult networks & social capital, & interpersonal relationships) and personal domains (initiative, identity, & basic skills). Assessment of these domains established whether



the intervention improved non-targeted life skills, or whether improvement in targeted life skills occurred at the expense of others (Swain & Jones, 1995). Finally, data were compared across cases to establish whether effects were generic across the sample as well as looking for individual nuances.

### *Social validity*

Social validation interviews evaluated the practical and applied importance of the intervention. Wolf (1978) suggested social validity could be established by examining the extent to which the dependent variables were important to the participant, by assessing whether the procedures used were deemed acceptable to participants, and by determining whether the participants were satisfied with the results. These questions formed the basis of a questioning route that guided a series of one-to-one interviews and focus groups (see Appendix G).

### *Procedural reliability assessment of treatment*

Hrycaiko and Martin (1996) stated that it is not enough to simply report that a particular treatment was applied. Rather steps must be taken to ensure that the intervention treatment is applied to participants exactly as it was intended. Procedural reliability was ensured by committing all intervention procedures to a leader manual, which guided intervention procedures (see Appendix J). The intervention procedure for each week was also included in participants' workbooks so that participants could read ahead and plan for future sessions. Issues of procedural reliability were also addressed in social validity interviews.

## **Results**

The data for the participants' communication, organisation, and composite developmental experiences across baseline, intervention, and follow-up are displayed graphically and assessed visually. Supplementary graphs of each developmental



domain across participants (i.e., teamwork and social skills, interpersonal relationships, adult networks and social capital, identity experiences, initiative experiences, basic skills, composite interpersonal life skills, and composite personal life skills) are included in the appendix (Appendix K) to elucidate the composite developmental experience graphs. A cross case analysis is presented to show trends across the group. Finally, results from a series of interviews and focus groups are presented to demonstrate the social validity of the ELITE life skills programme intervention procedures.

### *Idiographic analysis*

#### *Participant one*

*Communication.* Participant one showed gradual improvement in communication over the span of the intervention. During baseline, communication was going in the opposite direction to a hypothesised effect. During both intervention phases mean communication increased, however, trends showed it was decreasing. Finally, it decreased during follow-up. Overall, there is confidence that the intervention had an effect, however, the effect was observed in the organisation phase of the intervention, which was not hypothesised. In addition, maintenance of communication was not achieved.

*Organisation.* Baseline was in the opposite direction of a hypothesised effect. The range of reported organisation during baseline meant there was overlapping data points across intervention phases. Effects were observed during intervention phases however, because of overlapping data points and the small effect size confidence in the intervention causing the effect is low.

*Developmental experiences.* Participant one showed clear increases from baseline through intervention phases. Baseline was in the opposite hypothesised



direction with few overlapping data points. During intervention phases, mean developmental experiences increased however, trends showed decreases, which would explain the decreased mean during follow-up.

*Participant one summary.* In summary the ELITE life skills programme procedures did not have a significant, maintained effect on communication or organisation. However, effects of overall developmental experiences were observed suggesting other life skills have been improved (See Appendix K).



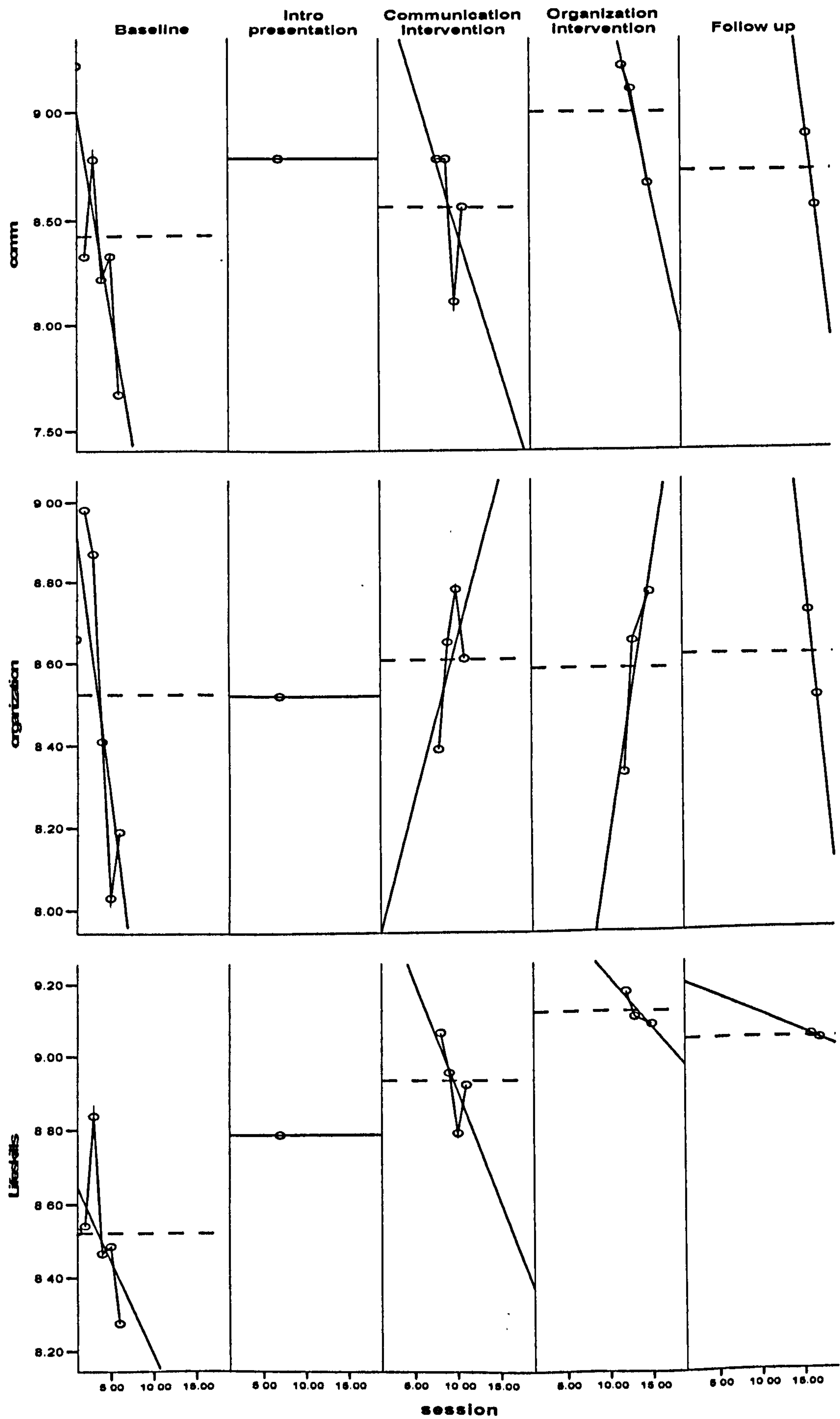


Figure 8: Participant one, communication, organisation and composite developmental experiences



### *Participant two*

*Communication.* The intervention appears to have had an effect during the communication phase (i.e., positive trend line). However, data points overlap with baseline and there is an overall decrease in communication between baseline and follow-up. As such, confidence in the intervention is low.

*Organisation.* An effect was observed when organisation was introduced. However, there were overlapping data points between baseline and organisation and the overall effect was not large. Interestingly, effects increased during follow-up, but again the size of the effect was not large in comparison to the baseline.

*Developmental experiences.* Overall, no effect was observed during intervention. Follow-up showed some improvements compared to baseline, however, there were overlapping data points, which reduce confidence that the intervention caused these effects.

*Participant two summary.* Overall, the intervention had no effect on communication, organisation, or composite developmental experiences. Effects were seen during follow-up periods (i.e., increased mean and positive trend), which may suggest the intervention was successful. It may be that this participant needed time to allow the information to “sink in” before an effect was reported. Further follow-up measurements would have been useful; however, participant two was not available following the final follow-up collection.



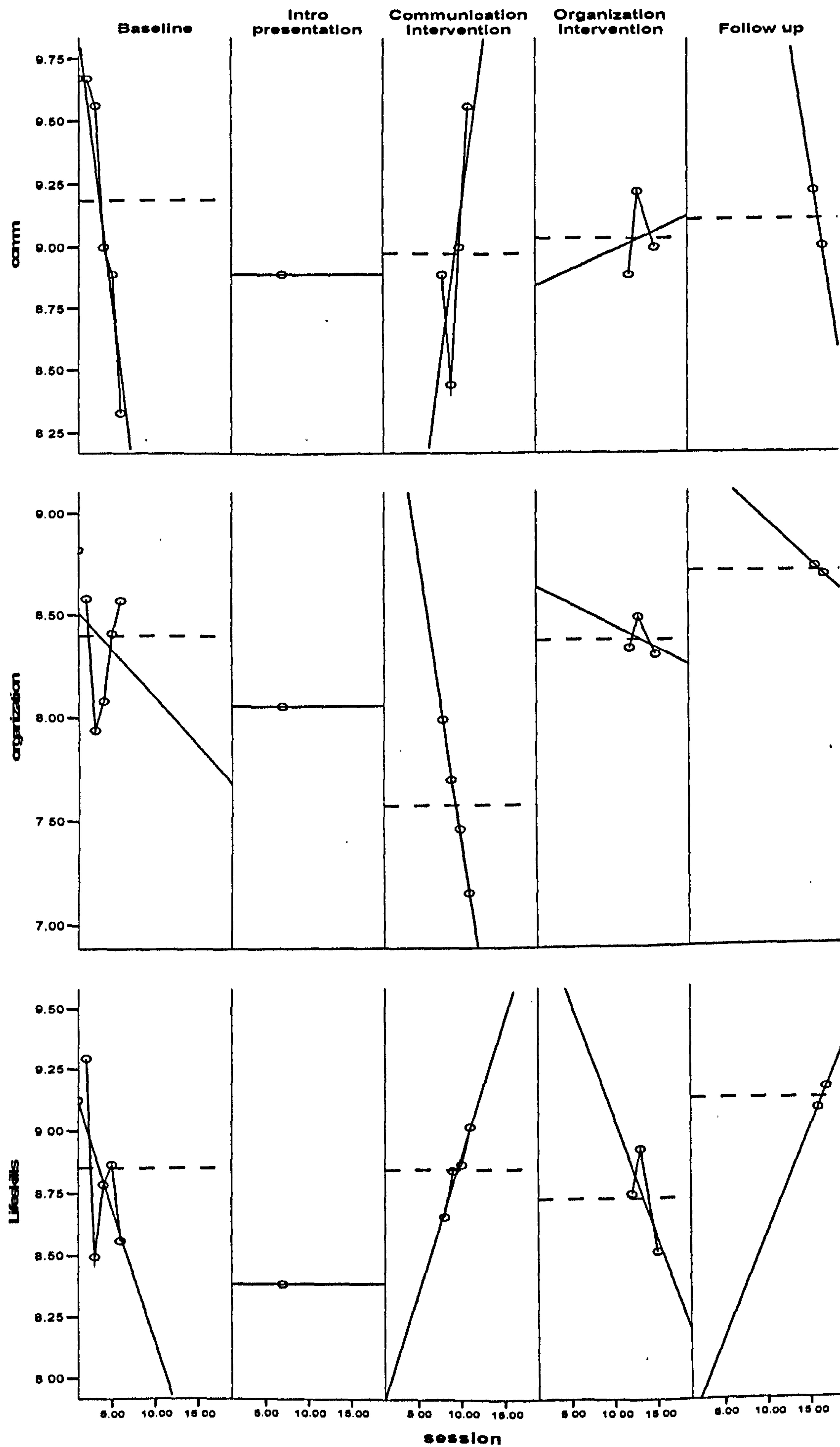


Figure 9: Participant two, communication, organisation, and composite developmental experiences



### *Participant three*

*Communication.* Communication increased between baseline and the communication intervention. However, there were overlapping data points between these two phases. Trend lines demonstrate that communication was increasing until initiation of the organisation intervention, upon which communication dropped. Communication during follow-up was not maintained however, it did not fall below baseline levels.

*Organisation.* Organisation increased between baseline and follow-up. There were however, overlapping data points between baseline and intervention phases. Overall, a mean effect was observed. Participant three only attended two out of four organisation sessions, which might explain the decreasing trends during the intervention phase.

*Developmental experiences.* An effect was observed between baseline and follow-up; however, there were two overlapping data points. Overall, the ELITE life skill intervention has had an effect on reported developmental experiences. A steep increase was observed during the communication intervention, which suggests, for this participant, reflecting on communication influenced other life skills. Because only one follow-up was collected it is not possible to know whether experiences were increasing or decreasing during follow-up.

*Participant three summary.* In summary, the ELITE life skills programme procedures do not appear to have had an effect on the communication or organisation. Composite developmental experiences have increased. However, because of overlapping data points and the small effect size in comparison to baseline, confidence that the ELITE life skills programme procedures caused these effects is lowered.



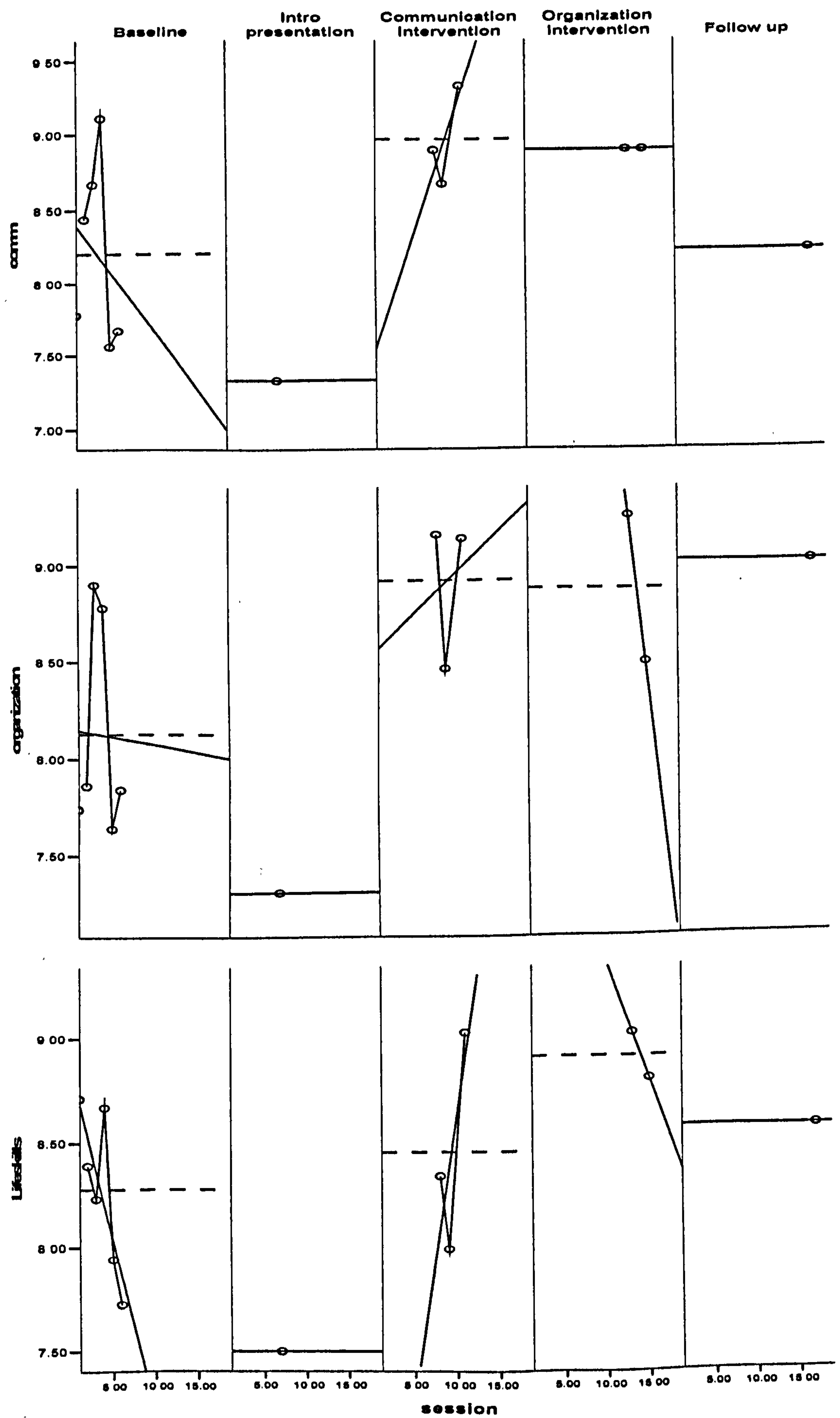


Figure 10: Participant three, communication, organisation and composite developmental experiences



### *Participant four*

*Communication.* An effect was observed between baseline and follow-up. One baseline measure was much higher than others leading to one overlapping data point and a baseline going in the same direction as a hypothesised effect. Organisation also decreased during the organisation intervention, but increased again at follow-up. As such, confidence is lowered, despite the fact that mean communication increased across intervention phases.

*Organisation.* As with communication, baseline for organisation was going in the direction to a hypothesised effect. Similarly, there are overlapping data points. Across intervention phases, there is a change in the mean and organisation appears to be increasing during both intervention phases. The final follow-up is higher than all baseline measures. However, because of the increasing baseline scores it is harder to demonstrate that it is the intervention that has caused this effect.

*Developmental experiences.* As with communication and organisation, the developmental baseline is going in the direction of a hypothesised effect. As such, subsequent increases are not necessarily caused by the intervention. There were observed effects across intervention phases with the communication phase showing gains in reported developmental experiences. The organisation intervention led to decreases in these gains, however, mean scores were still higher than the previous phase and increased further at follow-up.

*Participant four summary.* In summary, despite the fact that communication organisation and composite developmental experiences increased between baseline and follow, confidence in the intervention causing these effects is compromised. Specifically, the increasing baseline suggests increases would have happened without the intervention.



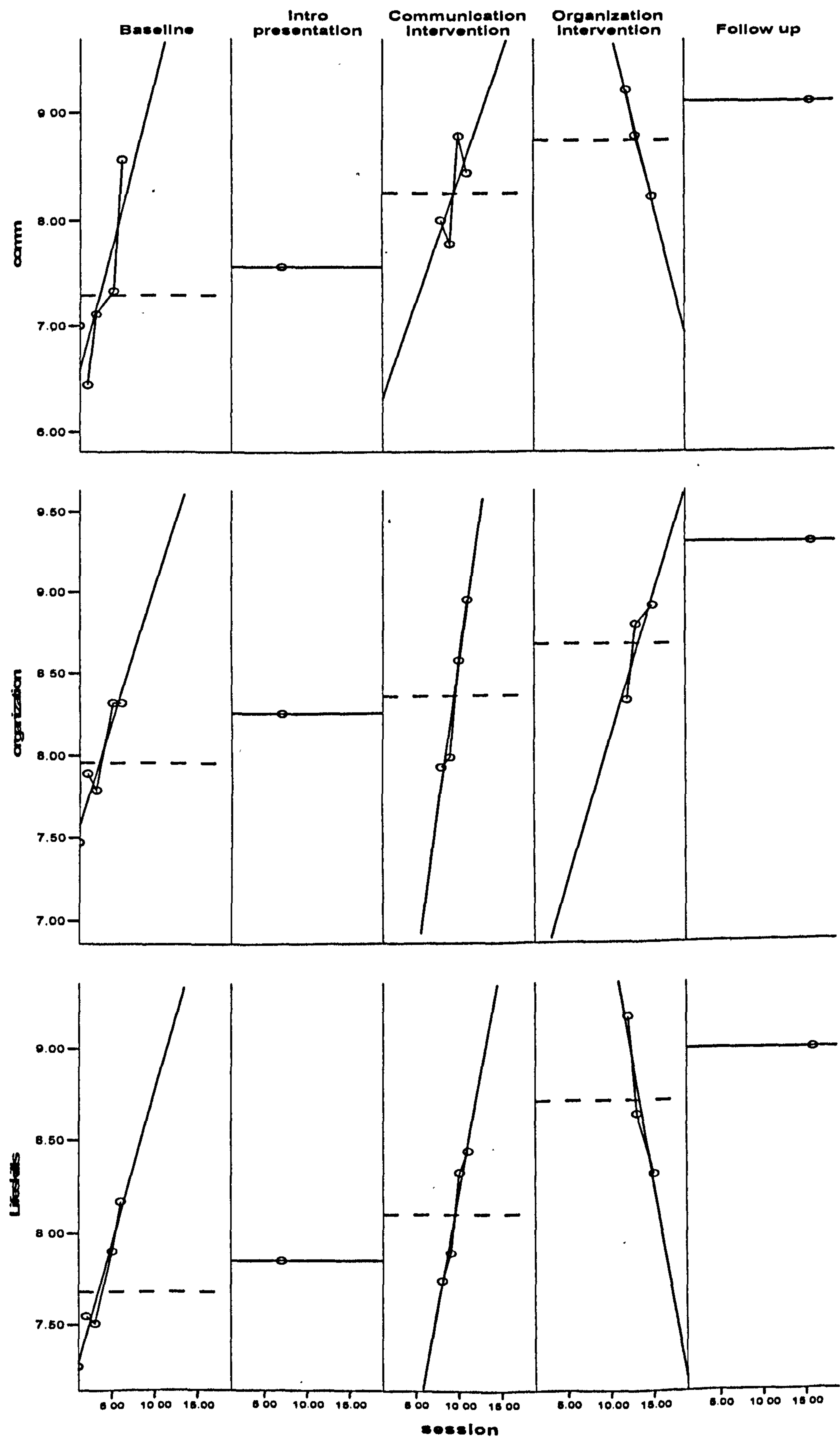


Figure 11: Participant four, communication, organisation, and composite developmental experiences



### *Participant five*

*Communication.* An effect was observed between baseline and the communication intervention phase. The baseline was in an opposite direction to that hypothesised and there were no overlapping data points. Finally the difference in means score between baseline and intervention is large. Post communication intervention, communication scores revert to baseline level, however, trends show they are increasing during follow-up.

*Organisation.* An effect was observed between baseline and organisation intervention phases. However, between the introduction presentation and the organisation intervention a small effect was observed. This would suggest that experiencing the introduction presentation and the communication interventions are as attributable as the strategies specifically targeted at organisation. Mean organisation remained high during follow-up, however it was decreasing.

*Developmental experiences.* Developmental experiences increased between baseline and follow-up. Baseline was relatively stable and there were no overlapping data points. The effect is large in comparison to baseline and an effect is observed immediately upon completion of baseline. Overall, it can be concluded that observed effects could be attributed to the ELITE life skills programme procedures.

*Participant five summary.* The ELITE life skills programme procedures had an effect on the communication, organisation, and composite developmental experiences of participant five. Interestingly, these increases do not necessarily happen at hypothesised times. Organisation increased because of the introduction presentation and the communication intervention. For this participant it appears that simply learning about reflection increased his life skills.



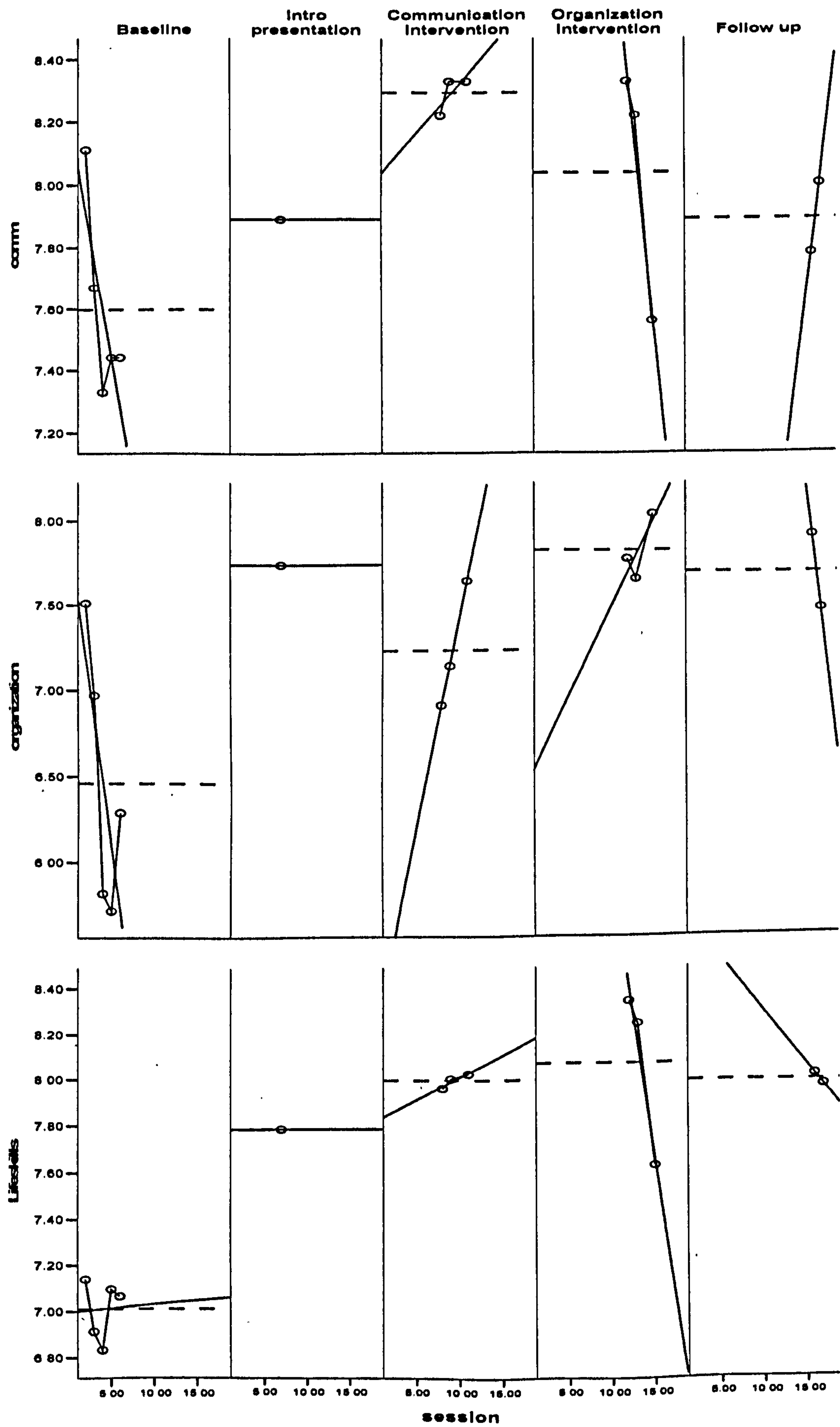


Figure 12: Participant five, communication, organisation and composite developmental experiences



### *Participant six*

*Communication.* An effect was observed between baseline and the communication intervention. However, baseline increased in the direction of the hypothesised change. Communication decreased slightly during the organisation intervention and again during follow-up. Participant six only attended one organisation session and one follow-up so it is hard to draw conclusions about these phases. At follow-up, results were still higher than baseline.

*Organisation.* An effect was observed between baseline and follow-up however, participant six attended only one organisation intervention session. Therefore, attributing changes in organisation to the organisation intervention is problematic. Changes could have occurred due to the communication intervention as trends showed increases during this phase. Changes could also have been a result of some extraneous variable as increases were also observed during baseline.

*Developmental experiences.* Overall, developmental experiences increased between baseline and follow-up. There were few overlapping data points and the size of the observed effect is moderate. However, baseline was in the same direction as the hypothesised change. Therefore, confidence that changes were due to the intervention is compromised.

*Participant six summary.* In summary, the participant has increased his communication, organisation, and composite developmental experiences. However, because of the increasing baseline, confidence that these effects were due to the intervention procedures cannot be assured.



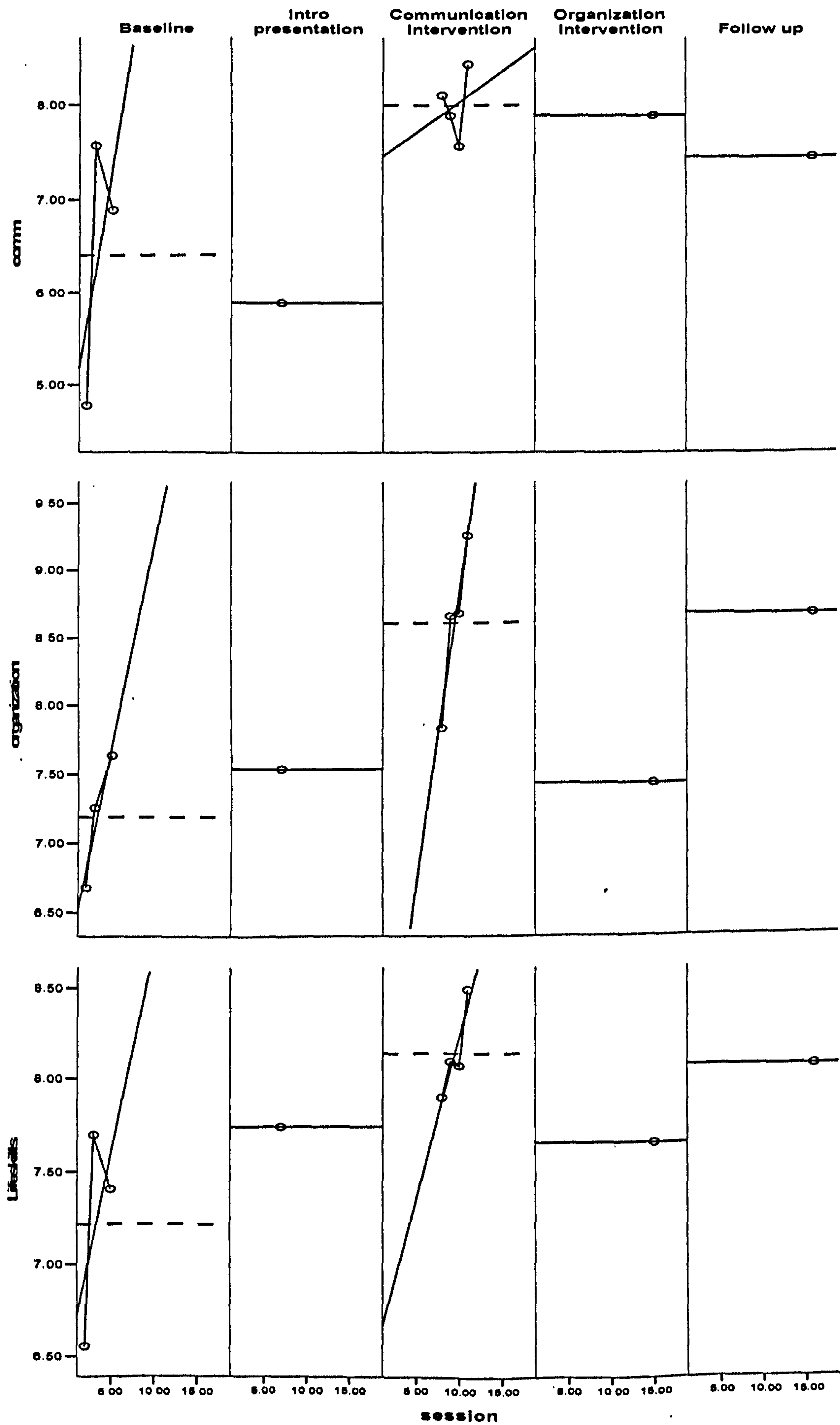


Figure 13: Participant six, communication, organisation, and composite developmental experiences



### *Participant seven*

*Communication.* Participant seven was the first female of the sample. She was also the first tennis player. During the intervention phases, her communication and organisation did not change from baseline levels. Follow-up were slightly higher but were still overlapping with baseline. The highest scores were during the introduction presentation, which was surprising given that no life skills were targeted during this session. Therefore, these changes were probably not due to the introduction presentation but rather some extraneous variable.

*Organisation.* An effect was observed between baseline and follow-up with few overlapping data points. During both intervention phases, organisation was increasing. Therefore, it was not the targeted intervention that caused the increases. Learning to reflect could have stimulated the participant to reflect on non-targeted skills. As with previous participants the mean follow-up increased, however, trends suggest that over time these scores would drop.

*Developmental experiences.* An effect was observed for composite developmental experiences between baseline and follow-up. Trends across phases suggest developmental experiences increased because of the intervention. However, increases during baseline reduce overall confidence that changes were due to the intervention. Maintenance of increased developmental experiences is questionable as trends indicate decreases post intervention.

*Participant seven summary.* In summary, the ELITE life skills programme procedures have had a limited effect on participant seven's communication. Developmental experiences have changed over the duration of the intervention; however, some life skills were improving during baseline (see Appendix K) hence the average of developmental experiences is skewed. Confidence is relatively high



that changes in organisation can be attributed to the ELITE life skills programme procedures.



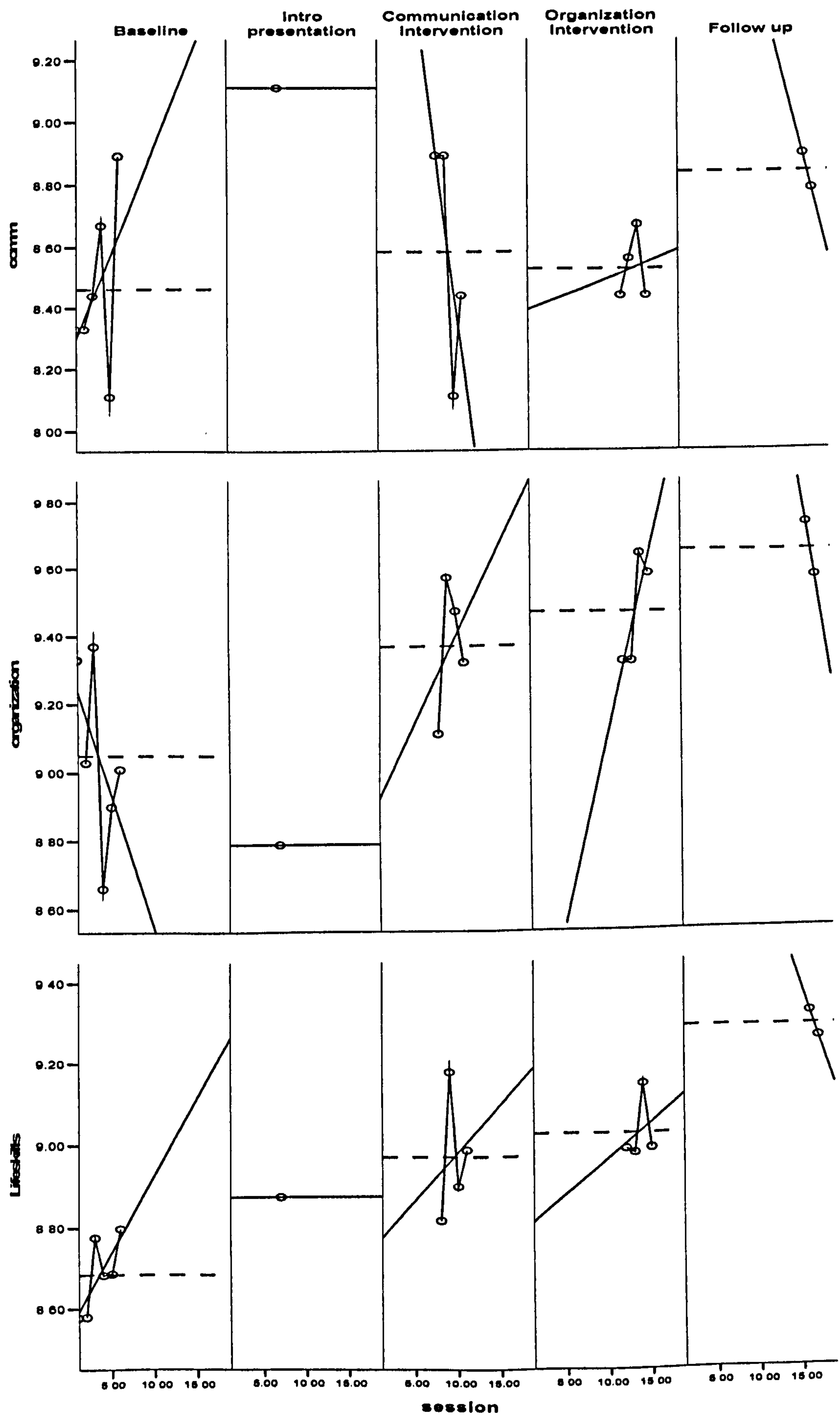


Figure 14: Participant seven, communication, organisation, and composite developmental experiences



### *Participant eight*

*Communication.* During the communication intervention participant eight scored 10/10, which was repeated during follow-up. This large increase happened immediately after the communication intervention began, increasing confidence that the change is a result of the intervention. However, baseline was going in a positive direction, which may suggest effects would have occurred naturally. However, the size of the effect suggests the intervention caused the change.

*Organisation.* Effects were observed between baseline and follow-up. Effects during the organisation intervention phase were large in comparison to the baseline. Baseline was in the same direction as the hypothesised effect; however, the magnitude of the effect between baseline and the organisation intervention suggest the change was a result of the intervention not an extraneous variable. Effects were seen during the communication intervention, which suggests it is general reflection that causes these changes rather than reflection targeted at specific skills. Follow-up scores were at the same level as intervention phases however, scores were decreasing.

*Developmental experiences.* Effects were observed across phases. The magnitude of the effect and the direction of the baseline question the confidence of the intervention causing the effects. As with most other participants follow-up scores are high but are falling, therefore developmental experiences may drop to baseline levels after a period, if reflection is not maintained.

*Participant eight summary.* In summary, the intervention has had an effect on the composite developmental experiences, communication, and organisation of participant eight. Effects are large enough in comparison to baseline and occurring



close enough to the initiation of treatment to suggest the ELITE life skills programme procedures caused these changes.



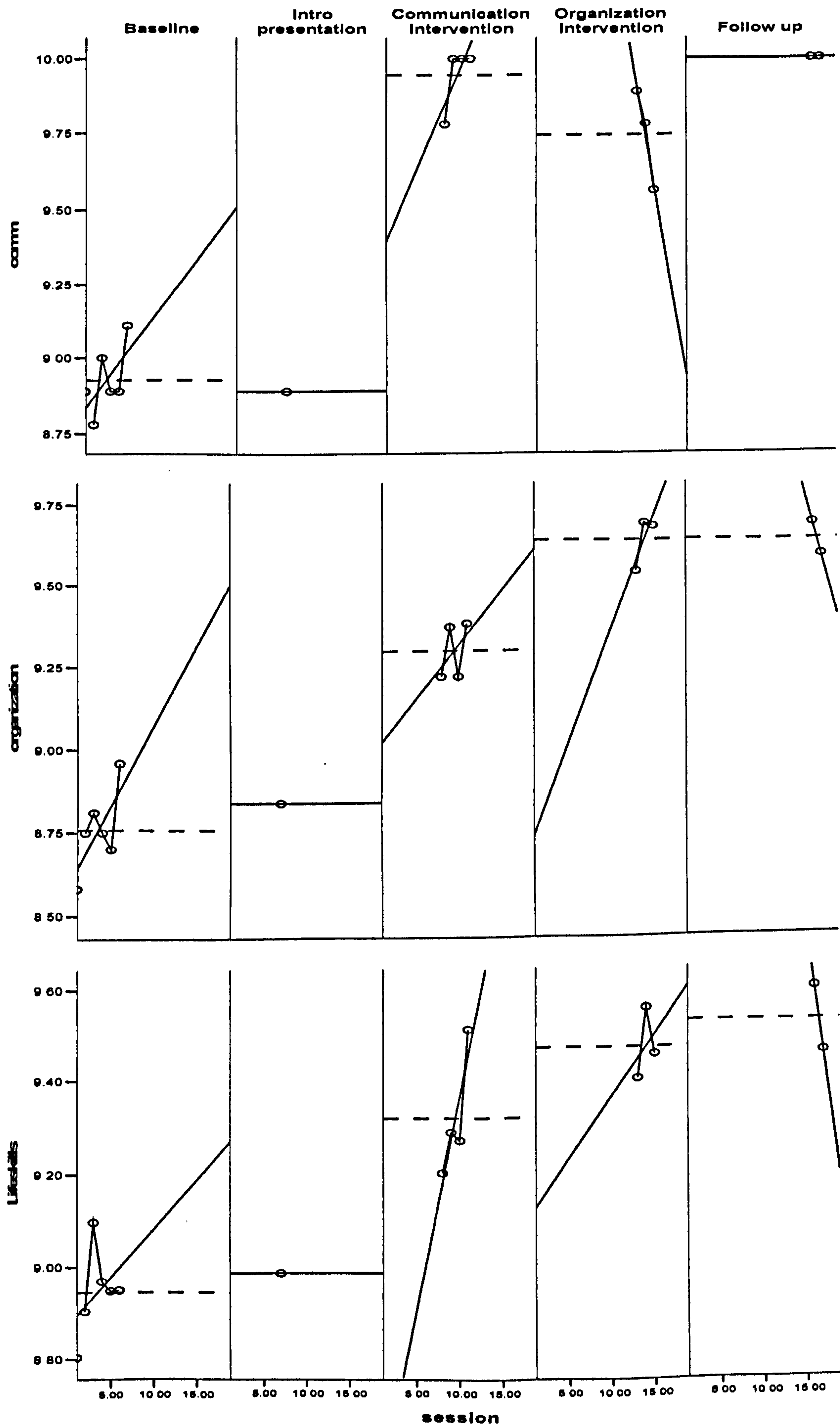


Figure 15: Participant eight, communication, organisation, and composite developmental experiences



### *Participant nine*

*Communication.* A clear effect was observed in participant nine. Baseline was in the opposite direction to the hypothesised treatment effect, an effect was observed immediately after initiation of treatment, and there were no overlapping data points. Participant nine also maintained these effects during the organisation intervention and follow-up.

*Organisation.* An effect was observed between baseline and follow-up. The effect was maintained during follow-up and was moderately large in comparison to the baseline. There was a gradual increase starting at baseline, which continued throughout the intervention. There were no overlapping data points during intervention phases, but one high baseline measure resulted in a trend moving in the direction of a hypothesised effect. Similarly, organisation increased during the communication phase when organisation was not targeted. As such, it is difficult to attribute changes to the intervention.

*Developmental experiences.* An effect was observed for composite developmental experiences between baseline and follow-up. Baseline was in the same direction as a hypothesised effect however, the trend line was not steep and, but for one result, baseline would have been stable. There were no overlapping data points between baseline and intervention phases. Trends show that the communication intervention had the greatest effect on developmental experiences. Mean scores increased during organisation and follow-up phases; however, trends suggest experiences were dropping.

*Participant nine summary.* The communication phase appeared to be the most effective for this participant as this phase showed the greatest gains. Furthermore, confidence that the communication intervention caused the effect is high because of



the decreasing baseline and no overlapping data points. Communication and organisation were both maintained during follow-up. Overall, developmental experiences began to decrease which would suggest reflection needs to be maintained to maintain positive effects.



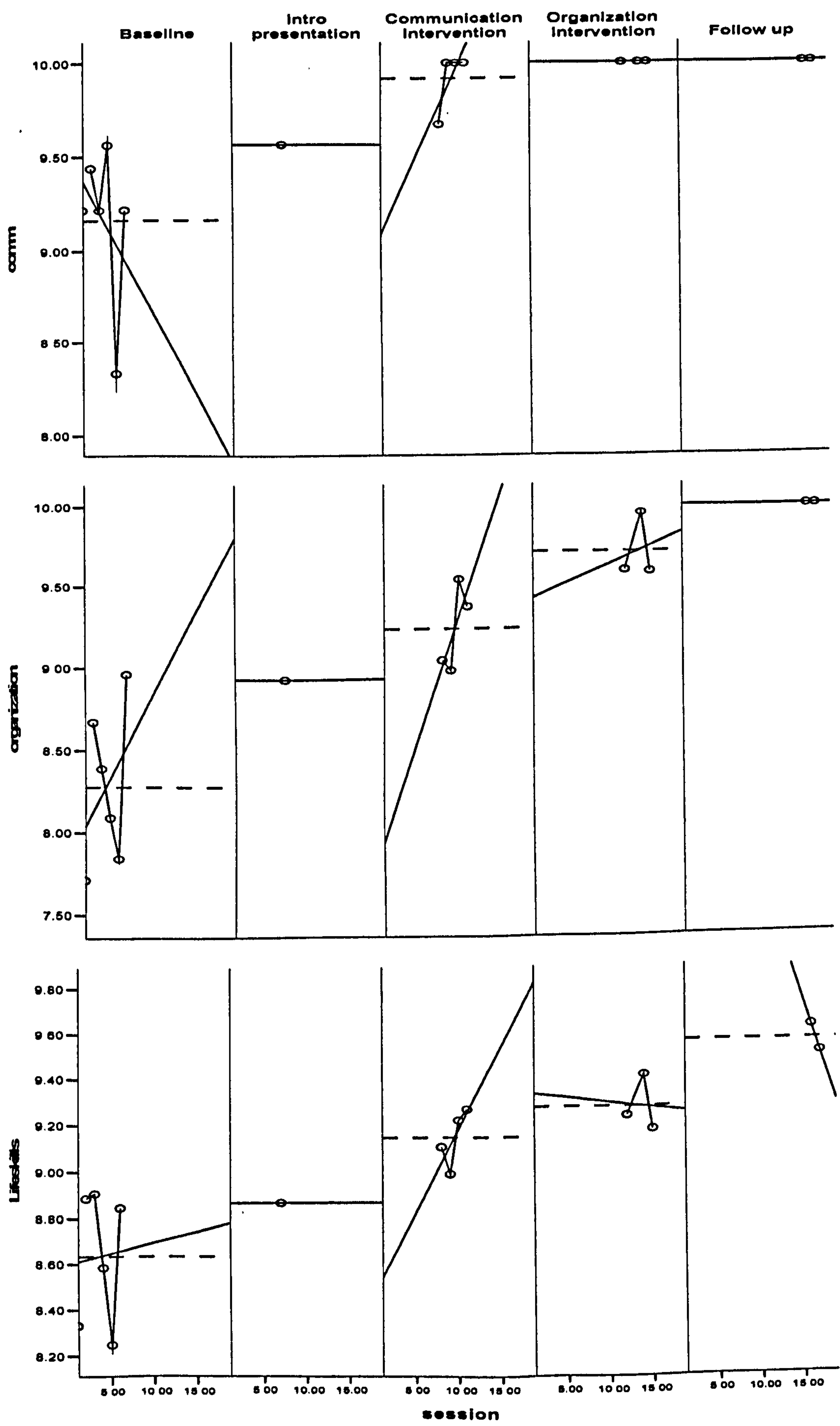


Figure 16: Participant nine, communication, organisation, and composite developmental experiences



### Cross case analysis

#### Communication

Across the group there were observed effects for communication. Baseline was in the opposite direction to the hypothesised effect and an effect was observed immediately after initiation of the intervention. The effect was around one point on the YES scale. This is small, however, participants started with high scores so demonstrating any effect is considered a good result. Mean communication increased during the organisation intervention. Trends suggest that during the organisation phase communication would decrease. The graph suggests the final session of the organisation intervention results in the greatest loss in communication. It may be necessary to analyse this reflection in action session to understand why communication is effected. Follow-up data suggest overall communication was maintained for two weeks post intervention.

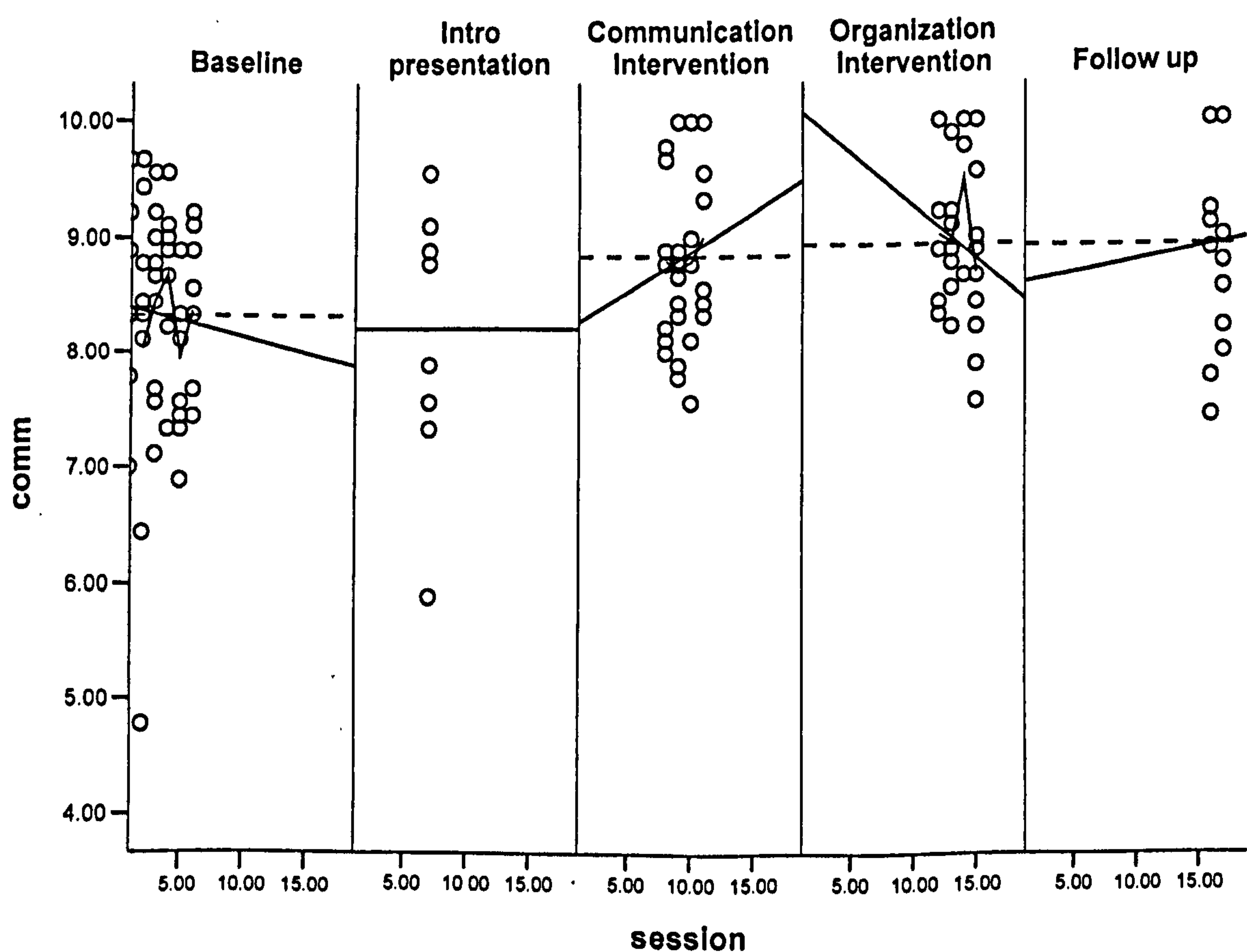


Figure 17: Group, communication



## Organisation

Group results suggest the intervention had an effect between baseline and follow-up. Baseline was in the opposite direction to hypothesised effects. Effects were observed during the communication intervention, which also increased during the organisation intervention. This suggests that the process of learning to reflect caused the changes, rather than specific reflection on particular life skills. Follow-up results were around one point higher than baseline, which again is a strong result given the high baseline. As with communication the final organisation session resulted in decreased scores and therefore requires attention.

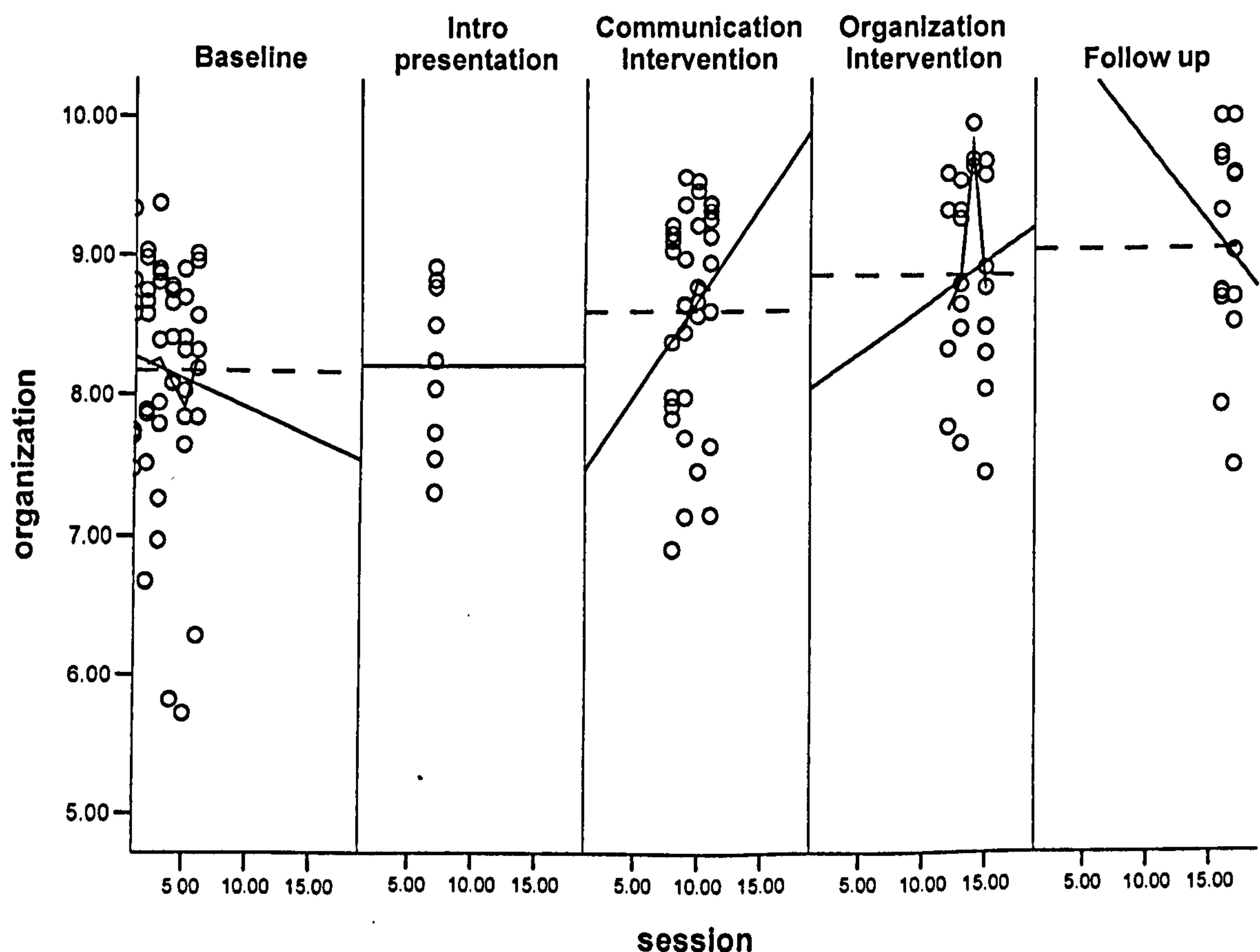


Figure 18: Group, organisation

## Composite developmental experiences

Composite developmental experiences showed similar trends to organisation and communication. A group average shows baseline was in the opposite direction to a hypothesised effect and an effect was seen immediately after the first intervention



phase. As with communication, the organisation phase resulted in increased mean scores but trends suggested developmental experiences were returning to baseline levels. Results point to the final session of the organisation phase, which dropped the scores. The interpolation line shows scores increasing from the first to the third organisation session. Despite this trend composite developmental experiences increased during follow-up.

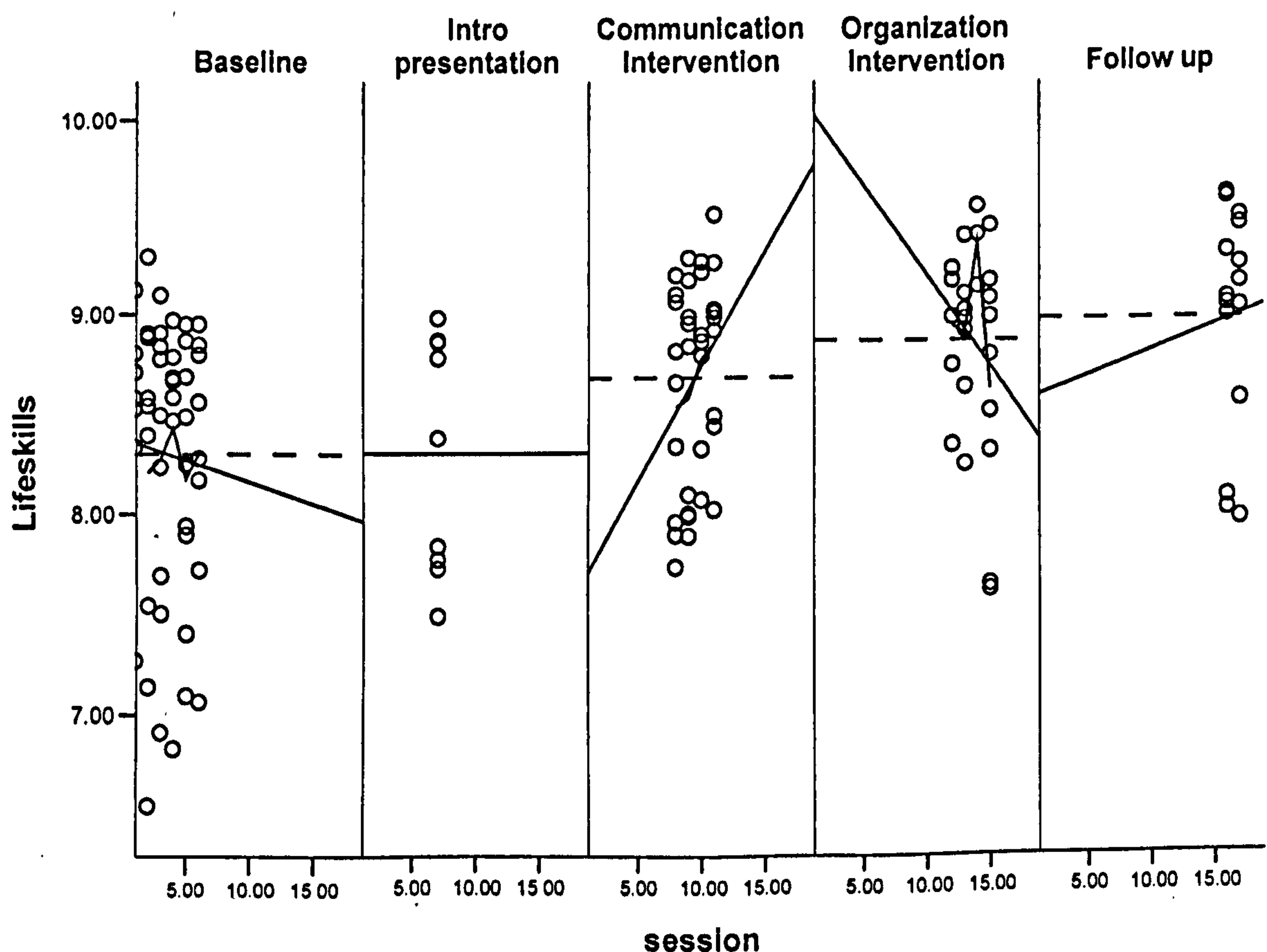


Figure 19: Group, composite developmental experiences

### *Social validation*

In addition to single YES data, interviews and focus groups were conducted with the participants to gain social validation of the ELITE life skills programme intervention techniques (Wolf, 1978). A deductive content analysis was conducted based on the following questions: importance of targeted behaviours, acceptability of intervention procedures, participant satisfaction, and outcomes.



### *Importance of targeted behaviours*

Participants believed that communication and organisation were vitally important for them to achieve success. Communication was needed in sport and also other life domains. The following extract from participant nine highlights this issue:

I definitely feel they [communication skills] are important just because you cannot get through life without them. You need them for absolutely everything in lots of different domains. Like, in friendships, in work, getting through work. Like in work, you have to be able to communicate in your group and then just getting on and having friends.

Participant eight voiced similar opinions, “I think communication skills are hugely important. Just generally, I think communication is one of the main ways to socialise. If you don’t communicate you won’t have many friends”. Participant seven also suggested communication was important because it affected other life skills:

They are important because everything you do involves interacting with other people, everything you do! If you want to get anything out of anything then you have to be able to communicate what you want. So, they are very important.

When discussing the importance of organisation participant four said, “Organisation skills are just massive. Especially when you are at university playing hockey, doing work, and trying to have a relationship”. Participant six supported this statement, “You would get nowhere without organisation, especially in sport”.

Participant five provided a summary statement of why he felt communication and organisation were important:



We have qualified for the first ever hockey champions league, we won our university gold. We haven't done that in the previous three years. I think that certainly shows that identifying communication and organisation is a really big thing. I think we have gone out and shown how important they are.

### *Acceptability of intervention procedures*

Participants were asked whether the week-by-week procedures were acceptable to them. Specifically, they were asked which parts they enjoyed and which parts they disliked. All participants talked about enjoying the team building games most. For example, participant eight said, "I think although the seminars were good I think the teambuilding was probably the best". Participant seven voiced similar feelings:

I liked the team building games, which I wasn't expecting too. I was really worried about them [laughing]. But that was actually really good and I came out of that feeling really happy or a lot happier with the communication thing and I felt a lot more confident about it.

Participant three talked about the organisation intervention in particular. He felt they were useful for him because he recognised he had learnt something that could be taken away and used in other domains. He said:

I think the organisation parts have been good. I've liked them because they are useful and I can use them. It gave me a couple of ideas of things that I can do better. So, those bits were really good.

During one of the hockey focus groups participant one articulated his initial reluctance to the intervention because he anticipated the intervention procedures would not be acceptable to him. The following extract highlights this issue:

When I heard about this intervention I was like, this won't be good because when we played for our different counties we have gone through that when you



get these kinds of things. But it always just put up on a screen. We never do anything about it. You never get to show what you have learnt. So, this has been really good.

The reason these intervention procedures were acceptable to participant one were because they were experiential and he got the chance to use the skills he had learnt during the reflection in action sessions.

Participants were also asked to discuss elements of the intervention they did not like. Participant five said:

I'd say a lot of the questions were quite similar in the journals. You'd be saying the same things over and over again. Which is good to an extent . . . I'd probably say that was probably my least favourite.

Other participants mentioned the initial reflection on action sessions. Participant eight said:

I think my least favourite part was filling in the booklets. It was quite the same each time. So, although it is good because you have something to keep at the end of it that you can refer back to, I think doing the case studies where all three of you worked as a team was much better.

Both sets of participants appeared to enjoy collaborative reflection in comparison to independent reflections. Therefore, future versions of the ELITE life skills programme must consider this.

### *Participant satisfaction*

Participants were asked whether they were happy with the outcomes of the intervention. The majority of participants felt they had positive outcomes. Participant seven said, "It was good for the organisation because I would say I am quite an



organised person anyway so it made me more aware that I was good at it and that made me feel better and more confident". Participant four also said:

You think about your sport much more. Sort of like thinking about the repercussions it has, like off the pitch as well. Like one question was about having conversations with your parents through sport and things like that. . . .  
Like job opportunities, I have a job at home through playing hockey.

Here participant four is introducing the subject of transfer and self-awareness as a mechanism to facilitate that transfer. Participant one also talked about transfer across domains:

The more we do things like this [ELITE] the more we can put it into our lives and do more things. Like when we were younger we didn't do it so much because we weren't as organised. Whereas the more organised you get the more you can fit in and the more you can do.

### *Outcomes*

Outcomes referred to things the participants thought they had learnt by participating in the ELITE life skills programme procedures. Despite the single subject findings participants did not always feel they had learnt communication and organisation. Rather they talked about increasing self-awareness. For example, participant seven said, "I think I've learnt more about how I see myself rather than actually learning skills. It's because thinking about how I do things has made me more aware of my good points and bad points". Participant nine echoed his statement, "It has made me more aware and through that you find out your own weaknesses and it's up to you to change it. Then it's putting the effort in to change". Participant eight suggested why self-awareness had increased:



I think mainly through the seminars you've kind of outlined what you do learn through sport . . . We outlined exactly what sport does teach you and you kind of put some thoughts in the air. For example, sport teaches you feedback so that has improved. That kind of thing, you increase your awareness.

Some of the hockey participants discussed learning specific life skills. For example, participant three talked about communication and how it is related to other life skills, "I knew the types of communication, but its more the importance of communication that I've learnt . . . Communication is important but communication also highlights other elements, which are also really important for team sports and things". Participant two also talked about communication, "That showed us the way we could [communicate] . . . we worked out the best way to communicate. So it's learning the best way to communicate for each situation". Participant four articulated specifically about the outcomes associated with organisation:

I'm much more organised than I was. I've written myself a revision timetable recording all the stuff I'm doing. It even records when I go out and days I've given myself, which I have never done before. I tick it off everyday; I have never done that before.

Participant five described similar outcomes related to transferring communication and organisation into other life domains:

I have done my dissertation this year. Before this intervention, I was very much letting my tutor email me first. . . . Definitely as we did the intervention, I found myself pushing for communication. I was asking people, instead of people coming to me and asking me to pull my socks up. I was making sure I tried to do it myself.



Participant two ended the discussion regarding organisation skills by saying, “I still don’t think I’m that organised at all but what I can say is that I am a lot more organised than before”. This closing quote demonstrated the difference between the single subject data and the interview data. During baseline participants reported high levels of communication and organisation which improved over the course of the intervention. Many of the participants, however, said they did not feel as though they had specifically learnt these life skills. They also suggested they felt they had low life skills. YES data suggested they had very high life skills. Participants did discuss increasing self-awareness, which ultimately appears to have caused the increases in observed life skills.

### Discussion

The aim of this study was to evaluate the reflective practice methods used in the ELITE life skills programme, as a method of improving the life skills of British adolescent competitive sport participants. Results revealed that the intervention techniques could be used to improve the life skills of this population.

This study contributes to the literature in several ways. First, experiential learning, and particularly reflective practice, provides an alternative to traditional direct skills tutoring (e.g., Danish, 2002). Previous programmes have used sport as a metaphor for life and are grounded in technical rationality (e.g., GOAL, SUPER). This epistemology of learning suggests that young people need to be charged with information which can be discharged as and when they need it. The current intervention was developed from an epistemological standpoint that rejects technical rationality. Specifically, Schön (1987) suggested people learn best through experience. As such, an awareness of the requirements of the sporting context and



the skills that had already been learnt were the focus of the ELITE life skills programme.

Results showed that participants enjoyed the experiential nature of the intervention procedures and they felt that by participating in the intervention they had learnt something. No other studies of life skill development in a sporting context had addressed how participants felt about being a participant in the programme. Petitpas et al. (2005) proposed that young people with high intrinsic motivation would be more likely to develop positive life skills. Similarly, Larson (2000) suggested that sport was a good context for positive youth development because it is a structured activity where young people choose to participate freely. If young people do not enjoy participating in life skills interventions and are externally motivated or even amotivated, it is likely they will not benefit from the programme. It is possible that participants could even reduce the positive outcomes associated with sport participation. Future research is required to investigate the influence of participant motivation on the outcomes that arise from taking part in life skill interventions.

The second contribution relates to the design of the evaluation. By conducting single subject research an idiographic analysis of what was learnt and which intervention procedures facilitated these changes was provided. Previous group based studies had failed to highlight individual nuances because of the group based evaluation (e.g., Brunelle et al., 2007; Goudas et al., 2006; Papacharisis et al., 2005). This is intriguing given the consensus that development is a subjective experience that will differ between individuals (Lerner et al., 2006). Many individual nuances were lost when an average across the group was calculated, suggesting an effect that was not necessarily present in all participants. It was clear that certain phases in the



intervention had greater effects on the participants. Specifically, many participants increased their reports of positive developmental experiences during the communication intervention, which began to drop during the organisation intervention. Qualitative results highlighted that participants enjoyed the reflection in action session during the communication phase the most, whereas, reflective journaling was the least enjoyable. This could explain why results declined during the organisation intervention. Intervention procedures were the same across intervention phases. Thus, if they did not enjoy reflective journaling in the first phases this would have been repeated, and possibly amplified, during the second intervention phase.

The reflection in action activities during the communication intervention phase activities were essentially team building games where participants had to use communication skills in new and novel experiences. Participants did not describe enjoying the reflection in action activities during the organisation intervention phases. During this session, participants were asked to plan out hypothetical scenarios based on case studies. The difference between the two sessions was that they were actively doing communication during the first phase, however, they were not actively involved in the hypothetical scenarios and may not have fully engaged in the process and as such failed to benefit. Future developments should consider how to get participants to “think on their feet”. Results suggest if participants enjoy the activities and are invested in the activities, they will more likely to report positive developmental experiences. These findings may have been masked by a group design; therefore, we suggest future youth development interventions should be undertaken using idiographic evaluation. Single subject research should be used to



test the efficacy of the intervention before conducting effectiveness and dissemination trials with larger numbers and less control.

Qualitative results add credibility to the single subject data (Nastasi & Schensul, 2005). Specifically, participants discussed differences in their life skills before and after the intervention and the changes they had observed due to their participation. This would suggest it was the intervention that caused these changes. Qualitative results also highlighted potential reasons to explain why baselines were in the direction of the hypothesised effect. During the field hockey focus groups participants talked about increasing their awareness as a result of filling out the YES. One participant said:

When you are ticking those boxes and you recognise that you had to put a low one so it was fresh in your mind. So you come to next week you still know it's something you need to work on.

Therefore, it appears that the baseline phase was not necessarily a true baseline. It could be that filling in the YES acted as the first phase of reflection for some participants and, as such, began to increase awareness of the skills they had learnt. As a result, reports of developmental experiences increased prior to the initiation of the intervention.

Changes in developmental experiences were observed during other non-targeted intervention phases. For example, organisation increased during the communication intervention and vice versa. It may be that the process of learning to reflect encouraged participants to reflect on other areas of their life and as such, alter untargeted life skills. Results from Study One suggested that life skills were linked. It was assumed that communication, as an interpersonal life skill, would not be correlated with organisation, a personal life skill. This assumption needs testing. In



terms of methodological rigour, it is impossible to control what people are thinking and therefore may pose serious issues when testing reflective practice programme procedures such as this.

Only small effects were observed when the participants were given the treatment. When establishing confidence in the intervention the larger the effect the higher the confidence that the intervention caused this effect (Johnson et al., 2004). All participants in the current study came into baseline with high YES scores across domains, with some participants even scoring 10/10 for some domains. Therefore, small effects were only possible due to a ceiling effect. Given that the aim of the study, and of the thesis of a whole, was to develop methods to improve the life skills of British adolescent sport participants it is a significant finding that these procedures can be used to improve life skills even if they are already high.

A positive finding was that the magnitude of reported developmental experiences between baseline and follow-up was not reduced for any participant. Mean follow-up scores were higher for all participants than baseline scores. As such, it appears that there is no short-term risk in participating in the ELITE life skills programmes reflective practice procedures. Further follow-up measurements are required to confirm that there is no long-term detriment.

The fourth contribution of this study to the current body of literature relates to the broader field of positive youth development. Previously, limited research had been conducted in the sporting context. As such, whether sport could be used as a context for positive youth development was questioned. The limited number of studies, which focused on teaching life skills through sport (e.g., Brunelle et al., 2007; Goudas et al., 2005; Papacharisis et al., 2005), were limited because they exclusively targeted one life skill (i.e., goal setting). Catalano et al. (1998) suggested



that the most effective programmes addressed a wide range of positive outcomes rather than just one. The current investigation demonstrates that sport can be used to develop ranges of life skills. Specifically, reflective practice can be used to highlight any number of life skills. Results showed that composite developmental experiences, made up of teamwork and social skills, interpersonal relationships, adult networks and social capital, identity, initiative, and basic skills, increased as participants reflected on their sporting experiences. As such, results suggest that the intervention procedures can be used to teach a range of skills.

#### *Limitations and future research*

A key limitation of the ELITE life skills programme is it is based on the assumption that the sport experiences teaches life skills and that the participants had acquired knowledge in action whilst playing competitive sport. If young people have not had the experiences on which to reflect they will not be able to increase their life skills. As such, the ELITE life skills programme should be used as a second phase of life skill development. The first phase should be the development of youth sport programmes that are structured in such a way to give young people a range of skill building activities. The ELITE life skills programme can then be used to highlight these skills and facilitate the transfer of such skills. In this way, the overall programme would last substantially longer, in line with the suggestions of Catalano et al. (1998).

Confidence that the intervention procedures caused the observed changes could not be confidently established due to a range of factors. The nature of the questions asked in the YES means participants may have started reflecting on their experiences in sport before the actual reflective practice procedures were implemented. Thus, the



baseline may not have been a true baseline, which may have lead to the trend lines moving in the same direction as the hypothesised effect with some participants.

A significant strength of this study was the integration of qualitative research. This integration reinforced confidence that observed effects were due to the intervention and provided additional information to develop the programme in the future. The interview and focus group data suggested participants had transferred skills across domains, however without observation data it is difficult to know which skills were transferred and into which domains. Participants talked mostly about using skills in the academic domain, which is understandable considering the participants were student athletes. We suggest qualitative research should be incorporated more often into the evaluation of life skill and positive youth development interventions to gain detailed information and to gain greater social validity.

In order to demonstrate the efficacy of the ELITE life skills programme it may be useful to conduct further single subject research with fewer participants to increase control and in depth understanding of developing life skills through sport. It is possible that having nine participants was too much at this stage of the research. Fewer cases would result in greater depth and would help develop the intervention procedures before larger scale efficacy and effectiveness research can be conducted. Additionally, a series of interviews at key points during the intervention could also be used to illuminate the process of development associated with the intervention. Interview and focus group data also highlighted issues of procedural reliability. Catalano et al. (1998) stated that the strongest evaluations of positive youth development programmes not only had strong research designs but also had extremely high procedural reliability. By ensuring procedural reliability the



treatment integrity is strengthened, research reliability is increased, and the interpretation of results is enhanced (Hrycaiko & Martin, 1996). Intervention procedures followed the guidelines described in the participant workbook and participants were happy with the programme procedures.

A limitation of the current research was that study participants were not those who participated in the original focus groups (Study One). There were representatives from hockey and tennis; however, Study Three participants were not asked specifically which life skills they felt they needed. There was an assumption that all British adolescent competitive sport participants needed the same skills, which may have been incorrect. Current participants may have been happy with their communication and organisation but would have benefited from other life skills. Establishing the needs of each sample should be the first step of future intervention research.

Results from Study Two suggests the structures and experiences associated with different sports lead to the development of different skills. As such, athletes from a range of sports should engage in the ELITE life skills programme to identify whether different sports produce different effects.

A major issue highlighted by Catalano et al. (1998) was that existing evaluations failed to integrate follow-up measurements. We endeavoured to include follow-ups in the current investigation. However, because the participants were all student-athletes they all left university for the summer after only two measurements. As such, it was hard to establish the longevity of the improvements in life skills. Given that the aim of this study was to evaluate whether the intervention procedures could be used to improve the life skills of the sample (not to assess maintenance of improved skills) this is not a major issue. However, when conducting efficacy,



effectiveness, and dissemination trials of the whole programme this issue must be addressed. Future research should integrate longer follow-up periods over at least one year to identify any prolonged effects of the intervention.

Finally, we decided to conduct the research with older adolescents because we believed they would have a greater repertoire of experience upon which to reflect and therefore would show the greatest gains. Future research should test this assumption by implementing reflective practice interventions across adolescence. The ELITE life skills programme could also be administered to young people are experiencing situations that required them to develop skills. Reflecting close to the actual event would reduce losses due to poor memory or glow effects of only remembering enjoyable or significant experiences. Now that confidence in the ELITE life skills programme procedures has been established, efficacy, effectiveness and dissemination trials should be conducted.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings provide preliminary evidence that using reflective practice procedures can increase life skills. Discussing the findings in relation to previous research proved complex because of the unique design of the ELITE life skills programme. Furthermore, the targeted life skills have not been presented in other published life skills interventions. Confidence that the intervention caused all effects could not be demonstrated with single subject research alone. However, the addition of qualitative research suggested that it was the intervention that caused these changes. An important conclusion is that the ELITE life skills programme could not teach life skills to people from scratch, rather it can be used to improve awareness of existing life skills developed in action. As such, future research should focus on integrating ELITE within well-planned youth sport programmes so that



young people are exposed to a range of skill building activities upon which they can reflect.

The findings from this study contribute to the existing literature by demonstrating that Schön’s (1987) reflective practice theory of experiential learning can be used to improve the life skills of British adolescent competitive sport participants.

The findings from this study contribute to the overall thesis by integrating findings from Study One, Study Two, and personal reflections from Chapter Six to develop intervention procedures that can be used in the ELITE life skills programme. Therefore, the findings from this study contribute to the overall aim of developing an intervention to improve the life skills of British adolescent competitive sport participants, who are in full time education by providing the actual methods by which the life skills are improved.

Reflections

When designing this study my initial aim was to conduct an efficacy trial of the ELITE life skills programme as a whole. However, after careful consideration it became apparent that before conducting an efficacy trial I would need to evaluate the feasibility of using reflective practice procedures as the main intervention strategies because reflective practice is a novel technique that has never been used before in thesis context.

During the Study Three a reflective diary was kept recording how I actually delivered the intervention procedures and the associated issues contributed to the thesis. As such, these reflections are presented in more detail in Study Four.



## Chapter Eight

### Study Four: A confessional tale of developing life skills through sport



## Abstract

### *Problem*

Outcome data from evaluations of intervention quality and effectiveness fail to take into account the complexity of practitioners' experiences on the ground in everyday practice. As such, critical information is missed which highlights how the intervention procedures were delivered, the problems and successes of the intervention, and how issues were identified and overcome.

### *Aims*

The aim of the current study was to provide an alternative evaluation to that presented in Study Three. This evaluation aimed to highlight how real world issues experienced during the development, implementation, and evaluation of the ELITE life skills programme contributed to the overall thesis aim of developing a life skills intervention to improve the life skills of British adolescent competitive sport participants, who are in full time education.

### *Methodology*

An intermittent reflection journal and records of personal correspondence were kept describing the issues faced as a doctoral researcher conducting intervention research. A confessional tale is used to present a highly personalised form of writing that highlights the research process in order to present what happened during the ELITE life skills programme.



## *Results*

The study highlights areas of supervision, delivery style, working with a squad of golf players who ultimately withdrew from the research, gaining entry into the hockey and tennis squads, managing the difficult times, and lessons learnt.

## *Contributions*

This study contributes to the existing life skills and positive youth development literature by highlighting issues of real world practice when delivering life skills interventions with British adolescent sport participants. Additionally, the reflections presented contribute to existing research by sharing lessons learnt so that researchers and practitioners working with similar populations are given guidance, and can avoid making similar mistakes.

This study contributes to the overall thesis by supplementing the evaluation of the life skills intervention techniques in Study Three, and providing more in depth information and detail about what actually happened day to day, therefore increasing procedural reliability of the ELITE life skills programme.



## Introduction

In this study, I examine the ways in which I approached the task of carrying out an intervention study as part of a PhD in sport psychology. I offer personal evaluations of the challenges faced during my experiences in evaluating the ELITE life skills programme. Experiences over the past year starting in September 2006 and finishing June 2007 provide the foundation of this study. Since the initial development of the ELITE life skills programme, through to the implementation, and evaluation of the programme intervention procedures, an intermittent research diary and an archive of correspondence were compiled. These texts constitute a case study of the ways in which a doctoral researcher managed his research experience. The primary purpose here is not to address the findings of the intervention study, but to reflect on my role as the programme leader in augmenting programme outcomes and my position as a young man teaching life skills to a group of adolescent sports people of similar ages. In particular, the purpose of this study is to highlight specific strategies used to gain entry, engage participants, and control withdrawal from the intervention to help researchers undertaking a similar task.

Information regarding how positive youth development interventions are delivered and evaluated provides an integral contribution to the field of positive youth development programmes (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 1998). Typically researchers adopt positivist perspectives in their evaluations of youth programmes. For example, experimental and quasi-experimental designs fill the landscape of life skills and positive youth development research across contexts. However, experimental designs often do reveal all that is “going on”. For example, the write up of experimental designs often fail to provide the details of how participants were recruited; what the researcher did during, before, and after the



intervention sessions; and any ethical issues raised during the course of the research. Moreover, these evaluations only report outcomes, focusing on what went well. Although this research is a critical and much needed aspect of positive youth development it does not help neophyte practitioners traverse the many pitfalls of intervention research.

Walker and Larson (in press) stated that being effective and intentional as a youth practitioner involves not just planning. It includes being able to react intelligently to the difficult situations that arise. Moreover, the quality of a youth development programme depends significantly on how practitioners respond to the challenges of real world practice. Current evaluations of programme quality and effectiveness fail to take into account the complexity of practitioners' experiences "on the ground" in everyday practice. Walker and Larson concluded that in addition to identifying the features of good programmes or quality standards for programmes, researchers should strive to understand how to achieve these features or standards when facing the complex dilemmas of real world practice.

By removing the personal and glossing over the ethical and methodological journey people take whilst doing research many lessons that are learnt go unwritten and hidden (Sparkes, 2002). It is by acknowledging ethical and methodological research issues, mistakes, and failures that the field can move forward. Unfortunately, personal misgivings, weaknesses, and areas of improvement are rarely seen in published work, particularly in emerging disciplines like sport psychology (Sparkes, 2002). As a result, neophyte practitioners are destined to repeat mistakes, which could be avoided.

In order to understand why one course of action was taken over another and to bring intriguing research issues to the fore it is important that a researcher is



reflexive in his approach. Pearsall (1998: cited Brackenridge, 1999) defined reflexivity in research as a taking account of the effect of the personality or presence of the researcher on what is being investigated. Brackenridge (1999) stated that reflexivity helps the researcher locate him /her within the power dynamics of the research relationships and to adopt a healthy scepticism toward the truth of his findings. Moreover, reflexivity and introspection are legitimate sources of knowledge. As a result, reflexivity is becoming an important research skill (Sparkes, 1995).

Reflexivity is essentially a meta-cognitive skill that is unobservable, existing within the individual. Despite this fact methods exist by which reflexivity can become explicit. Systematic reflective practice presents one such method. To date reflective practice has been underrepresented in the developmental sport psychology literature, despite the potential of reflective practice to contribute to the applied body of knowledge in service delivery (Holt & Strean, 2001). This is also interesting given the utilisation of reflective practice in other service professions such as coaching, nursing, teaching, and social work (Knowles, Gilbourne, Borrie, & Nevill, 2001). Reflective practice aims to enable practitioners to “think on their feet” and develop their skills. It is also based on an epistemology of practice that seeks to reduce the distance between theoretical best practice and real world best practice (Schön, 1987).

Schön (1987) suggested that research based knowledge (i.e., practice knowledge associated with theories and research driven techniques) should be integrated with tacit, hands on knowledge, which is developed through experience. The result of integration is increased practitioner effectiveness and understanding of what practitioners actually do. Integration is predicated on the belief that in the real world practitioners are faced with situations, which cannot be approached with a



systematic scientific knowledge base because of the wider personal, contextual, and cultural factors that combine to influence practice (Schön, 1987). By integrating research based knowledge with tacit knowledge practitioners will be in a better position to identify good practice and take steps to learn from it (Knowles, Tyler, Gilbourne, & Eubank, 2006).

Tacit knowledge can be improved by reflecting on action (Schön, 1987). Reflecting on action is typically retrospective and is characterised by thinking about past experiences in order to increase understanding of ones' actions, the reasons for ones' actions, consequences of ones' actions, and ultimately improving future practice. By thinking back to how service was delivered practitioners can identify where they have done well, where they need to improve, and how they can make the experience more engaging for the participant.

Research has indicated that key mediating factors in positive outcomes associated with organised activities are the interactions between adolescents and adult leaders (Larson & Walker, 2005). An adult's personality, social skills, and delivery style may be the mechanisms that create positive change, not necessarily the programme contents. Within sport psychology similar interactions have been revealed. Holt and Streat (2001) summarised that successful outcomes in sport psychology service delivery can, in part, be attributed to the personality of the consultant. Specifically, a consultant's ability to form relationships with clients, their honesty, integrity, spontaneity, sincerity, and understanding result in positive outcomes. Petitpas, Giges, and Danish (1999) identified that few studies in sport psychology have examined the specific factors in the process of service delivery that contribute to successful outcomes. Therefore, how a practitioner's delivery "style" influences what people learn is relatively unknown. These individual nuances in how



a programme is delivered are potentially as important as the programme curriculum in augmenting positive outcomes. Thus, it is important to extend our understanding of the intricate details of what practitioners actually do (and do not do) in order to develop future interventions.

Unfortunately, the field norms often regulate one's writing and thinking (Burnier, 2006). In sport psychology, confessional tales are not the norm and as such are rarely seen (Sparkes, 2002). Traditional writing in sport psychology typically focuses on outcomes and significant findings. As such, traditional writing in sport psychology generally only reports what went right. By ignoring things that did not go right and omitting ethical issues, the lessons learnt from making mistakes remain private and cannot be used to help future researchers. Gilbourne (2006) stated "a profession that begins to feel at ease when writing about itself (in a confessional type way) can expand the critical literature very quickly" (p51). The problem faced by researchers adopting a confessional tale is that from a positivist perspective it can be viewed as narcissistic and self-indulgent instead of reflective and self-aware (Sparkes, 2002). Furthermore, a difficulty associated with the confessional tale is that judgments of quality are based on the life journey and mindset of the reader (Gilbourne, 2006).

Given that I served as the programme leader and the primary evaluator of the programme there can be no disengaged observation or evaluation of the ELITE life skills programme independent of my presence. It is an ineluctable fact that the researcher is fully implicated in the phenomena that he or she documents (Atkinson, 2006). As such, my reflections play an integral role in the overall evaluation of the ELITE life skills programme, providing guidance for future research.



## Methodology

Confessional tales are highly personalised forms of writing that take the reader behind the scenes of the research process in order to present what really happened (Sparkes, 2002). Confessional tales typically appear alongside realist tales in ethnographic research to elaborate on certain issues or stimulate deeper consideration of, as yet, unexplored areas. To my knowledge confessional tales have never been used to uncover the intricacies of intervention research. However, the capacity within confessional tales to “flesh out” the lived experience of the author makes it an appropriate methodology. This is particularly salient given my role as both programme leader and programme evaluator. Gilbourne (2006) stated reflections on applied practice could also qualify for confessional status.

The details in confessional tales are those that constitute the field experience of the author. These include stories of infiltration, fables of fieldwork, rapport, mini melodramas of hardships endured and overcome, and accounts of what fieldwork did to the fieldworker (Van Maanen, 1988). In a confessional tale the fieldwork odyssey and the problems and processes of coming to know are the main focus (Sparkes, 2002). Experiences identified as problematic or challenging can be re-identified as resources to learn about the process of doing research.

### *Situating myself*

Before examining my experiences it is important to situate myself within the broader research landscape. Brackenridge (1999) stated that part of situating oneself is to recognise the reciprocal effects of the research process on the researcher and the effect of the research process on the participants. By doing so the contextual influences are highlighted and the text is “author loaded”. Brackenridge also suggested that all elements of self-presentation (e.g., gender, socio economic status,



race, sexuality, & identity) influence research participants and research results and as such should be made explicit.

I am a 25 year old, Caucasian male. I grew up in a town in the Midlands of England. I have one older sister, my mother and father are married (to each other) and my grandparents live on the same housing estate. I attended a British comprehensive school with over 1000 pupils. In the year 2000 I graduated with eight GCSE's and four A Levels. Following my time at school I went to University, where I studied BSc (Hons) Sport and Exercise Science. Upon graduation I furthered my education by completing an MSc, which was immediately followed by registration onto a full time PhD. In total I have been in education for 21 years. I have never had a year off. Consequently, I very much identify myself as a student.

My educational background in sport science had encouraged a principally positivist stance. As such, much of my previous writing has adopted a context free position. As I moved through my undergraduate studies I was exposed to different epistemologies and began to forge my own worldview. Although, at this early stage in my academic career I would not like to claim affiliation to any one particular epistemology I do feel I have moved away from positivism along the epistemological continuum to a more interpretive understanding of knowledge acquisition. This is reflected in my use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis in Study Two and writing in a context and author laden style in the current study. I am not sure whether I will retain this philosophical position or whether future experiences will shift my thinking. As a result, I view this study as an experiment in writing as much as it is a method of uncovering knowledge.

While I was an undergraduate I had experience playing university sport, representing my university's 2<sup>nd</sup> XIII in Rugby League for two and a half years. A



knee injury forced me to stop playing. As a junior athlete I had experience in a range of sports. My main sport was tennis. I play tennis regularly and have gained coaching qualifications in tennis. As such, I felt I had an immediate rapport with the tennis participants. I had a brief stint playing for a men's field hockey team whilst at comprehensive school. As such, I felt I understood the culture of hockey. My experiences of hockey were not positive. I left the team after one season as a result of being forced to play out of position. I also knew some hockey players at my university who I did not like. I endeavoured to remain non-judgmental and put my preconceptions of "hockey players" to one side during my interactions with this group of participants.

When I met the coaches at the beginning of the study I did not know what courses the participants studied. It was only after meeting the participants that it became apparent that many of the participants were studying sport and exercise science or combined sport science and other subjects. I felt we had common ground, and it helped build rapport with these participants.

### *Reflective repertoire*

During the development, implementation, and evaluation of the ELITE life skills programme between September 2006 and June 2007 an intermittent research diary was kept to recorded thoughts and feelings related to the process of conducting intervention research. This diary included day-to-day thoughts and feelings, reflections on sessions, and email correspondence. Session notes were recorded immediately after the session. Details included describing key events, courses of action, consequences of actions, tone of the participants, and learning (Anderson, Knowles, & Gilbourne, 2006). A set of questions were developed to help guide the reflection (Appendix O). These guiding questions were intended to be semi



structured and fluid. They were not a rigid set of questions that required answering after each session. This repertoire of reflections and experiences were transformed into the narrative account that follows.

## Results

### *Supervision*

In 2004 I was registered on an MSc in Sport and Exercise Psychology. During that year I had talked to my current supervisor, Professor David Lavalley, about the possibility of extending my time at Loughborough by registering as a full time PhD student. At that time we talked through possible research avenues, which included a life skills intervention. I wrote up a PhD proposal explaining that to date the life skills literature has suffered from a lack of well-designed and evaluated interventions. As such, my PhD would fill these gaps by providing an intervention that taught young people life skills through their participation in sport.

As I began my PhD my focus was always on developing a life skills intervention. The first two studies were geared towards providing information to develop the intervention. The final two studies then evaluated the intervention procedures. It was not until after I had written up a first draft of this current study that David suggested that perhaps his expectations had influenced my decision to conduct intervention research. From our first meeting he had encouraged me to read the SUPER and GOAL life skills programmes and to think about developing an intervention. I agreed with him that a new life skill intervention would be a good thing to create; however, I do think his expectations influenced how I developed my intervention.

My initial idea, in part based on our initial discussions, was to conduct an intervention with 10-15 year old adolescents. As the PhD progressed it became



evident that this age group would be very difficult to recruit given that I had few contacts in the Loughborough area. I made the decision to conduct the research with older adolescents because they were more readily available and also because they had many more experiences upon which to draw, and therefore, would be able to reflect more readily. David supported this decision. Throughout the PhD I felt that as long as I provided a good rationale for why I was following a particular course David would support my decision.

As I came into the PhD I was focused on qualitative research. I had always thought I would conduct some kind of qualitative evaluation of the intervention, although I was not sure how I was going to do this. As I finished my first year I began to think about how I was going to design and evaluate my intervention. It was at this time that David suggested I looked at single subject research. At first I was a little apprehensive, as I had only seen a hand full of published studies using single subject designs. Despite this initial apprehension I did a search for single subject research and began reading.

David had told me one of his other PhD students had conducted a single subject study as part of her PhD. He also told me that another member of staff had published some single subject research. Over time it came to my attention that three other PhD students had also conducted single subject evaluations of their interventions as part of their PhD research. I was confident David could provide supervision on how to conduct single subject research, and it was additionally reassuring that I could engage in peer supervision if David was not available. One of the final year PhD students had asked me to proof read his single subject chapter because he thought I knew the area well. At this point I had perhaps read around three articles and did not know the methodology well. I read it for him anyway and



tried to provide as much support as I could. In reality, reading his work helped me more than it did him. It gave a summary of the research method, it provided a list of articles to read, and it provided a structure of how to write up the chapter.

The peer supervision extended beyond the design of the intervention. At the beginning of my PhD I had been enrolled on the British Association of Sport and Exercise Science (BASES) supervised experience programme to provide scientific support in psychology. My supervisor, Kate Goodger, was the current teaching assistant in the department who had just started supervising students. As the PhD progressed I decided to withdraw from BASES supervised experiences because of time constraints and uncertainty of whether I agreed with the BASES accreditation system. Around that time I also travelled to Michigan State University with Kate to visit the Institute for the Study of Youth Sport. Since travelling to the United States and withdrawing from BASES my relationship with Kate changed from supervisor and supervisee to friends. As such, I often talked with her over lunch, over tea and coffee, in the gym, and on the phone to get her opinion on the practical application of the intervention. For example, the reflection in action games for the communication intervention mostly came from activities Kate had used when working with athletes in her role as an applied sport psychologist.

### *The golfers*

Reflections of my intervention research start with the story of the golfers. At the beginning of September 2006 I met with the golf coordinator at the university. I had heard that the golf squad had a well organised set up at the university and the majority of the squad had either Talented Athlete Scholarship Scheme (TASS) scholarships or were part of the Royal and Ancient (R&A) Scholarship Scheme. The previous year the sport psychology research group had been contacted by a



representative from the golf squad with a request to provide psychological support to the golfers playing for the university. As such, I thought they would be receptive to my sport psychology intervention.

My meeting with the coordinator, Tim (pseudonym), ended with an agreement to meet the golf squad at a squad meeting. On the day of the meeting, five minutes before the meeting was due to start I found myself I sat in the empty meeting room. One by one the squad members entered the room until there were no seats left. Tim introduced me as the squad psychologist. This concerned me slightly as I had said to him previously that I was here to do my research. Once my research had finished I had agreed to work with the players but while the research was going I wanted to avoid any dual role conflicts.

As the meeting was about to start I felt a tap on the shoulder. As I turned around I heard a thick midlands accent say to me "Did you go to Rawletts School"? I recognised the young man stood behind me. John (pseudonym) was the younger brother of a friend of mine from junior school. We had grown up in the same area of my hometown and we had gone to the same junior school. I explained I had not gone to Rawletts comprehensive school but I knew his brother well. I talked with John about what he was doing at university, how his brother was doing and how his golf was coming along. It became clear that John was a key member of the squad. He was a final year student with the lowest handicap. John was very outspoken, constantly making jokes and directing attention to himself. Because of his confident manner and friendly banter the conversation often revolved around him. If I could get John to buy into the intervention I was certain the others would follow.

I arrived at the driving range on a cold, windy Monday evening. This was the first baseline session. As I walked onto the range I recognised a few faces from the



meeting. I walked over to their bays and I suddenly realised I had spent the majority of last weeks meeting talking to John and I knew no other names! Luckily they remembered me. I handed out the questionnaires, talked to them about the study and their golf, and tried to build rapport. As I drove home I felt good. My intervention study had officially begun.

Each week for the next five weeks I went back to the driving range on a Monday and Thursday evening to make sure I saw all the squad members. John never attended Monday sessions and spent the entire Thursday session practicing trick shots, coaching other golfers (whether they asked for it or not), and generally messed about. I soon came to the realisation that John was a key member of the group; however, his role was not as a group leader but more as a class clown. As the weeks went by it became clear the participants were not enjoying filling out the YES questionnaire. On one occasion I sat and watched one golfer fill out 60 items in less than two minutes. A few of the group complained that they had already filled out the questionnaire. I explained the reasons why they were filling it in each week but that did not stop the complaining.

At the final baseline session the participants told me that the first and second teams were playing in the BUSA (British Universities Sports Association) golf quarterfinals. They were confident of a win and as a result were looking forward to who they would be playing in the semi-finals.

I turned up the following week to do the introduction presentation. As I pulled into the driving range car park I noticed there were fewer cars than normal. I walked onto the range and was met by a quarter of the usual numbers. I walked to the far bay to meet Mike (pseudonym). "Where is everyone"? Mike, hit a high pitching wedge onto the right hand green and then turned to me. "We got knocked out yesterday,



nobody is coming". At first I thought that is was OK, as I would see them on Monday, however Mike had not finished. "That's it," he said. "People won't come training anymore because we haven't got anymore matches. They'll just organise matches and play during the day". My heart sank. How was I going to finish the intervention if the group never got together? If I could only see them two at a time I would never be able to do the reflection in action sessions.

It was Study One all over again, where participants dropping out left right and centre had stretched a nine focus group study over nearly 18 months. It reminded me of something one of my friends had said: "Research would be so easy if it wasn't for the participants". At this point I totally agreed. I felt my PhD was in the hands of a group of student-athletes who did not really care about the research. This was not a good situation to be in. Regardless of whether I could continue with the golf squad I thought I needed a plan B. The next morning I sent an email to all the coaches at the university and all the coaches who had participated in my focus groups in Study One to set up recruitment meetings.

I phoned Tim but got no reply. I emailed him to get the phone numbers of the squad members but he never replied. I even went to his office to get his help but he was never around. I later found out he was resigning as golf coordinator so once the squad got knocked out he began to cut ties. I decided it was better to start from scratch with a new squad than to waste precious time chasing after the golfers. I talked with David to get his advice and to seek a way to overcome the problems I faced. He suggested I kept going and I tried to win over the key members of the group. We talked about contacting the golf captain and trying to get him to win the other golfers over. I had spent some time with the golf captain so I felt he could and possibly would help me out. However, I felt I was being a little optimistic. As I sat in



David's office I thought re-engaging the group would be tough because the golfers were training intermittently and therefore would be difficult to get hold of.

Moreover, if they were not training at the same time in the same place I would not be able to do the group based exercise I had planned for the reflection in action sessions. I felt it would be easier to cut my losses and focus on another group but I went with David's advice. I continued going to the driving range just in case but in the end I got six weeks of baseline data but no intervention data.

I had made many mistakes during that six-week period but I felt I had learnt from them. I had not got to know the squad members and had not got any contact details so when things went wrong I had no way of getting help. I had invested time in someone who I thought was a "gatekeeper" who turned out to be a bit of a joker in the group. I also failed to sell the benefits of the intervention. I turned my attention to working with the men's field hockey team and women's tennis team.

### *Gaining entry*

I had approached the men's hockey team at the same time as the golf squad. During the baseline sessions the hockey team were one week behind the golfers. The tennis team was approached as the intervention was starting with the hockey squad so they were around seven weeks behind the hockey squad.

*Field hockey.* The story of gaining entry begins with the hockey squad. At the beginning of September, 2006 I emailed the field hockey head coach to arrange a meeting. I knew of the coach as he had studied on the MSc Sport and Exercise Psychology the year before I had completed my MSc, however, he had yet to complete the course. I also knew the men's field hockey team was very professional with some very talented squad members. I therefore targeted men's field hockey as



potential participants as I assumed the coach would endorse a sport psychology intervention and the players would be receptive to such an intervention.

I sat in a café on campus waiting for Dan (pseudonym). We had arranged to meet in the café to go over the intervention. In my email I had explained what the intervention was and what I needed from him and the players. He had responded quickly and seemed interested in using the intervention.

I waited for ten minutes. Fifteen minutes passed. Before long I had been waiting for 30 minutes and Dan had not shown. I began to wonder whether I'd got the time and date wrong. Had I said Monday or was it Tuesday? After around 45 minutes I decided to go back to the research lab to arrange another meeting. Upon opening my emails I checked to see when we were supposed to meet. I was right – we had arranged to meet that day. Based on my experiences with coaches during Study One I began to worry. I really needed this study to go well and this was not a good start. I arranged another meeting for the following week; however, I began to doubt my initial confidence that the men's field hockey were the best option.

The following week I sat at the same table in the same café waiting for Dan. As before I sat waiting. I started to feel frustrated. Just as was about to get up and leave Dan walked in. He apologised for being late and for forgetting last weeks meeting. As we began to talk it was apparent he was very interested in the intervention. In my email I had mentioned the intervention would target communication and organisation skills. Dan complained that some members of the squad were ridiculously disorganised and as a result some of them had failed modules the previous year. He was clearly concerned for the academic development as much as the athletic development of his players. As such, he felt the players would definitely benefit from the intervention. I left the meeting feeling positive – I had arranged a start date



when I could meet the players and start the baseline, I also felt I had the backing of Dan. All I had to do was convince the players of the value of the intervention.

The first baseline session was a cold Monday evening in October. The university had just opened after the summer and Fresher's fortnight was well underway. I had agreed to meet Dan in a seminar room next to the hockey pitch before the players got there. As I walked into the room I noticed the entire squad had arrived before me. Fifteen pairs of eyes followed me as I walked through the room. I felt very uncomfortable. I have experience working as an applied practitioner but I always felt nervous when meeting athletes for the first time, especially as I was relying on them to participate in my intervention. After I had introduced myself and talked them through the intervention requirements I walked around the room showing the participants how to fill in their first YES baseline.

Each week during baseline was essentially the same. I came in, gave out a questionnaire and a pen, sat while the participants filled in the YES, and left as they were getting ready to go out onto the pitch practice. The 15 minutes before each session was the most fruitful in terms of building rapport and gaining acceptance. Upon reflection this was an essential part of the intervention. At later stages in the intervention some squad members began to drop out of sessions to revise for exams. One squad member who I had spent a lot of time talking to before sessions convinced these players to come along to sessions. Without him the data would have been very different. I also talked to the players outside of the intervention sessions. For example, I talked with one of the players at a local supermarket one evening while he was shopping with his parents. I also talked to participants in the library, in pubs, in the town centre, and at restaurants. Our conversation rarely involved the intervention. We would talk about how the season was going, what happened at the



Student Union the previous Wednesday, how they were getting on with their work, plans for the summer, plans for life after university, and life in Loughborough.

Building rapport with the participants definitely helped the intervention and played a critical role in increasing the life skills of the participants. I had not taken time to do this with the golf squad, which with hindsight may have contributed to their apathy when it came to helping me.

*Tennis.* Gaining entry into the tennis team was a different experience because of my previous contact with the tennis team. I had gained my tennis coaching qualifications earlier this year and I had met a number of the tennis squad at those courses. Furthermore, I had met a number of tennis players through a mutual friend who had played in the women's team the year before. I had met the coach over the summer to discuss some applied sport psychology work with team. The coach had wanted me to work with the women's first and second teams as he felt they needed some psychological support. I had not started any work with them so I approached the coach; Jim (pseudonym) to see whether I could first do my intervention and in return I would work with the women once the intervention had finished. This was a mistake. It became clear that a dual role relationship formed. I ended up working with some of the participants who were not doing the intervention, and subsequently I did some work with some of the participants who were participating in the intervention.

The fact that I knew the three participants relatively well before the intervention started helped in some respects but made other areas quite hard. I felt I had already gained entry. They knew I played and coached tennis and as such they openly talked about their experiences. I felt as though we could hit the ground running, whereas with hockey and golf I felt like I had to establish myself first. I also



felt that because I knew them they were more likely to attend sessions and make an effort in the intervention. This was reflected in the attendance statistics. The tennis players attended the majority of sessions with one player attending all baseline, intervention, and follow-up sessions. No one in the hockey group did that. As with hockey I felt the rapport I had with the participants played a key role in the success of the intervention. Without that rapport I am sure the results would have been very different.

On reflection I felt that my similarities made it quite easy to build rapport and gain entry with both sets of participants. A large proportion of the participants were studying Sport Science or similar joint honours courses. As such, I talked to them about the course and they asked my advice about careers and module options. One participant was interested in applying for the MSc in Sport and Exercise Psychology, and becoming an applied sport psychologist so we talked at length about the course. He also asked to observe me working with other athletes to help him get a feel of what sport psychologists do. Other participants were interested in coaching careers and asked me about my experiences in coach education and sought career advice. I felt my role was somewhere between acquaintance and knowledge provider.

At the beginning of the intervention I was 24 years old. The participants were aged 18-22 years. The closeness in age made it easy to build rapport. Finally, I have been at university continuously since starting my undergraduate studies so I identified with them as students. I had started my PhD the same year many of them had started their undergraduate studies so I felt similar in our experiences of living in Loughborough. Many of the final year participants were preparing to leave Loughborough and start their careers. I was also preparing for a similar transition.



### *Delivery style*

On reflection the way I delivered the intervention played a key role in how the participants experienced the intervention. My delivery style was developed as I wrote the programme guidelines and the reflection journals. During the actual intervention my delivery style evolved. I had set out to develop the programme so that the participants increased their awareness of the life skills they already had. As such, I felt it was not necessary for me to stand at the front of a classroom lecturing them on which skills they had and how they could be improved. My delivery style was more participant-centred and autonomy supportive. Specifically, I gave them perceived choice about how to reflect on their experience in sport. I gave each participant a reflection journal; however, I explained that it was up to them how they used it. They could use the spaces in the journal to write notes, they could use the questions to initiate discussions with each other, they could talk directly to me, or they could think to themselves without making notes. I anticipated that the planning sessions would require me to explain the task and then prompt the participants if they struggled completing the task. Finally, I thought the reflection in action would require me to act as a facilitator, explaining the task and working alongside the participants as they discovered how their communication and organisation skills could be used in different tasks away from their sporting experiences.

Because of the difference in numbers between the hockey and the tennis group there were subtle differences in the way the intervention was delivered. The hockey group set themselves up on three tables in the hockey seminar room. When filling out the reflection journals they usually sat and filled the diaries out in silence, separated by the occasional conversation between group members. As they were filling out the diaries I moved around the room talking to individual members asking



questions to stimulate their reflection. Because of the numbers and the amount of time available I spend no more than five minutes with each participant. Occasionally participants forgot their diaries so I spent more time with them talking them through what they were reflecting on during that session.

The planning sessions and reflection in action were much more interactive. The planning sessions involved the use of posters to plan out which scenarios require communication and organisation skills, and how they could use the skills they had developed in hockey to help themselves in other life domains. I set up two tables with paper and pens on each table. As the participants entered the room they split into two groups. It had not been my intention to have groups competing against each other but as the session got underway it was clear the two groups were in competition to see who could get the most points on a spider diagram, and who could get the positive reinforcement from me. We spent some time debriefing after they had drawn their spider diagrams. Each time the group noted something the other group had not, the participants cheered and jeered each other. When the other group presented their diagram the same thing happened. One of the participants even kept score of how many “points” they had compared with the other group.

Throughout the session the participants appeared to be enjoying themselves. As I walked between groups asking them questions and seeking elaboration on what they had written they were smiling, making jokes, and overall appeared to be enjoying the competition. The element of competition was recreated during the reflection in action. The series of team building games had not been designed so that the participants competed against each other but it did not take them long before they formed separate teams and started to compete.



My role in the reflection in action sessions was quite different to reflection on action and the planning sessions. This was particularly evident during the communication reflection in action. In previous sessions I introduced the activities and then walked around encouraging and stimulating reflection. Because the games had taken on a competitive element I now found myself as the official umpire. I tried to stimulate reflection, getting the players to think about their communication skills and how they could be used to complete the tasks I had set them. I felt they were learning because most of the participants could answer my questions, and responded well when asked “How can your communication skills help you in this scenario”? On reflection, however, I was definitely more of an umpire settling arguments between rival teams more than a researcher trying to stimulate reflection.

The tennis group took a very different approach. Because there were only three of them they worked as a group throughout the intervention. During reflection on action sessions the three participants got together in a group and discussed the reflection questions. They used the reflection diaries to stimulate the discussion but rarely noted down what they had been talking about. I sat with the group around a table and prompted discussions, and encouraged them to think about their experiences in relation to learning communication and organisation skills. We worked together to understand how their experiences had taught them life skills. Although some members did not always seem to be totally invested in the process they did tell me about jokes they had during normal tennis sessions related to the intervention. For example, one participant told me that she joked with her coach about the types of communication skills she was using when instructing and giving feedback to the squad. Another member had come into the session explaining that she had taught her flat mate how to draw up a timetable for her revision.



During the planning sessions the three participants again worked together to draw up spider diagrams of the skills they had, and the skills they needed in different life domains and specific scenarios. They did not compete against each other like the hockey group. They did however come up with an exhaustive list for both communication and organisation skills. While they were drawing up their diagrams I sat with them but I took a back seat role. During both planning sessions I barely spoke a word. They were very much in control of the sessions and did not really require my input.

Since there were only three participants from the tennis group I recruited members from the tennis squad to help out with communication reflection in action session. We had three women come to the session who were not participating in the remainder of the research. The participants appeared much more apprehensive to get involved with the team building games. They started slowly and required a lot of feedback and assurance. It was difficult for me to coordinate the group because I was asking them to think back to previous sessions and use the skills we had talked about to help them complete the tasks. This was difficult because only three participants had participated in the previous sessions. As such, I targeted my attention to the participants who were participating in the entire intervention. The problem with this strategy was that I was spending less time with other participants and they were contributing less to the overall team. After observing this I decided to change the teams around so that there were three pairs. Each pair had one participant who was on the intervention and one who had just come for the day to help out.

Once the participants had got going and were used to the types of games they were playing they seemed much more at home and they appeared to be enjoying themselves. Because they were not competing against each other in the same way as



the hockey participants did I was able to spend more time working with the teams to help them understand what they had to do, and how their experiences in tennis could help them complete the tasks. I received promising feedback from all the participants. Interestingly participant seven had said she was very apprehensive about these games and had contemplated not coming to the session. On reflection it was clear that she seemed uncomfortable in some of the games, especially the games where she was blindfolded, relying on verbal communication. At the end of the session she said despite her apprehension she had actually enjoyed herself.

The reflection in action session for organisation skills was very similar to the planning sessions. The participants were given three case studies and they were asked to plan different activities. I introduced the session and explained a few key points, but apart from that the participants got on with it by themselves. As they drew up a series of plans they joked with each other about planning in time to go drinking, to see boyfriends and girlfriends, and the lifestyle of one of the characters in the cases studies. Specifically, they joked that the football player did no work so they could schedule in more gym and grooming time. I found that quite funny having lived with university footballers during my undergraduate degree – in my experience they were quite right!

In closing, my delivery style changed throughout the intervention depending upon which group I was delivering to and the dynamic of the group. I feel it would be very difficult to approach each situation with the same delivery style in order to achieve control. Moreover, I feel my reflexive delivery style allowed me to use teachable moments as and when they appeared and more importantly allowed me to tailor the intervention to the needs and learning styles of the participants.



### *Managing the difficult times*

As with any piece of research there were difficult times. Part of the difficulty was related to the applied nature of the research. The participants were student athletes and as such they had many commitments that often took precedence over the intervention. On one occasion I received an email from Dan on Thursday morning less than six hours before I was supposed to conduct one of the sessions. Dan explained that the participants had a video feedback session that afternoon and because they were playing an extremely important match the next week Dan decided to postpone my session in favour of the feedback session. My initial feeling was that he valued the feedback session higher than my intervention. This was a little frustrating as I had put a lot of work into the intervention and I felt he was belittling my efforts. All I could do was re-arrange the session some time early the following week and hope the participants would turn up. Luckily the majority did. Throughout the course of the intervention with the hockey group similar issues arose. The nature of applied research in sport meant I had little control over the research. I had no idea whether they were learning things outside of the intervention that was influencing the results and I could not be certain that they were filling out the YES properly. Similarly, I had no control over them leaving the intervention. One player was injured during the intervention and could not train. I explained to him that he could still participate in the intervention while injured. I never saw him again.

By the time the actual intervention started the golf squad had dropped out so I was more aware of certain issues that may result in players dropping out. I talked to them about the intervention more in an attempt to get them involved in what they were learning. I explained more than once that this was part of my PhD and it was very important to me that I finished this study in order to complete my PhD.



Ethically this was questionable. On reflection I think I was influencing their participation in the intervention. No longer were they free to withdraw. Now that I had explained how much I needed their participation they knew that withdrawal had consequences and they may have felt guilty.

Issues with the tennis squad were more related to the level of closeness I had with the participants. I knew two of the participants played together on the second team, with the remaining squad member playing on the first team. I also knew there was a lot going on behind the scenes in the tennis team. At the time of the intervention the men's and women's teams had travelled to Scotland to play in a tournament. As there were 15 squad members Jim had asked me to drive up with them in a hired car so that the remaining players could fit in a mini bus. During the tournament it became clear that the three participants participating in the intervention had a very strange relationship. While they appeared to be very good friends on the surface there was a definite under current of competition for places, perceived favouritism, and general ill favour. I began to observe some instances during the actual intervention.

One participant (Participant seven) in particular appeared to feel very uncomfortable in the presence of the one of the other participants (Participant eight). During the communication intervention her body language was very negative towards participant nine and she also made a few comments about verbal communication and saying the "right things". Participant seven also said sometimes too much talk was a bad thing, she said sometimes it's just better to keep things to yourself. At the time I did not think much of this statement. I simply moved on to the next section of the session.



Once the intervention had finished the social validation interviews highlighted some of these issues. Participant seven had said she would have preferred to do the sessions on her own. Participant eight also said she felt she dominated the sessions and the other participants did not contribute as much as she did.

During the intervention I sensed something was not quite right with these participants. My role in the tennis squad as driver/sport psychologist had thrown up a few issues that many of the participants had with the coach and with each other. Some players felt they deserved to be playing in the first team but the participants who had been selected had only been selected because the coach favoured them. As a result, there was a definite atmosphere surrounding elements of the tennis club, which spilled over to the intervention. All three participants were caught up in these tennis club politics at the time of the intervention.

It was not until after the intervention that I found out the intricacies of the relationship the participants had, which I learnt from another member of the tennis squad who was not participating in the research. She had told me about some of the underlying reasons for the atmosphere in the group. While it is not ethical to go into all the details it is important to acknowledge that participant seven and participant eight had issue with each other and participant eight had issues with participant nine. Participant seven's results showed that the intervention had little effect in increasing her developmental experiences associated with sport. It could have been that this contextual variable influenced how she responded to the intervention.

At the time of the intervention I was solely focused on successfully completing the work given what had happened with the golf squad so I think I swept a few things under the rug. On reflection it was clear that some of the participants were not comfortable discussing some of the questions in the reflection journal amongst each



other. Since participant eight did dominate the discussions and the other participants were non-confrontational they were left to go with the flow. As a result, they may not have benefited as much had the intervention been delivered in a different style.

### *Lessons Learnt*

Throughout the intervention, from the first meeting up to the final follow-up measurement I felt I learnt many things about how to conduct intervention research, working with student athletes, and teaching life skills. First and foremost I felt building rapport with the participants was crucial. Had I come in as just a researcher and spent no time getting to know who I was working with then I am sure I would not have finished the intervention. It became clear that some aspects of the intervention were quite repetitive and boring. Specifically, the reflection on action was quite similar and in future versions of ELITE could be condensed into fewer sessions. The participants had all the sessions in their reflection diaries so they knew what was coming up in the second phase (i.e., organisation intervention). Had I not spent time building rapport with the participants I am not sure they would have come back for the second session. The hockey group had Dan around during the sessions so they may have felt obliged to participate, as part of the broader training regime. However, the tennis participants did not have the coach telling them they had to do the session. For them it was 100 per cent voluntary, as such they could have dropped out if they had wanted to.

This raises an ethical issue with intervention research. Firstly I believe building rapport is crucial, however if this rapport changes the participant's adherence and attitude toward the research it is questionable whether rapport should be built. Specifically, if they realise they are letting down a friend by dropping out they may continue participating for the "wrong" reasons. Therefore, how free are participants



to withdraw? Similarly, recruiting participants presents similar ethical issues. I felt the head coaches were gatekeepers and had to be approached to get permission to use their players. Jim, the tennis coach said he did not mind me approaching tennis players but he would have no part of the research. This was good because the players were not influenced by Jim and could participate freely. Dan, on the other hand, was very much involved in the research. From our first meeting I recognised he valued the skills being taught in the intervention and he wanted his players to learn these skills. At the time I thought this was great. By the end of the intervention I recognised that this had certain ethical issues. Dan wanted his players to participate in the intervention. As such, it may not have given them much option if they did not want to participate. Although Dan did not participate in the sessions he was always in the vicinity. He also phoned participants on my behalf to tell them of upcoming sessions and arranged the room for me. Although I am extremely grateful to him for doing this for me, I was aware that participants might have been externally regulated in their motivation to participate in the ELITE life skills programme. Ideally, I would have liked intrinsically motivated participants in the intervention; however, in real world research in sport I am not sure whether this will ever be possible given the need to gain entry through gatekeepers and the need to keep such gatekeepers on your side during the research.

Another key lesson learnt was the way I contacted coaches and participants both during recruitment and during the intervention. I had email contacts for all the coaches and programme coordinators at the university, and as such that was the method I chose to initiate contact. During the intervention I maintained email contact with the coaches but never got any contact details for any of the hockey participants until the after the golf squad had dropped out. Realising my mistake, this was the



first thing I did with the tennis participants. The problem I found with emails is they are faceless and there is no way of knowing whether they have been received, opened, or read. As such, I was left waiting for people to contact me to arrange sessions. I found it was best to maintain as much control as I could, especially given that so many things out of my control could go wrong. By only using emails I gave away control to the coaches. With the tennis participants I got mobile phone numbers in the first session and contacted participants individually to organise sessions. This worked much better because there was never any doubt that they had not read my emails. By phoning them I was assured they knew when and where they were meant to be.

In the follow-up interviews an issue recalled by one of the tennis participants really hit home with me. She had said since completing the intervention she had talked to more people on the phone and relied on verbal communication much more than written forms of communication (e.g., texts and emails). She said she felt much closer to people communicating that way and she felt much more productive. At that moment it dawned on me that I had not been practicing what I was preaching. My own communication skills had been poor at the beginning of the intervention. The fact that Dan had not turned up to our first meeting, the golf squad had dropped out, and many other troubles I had during the session were mostly down to the fact that I had not taken the time to talk to people. I had used emails because they were easier and cheaper. On reflection this could have had a detrimental influence on the overall success of the intervention.

My organisation skills, on the other hand, had been very good throughout the intervention. I had planned the sessions down the finest detail several weeks before starting the intervention. I also had several contingency plans in place if things went



badly during sessions. I made sure I had all the equipment I needed for each session, I arrived ten minutes early for each session, and I scheduled my days to allow time for reflection and data inputting. Throughout the intervention I inputted all the data into Microsoft Excel and SPSS and by the time of the final follow-up measurement I had written up the introduction and methodology sections of Study Three (in addition to the write up of the general literature review, Study One, Study Two, and the programme description). I had also prepared all the spreadsheets and graphs so that I could write up the results and discussion of Study Three with no delay.

### Discussion

The reflective practice completed during and after the implementation and evaluation of the ELITE life skills programme increased my self-awareness of my place within the research process and my strengths and areas for improvement in relation to conducting intervention research. The reflective journaling did not follow any particular model of reflective practice; however, the reflections do show similarities with Goodman's (1984) levels of reflection (cited Gilbourne, 2006). Goodman suggested reflection is anchored around levels of cognitive engagement and the existence of different levels of reflection suggests different types of reflection take place. Goodman suggested that reflections could be categorised as reflections to reach given objectives related to issues of efficiency, effectiveness and accountability, reflections on the relationship between principles and practice, and reflections incorporating ethical and political concerns. In the current study the majority of reflections can be classified as level one and level three reflections. Specifically, reflections were related to effectiveness and efficiency (level one) and ethical issues (level three). Consequence of actions (e.g., level two) were described mostly when things went wrong. Rarely did level two reflections describe the



consequences of things going right or the relationships between principles and practice on occasions when positive outcomes were observed.

During the course of my research I have come to face several challenges in recognising my role in the research and how I have affected the outcomes of the ELITE life skills programme. My greatest challenge has revolved around my relationship with the participants. I felt a certain level of closeness and rapport facilitated “buy in” to the programme, increased adherence, and had a positive effect on how the participants increased their life skills. The problem that I have reflected over is to what extent have the relationships influenced the results and how much is attributable to the intervention alone? Similarly, would it be possible to conduct the research and not build rapport with the participants, or is this a critical intervention procedure. The key question is what level of rapport can be built with participants. Some rapport is needed to engage participants in conversation but too much may be unethical. In the current study ethical issues may have arisen due to the relationships formed with participants. Ethically, participants must be free to withdraw from the research at any time. I did not, and would not have stopped anyone leaving the research, however it is possible that participants were not free to withdraw because of pressure from coaches and teammates or from a feeling of guilt from letting me down. In conclusion, I feel it is a balancing act between developing rapport with participants and maintaining enough distance so that participants still feel free to withdraw.

The ELITE life skills programme was conducted with three groups at different times. As a result, my experiences of working with the golf squad, reflecting on those experiences, and the associated lessons learnt will have changed my delivery style and behaviour when working with the hockey squad. Moreover, changes were



evident when working with tennis participants. Changes included gaining individual contact details rather than relying on gatekeepers to organise sessions and taking time to talk to participants between sessions

### *Limitations and future research*

Part of my reflection involved trying to move beyond the very good things and/or the catastrophes that naturally stood out so that I captured the lived experience of implementing the ELITE life skills programme. Despite this effort it is possible that reflections are only the things that I deemed important or relevant and I may have totally missed elements of the experience that, to someone else, may have been critical elements of the research process. This “glow” effect of very good or very bad experiences could be addressed by including other people in the research, conducting more traditional ethnographic research. Presenting evaluative research from other peoples’ perspectives could be used to corroborate my own reflections and to stimulate more critical reflection.

Although I endeavoured to keep a reflective journal throughout the research that included day to day thoughts and feelings, in reality the reflective diary was much more intermittent. Journal entries were usually made immediately after a session, or the morning after the session had been conducted, but rarely included reflections between sessions. Most of my epiphanies happened when walking home, whilst in the gym, and while driving. At the time I did not have my reflection journal to record my thoughts and as such some of these thoughts may have been lost due to memory. In the future reflections may have been better recorded with a digital audio recorder and transcribed. Audio memos could have been kept when writing is not possible resulting in a fuller description of my reflections.



Although reflective practice has received its endorsements in the sport psychology, education, and nursing literature (Anderson et al., 2004) it was unsure whether, in the current context, whether a reflective practitioner made a better practitioner. Specifically, reflections changed my delivery style and behaviour, which may have been substantially different to what I had originally intended. As a result of these changes it makes it difficult to draw comparisons between the hockey and tennis participants because of my evolving delivery style. The ELITE life skills programme should be delivered by a range of programme leaders who do and do not reflect on their delivery of the intervention to uncover whether being a reflective practitioner is a good thing when delivering the ELITE life skills programme.

My understanding of a number of issues has been increased as a result of delivering and reflecting upon my delivery of the ELITE life skills programme. Despite these increases I would suggest the process of reflection is by no means complete. This study presents the reflections at one point in time, which may change as I develop my understanding of intervention research, positive youth development, and life skills research.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings from this confessional tale contribute to the existing life skills and positive youth development literature by highlighting issues of real world practice when delivering life skills interventions with British adolescent sport participants. Additionally, the reflections presented contribute to existing research by sharing lessons learnt so that researchers and practitioners working with similar populations are given guidance and can avoid making similar mistakes.

The findings from this confessional tale contribute to the overall thesis by supplementing the evaluation of the life skills intervention techniques in Study Three



and providing more in depth information and detail about what actually happened day to day, therefore increasing procedural reliability of the ELITE life skills programme.



**Chapter Nine**  
**General Discussion**



## Introduction

The aim of this thesis was to develop an intervention to improve the life skills of British adolescent competitive sport participants, who are in full time education. This thesis was informed by positive youth development theory. Positive youth development is a strength-based conception of adolescence that stresses improving existing strengths and building competencies so that young people are better prepared for life. Young people who already have life skills should still be given opportunities to improve their life skills because positive youth development is focussed on building strengths.

In order to accomplish the thesis aim several problems in the existing literature were addressed. Generally, the majority of existing research has been conducted for North American populations. As North American research may not be generalisable across cultures, research needs to be conducted across cultures, and in particular with British young people. Specific problems with existing research included: It is unclear whether existing definitions of life skills reflect how British adolescent competitive sport participants define the term, it is unclear whether existing models of positive youth development (e.g., 5Cs, 40 developmental assets) reflect the needs of British adolescent competitive sport participants, it is unclear how British adolescent competitive sport participants improve their life skills (i.e., taught vs. caught?), it is unclear whether existing interventions are applicable to British young people and whether existing interventions can improve a range of life skills.

With these existing limitations in mind, and the overall thesis aim of developing a life skills intervention for British adolescent competitive sports people who are in full time education, the specific aims of the thesis, which contributed to the overall aim, were:



- To develop a definition of life skills that reflects how British adolescent competitive sport participants, who are in full time education define the term
- To conduct a needs analysis of which life skills are needed by British adolescent competitive sport participants, who are full time education
- To investigate how life skills are developed
- To develop intervention procedures based on the needs of British adolescent sport participants and the processes of how life skills are developed
- To evaluate the new intervention procedures

### *Thesis overview*

Study One provided a participant-centred definition of life skills and uncovered a range of skills, which were deemed important for British adolescent competitive sport participants to acquire. Research that fails to capitalise on the wisdom of its participants runs the danger of lacking authenticity, and of erecting unnecessary obstacles to the translation of the scholarship of knowledge generation into the scholarship of knowledge application (Jensen, Hoagwood, & Trickett, 1999). As such, British adolescent competitive sport participants, and the adults involved in the adolescent sporting experiences, were asked about adolescent needs and how life skills could be defined. The results of this needs analysis was used as the first step towards developing a life skills intervention tailored to the needs of British adolescent competitive sport participants. Specifically, participants suggested that communication skills and organisation skills were the most important skills for British adolescent sport participants to learn.

The second step was to understand how life skills could be learnt. Study Two investigated how life skills had been developed. A single participant was interviewed several times to gain in depth information regarding how she felt she had developed



her life skills. Results revealed that life skills had been learnt through the individual experiences that she had whilst participating in organised sport. Findings suggest that the intricacies of the sporting experience encouraged skill development. In essence skills need to be learnt so that one may successfully navigate the world of sport. A key finding was that she felt no one had taught her skills. Rather it was her self-awareness and an awareness of the requirements of the sport that had developed her skills. Thus, it was concluded that experiential learning and increasing self-awareness could increase life skills. This concept is supported by Danish, Petitpas, and Hale (1993) and Mayocchi and Hanrahan (2004) who both postulated that improving life skills and transfer of life skills from one life domain to another could be achieved by increasing an athlete's awareness of the skills he or she already possesses. This postulation, combined with the results of Study Two, provided the theoretical foundation for the ELITE life skills programme procedures.

The ELITE life skills programme procedures were created as a method to increase participant's awareness of the skills they had developed as a result of their experiences in sport. Engaging in three types of reflections increased self-awareness of knowledge in action (i.e., life skills learnt through sport participation). Participants reflected retrospectively on action during the first two sessions. The third session involved anticipatory reflection on action. The final session involved reflecting in action. In essence the programme involved thinking back to specific sporting situations to understand what had been learnt, using these past experiences to anticipate what one would need in the future, followed by attempting to use these skills in new scenarios. The same procedure was then followed for a different life skill (i.e., organisation).



Study Three aimed to evaluate whether life skills programme procedures, grounded in experiential learning theory, could improve the life skills of a sample of British adolescent competitive sport participants. The use of reflective practice to improve life skills is a novel intervention technique that has never been used with this population in this context (i.e., sport). As such, it was important to test the feasibility of using this novel technique before efficacy trials of the intervention could be conducted.

Results of a single subject, across behaviours, multiple baseline design suggested participating in the ELITE life skills programme procedures could increase life skills. Specifically, results showed that reflecting on one's experience in sport could improve organisation skills and communication skills. A composite score of overall developmental experiences could also be improved by participating in the ELITE life skills programme procedures. Social validation interviews provided qualitative evaluation of the programme. Participants revealed that the targeted behaviours were important to them, the intervention procedures were acceptable and enjoyable, and participants felt that by taking part they had increased their self-awareness, leading to increased reports of developmental experiences.

Results from Study Three contributed to the existing literature by demonstrating that life skills interventions can employ experiential learning practices to improve the life skills of British adolescent competitive sport participants. The study contributed to wider positive youth development literature by demonstrating that sport can be used as a context in which life skills can be improved. Results from Study Three contributed to the overall thesis by providing an evaluation of life skills intervention procedures that shows that life skills of British adolescent competitive sport participants can be improved.



Study Four provided an alternative evaluation of the ELITE life skills programme procedures to strengthen the overall assessment of the programme. An intermittent reflection diary and a repertoire of correspondence were kept between September 2006 and June 2007 recording reflections of how the ELITE life skill programme procedures were delivered. This procedural information demonstrated that the intervention was delivered in accordance with the programme guidelines but more significantly it highlighted the ethical issues and the obstacles faced during the implementation of the programme. Reflections were centred on the areas of supervision, delivery style, working with a squad of golf players who ultimately withdrew from the research, gaining entry into the hockey and tennis squads, managing the difficult times, and lessons learnt. By providing a highly personalised tale information regarding how the intervention was delivered was presented, which may have been lost by only presenting the outcomes of the single subject and social validation aspects of the evaluation.

### *Structure of discussion*

Each study chapter has a separate discussion section, which discusses specific findings in relation to the particular study aims addressed. The following sections build upon these discussions and focus on the theoretical and conceptual issues related to the current thesis as a whole. This is followed by methodological and measurement concerns associated with the thesis. Finally, practical implications are examined followed by general limitations and delimitations and future research directions.

### *Theoretical and conceptual implications*

This section highlights the most important themes to emerge from this thesis and outlines their theoretical contribution in relation to existing theories of positive



youth development and learning life skills through sport. Each study will be addressed in turn.

Study One uncovered a participant-centred definition of life skills. Based on the results of Study One, life skills were defined as ranges of transferable skills needed for everyday life, by everybody, that help people thrive above and beyond the normal requirements of everyday existence. When analysing this definition several theoretical implications arise. The Life Development Intervention suggests that transfer of life skills is an important aspect to consider, however it is not a central concept. The current definition suggests transfer is critical. If skills cannot be transferred across domains they are domain specific (e.g., a sport skill vs. a life skill). Thriving is a central concept of positive youth development from a developmental systems perspective. Specifically, Lerner et al. (2006) suggested that if young people match their individual needs with ecological assets they will be able to build the 5Cs of positive youth development, leading to well being within time and thriving across time. Results from Study One suggested that life skills are needed to thrive in life in a similar way that Lerner and colleagues suggest the 5Cs are needed to thrive. As demonstrated in the Study One discussion there is substantial crossover between the life skills uncovered in the needs analysis and the 5Cs.

The 5Cs model is grounded in a developmental systems perspective of human development. These theories suggest development is the result of the interaction between the person and the context. Results from Study Two present findings that support this theoretical perspective. Specifically, the participant in Study Two revealed that she believed her life skills were learnt as a result of her born with skills (e.g., individual strengths) and the experiences she had whilst playing sport (e.g.,



ecological assets). A matching of the individual strengths (e.g., her hard work ethic) and the ecological assets (e.g., parents and coaches who valued and encouraged hard work) resulted in life skill development.

Study Three highlighted that experiential learning theory could be used to inform life skills interventions. Results demonstrated that reflective practice could be used to increase awareness of the skills that were being developed during sporting participation. This increased self-awareness, and awareness of the sport resulted in increased reports of positive developmental experiences associated with sport participation. These results contradict certain aspects of the Life Development Intervention approach to teaching life skills. The Life Development Intervention states that life skills need to be taught systematically, and simply being in the sporting environment will not teach life skills. This idea is captured in the statement that life skills are taught not caught. In Study Three, life skills were not directly taught to young people. Reflecting on past experience increased life skills. This would suggest that life skills had been learnt by simply being in the sporting environment.

Study Four also highlighted aspects of experiential learning theory in terms of developing my own delivery style and improving the overall effectiveness of the programme. Reflective practice was used to draw attention to the role I played as the intervention developer, deliverer, and evaluator. Evaluation of positive youth development programmes in a sporting context is a key recommendation of several youth development frameworks (e.g., Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2005; Petitpas, Cornelius, Van Raalte, & Jones, 2005). However, these frameworks only focus on the outcomes of the intervention and do not consider how processes are evaluated. Specifically, no evaluation of the role of the programme leader is suggested. Results of Study Four suggest the experiences, supervision, and delivery



style of the programme leader can influence how a life skills intervention can be delivered. As such, this should be integrated into future frameworks of youth development in the sporting context. Moreover, the role of the programme leader should be integrated into process models of positive youth development and life skills.

### *Methods and measures*

The measurement of life skills proposed a significant challenge when developing the ELITE skills programme procedures and designing Study Three. Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, and Hawkins (1998) stated that a major limitation of the positive youth development literature is that there are no standard measures of positive youth development. As such, comparisons of the effectiveness of positive youth development and life skills interventions are problematic.

It was decided to measure life skills by using a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches. The first step was to establish a definition of life skills so that participant understood what was meant when the term was used. The participant-centred definition of life skills, as ranges of transferable skills needed for everyday life, by everybody, that help people thrive above and beyond the normal requirements of everyday existence, was used to introduce subsequent research when the term was used.

In Studies Two and Three life skills were measured using an adapted version of the Youth Experiences Survey (Hansen & Larson, 2002). Study Two measured life skills to assess whether the participant had life skills. Once it was established that the magnitude of reported life skills was high enough the participant was asked to describe how she had developed these skills. In Study Three life skills were



measured to assess whether the ELITE life skills intervention procedures had been successful.

The YES does not measure life skills per se. Rather the YES measures developmental experiences. Specifically, the YES was designed to measure the developmental experiences associated with the organised activities young people participate in. The developmental experiences are classified as interpersonal experiences and personal experiences. These subscales were further subdivided into teamwork and social skills, interpersonal relationships, adult networks and social capital, and identity experiences, initiative experiences, and basic skills respectively. The rationale for using the YES to measure life skills was based on the fact that many of the subscales represent life skills mentioned by participants in Study One. Essentially, it appears that many of the developmental experiences in the YES can also be classified as life skills based on the definition provided in Study One.

In addition to the existing YES subscales, communication skills and organisation skills were added to measure the targeted life skills in Study Three. A visual scale upon which participants placed a mark ranging from yes definitely to no not at all, indicating how much they had experienced particular skills during their sporting participation, replaced the four point Likert scale used in the original YES. The marks were then transposed onto a scale with ten representing yes definitely and zero representing no not at all. The decision to change the Likert scale to a visual analogue scale was made based on issues of internal validity. It was anticipated that participants would remember which number they had filled in, in the previous weeks, and therefore internal validity would be threatened because of bias associated with repeated testing. As such, a visual continuum was used to reduce the bias associated with repeated testing. Specifically, by having a visual scale it would be



harder to for participants to remember where they had placed a mark in the previous weeks and would therefore more accurately represent the experiences they had in that week.

Quantitative measurements were supplemented by qualitative research. Participants were asked which life skills participants felt they had learnt during interviews and focus groups. Gaining qualitative descriptions of the life skills learnt extended the YES data because the participants were given the opportunity to described life skills that had not been included in the YES scale. Qualitative research was also used to elaborate on the magnitude of life skills learnt. Expressly, it was possible that yes definitely or no not at all represented different degrees of magnitude across participants. As such, by gaining more in-depth information the YES data was augmented.

The YES scale has been used by other researchers to assess the developmental experiences of young people; however it has not been used exclusively for research focused on sport as the context for positive development. For example, Hansen, Larson and Dworkin (2003) used the YES to inventory adolescents' reports on different developmental experiences in organised youth activities including extra curricular and community based activities. Similarly, Larson, Hansen, and Moneta (2006) used the YES to examine the developmental experiences of high school aged students. Within the sport psychology research the limited number of life skills interventions have typically used the same measures, particularly those articles that evaluate adapted versions of the SUPER programme. For example, Papacharisis, Goudas, Danish, and Theodorakis (2005) and Goudas, Dermitzaki, Leondari, and Danish (2006) both used the knowledge test, self-beliefs test, and a sport skills test described in Chapter Two.



Life skills and other outcomes associated with positive youth development have been measured using a range of methods. No one measurement of positive youth development was found; rather researchers typically use batteries of tests that assess outcomes associated with positive youth development. For example, the 5Cs of positive youth development (competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring/compassion: Lerner, 2005) are measured by assessing surface traits of each C. Lerner et al. (2005) measured the 5Cs using a battery of 18 separate psychometric tests measuring varying aspects of positive youth development (see Lerner et al., 2005 for a full description). In practice it would be very difficult to have participants fill out 18 tests, especially if longitudinal or any type of repeated measures research was being carried out due to the time required to fill out the questionnaires and the risks to internal validity associated with repeated testing.

Several researchers have developed measures of positive youth development that are much shorter and easier to fill out. For example, Klein et al. (2006) developed the Rochester Evaluation of Asset Development for Youth (READY) tool. Klein and colleagues recognised that existing measures of youth development are lengthy and complex and as such they set out to create a shorter measure of positive youth development that was easy to use, easy to administer, applicable to a variety of youth development programmes, and useful for the assessment of the impact of programmes on the development of programme participants. Through a series of meetings with funding agencies and community youth development programmes, Klein and colleagues identified and operationalised four priority outcomes for youth development that were likely to have an attributable impact upon: social skills, decision making, caring adult relationships, and constructive use of leisure time. Items were piloted and field-tested to test feasibility and establish



face validity with experts and with adolescents. Results revealed the READY took an average of 11 minutes to complete and as such the READY provided an easy to administer test, which allows community-based programmes to receive feedback for programme improvement, and to track the effectiveness of programmes. Results also showed that the four youth development outcomes identified factor into reliable constructs with acceptable alpha coefficients for adolescents over the age of 13. To date the READY has never been used with young people in a sporting context. Given that one of the objectives of the developers of the READY was to provide a measure that was applicable to a variety of youth development programmes it should be tested with sport based positive youth development programmes.

To date the majority of life skills evaluations rely on self-reports of which life skills have been learnt and to what extent these life skills get used in other life domains. In addition to self-report measures observational research should also be included to identify whether individuals are doing what they say they are, particularly when assessing behavioural life skills.

Measurement of life skills should take into account, process, outcomes, maintenance of learnt life skills, and transferability of life skills across life domains. Measurement of how skills are learnt is needed to expand the understanding of processes of positive youth development. To date a limited amount of research has been conducted that has specifically looked at the strategies utilised in life skills interventions to develop life skills. Measurement of these strategies would be a significant addition to the literature. Measurement of the outcomes of life skills interventions makes up the majority of evaluation research. Further outcome-based evaluation should be conducted; however the relationships between specific aspects of the sporting experience should be measured in relation to those outcomes so that



cause and effect relationships can be established. Finally, how life skills are transferred from one life domain to another should be measured. Study One highlighted that participants believed life skills to be transferable. If skills could not be transferred across life domains they were described as sport skills not life skills. Thus, transferability is a critical element of life skills research and should be given due attention.

Study Four has demonstrated that procedural information can extend beyond describing intervention procedures in the text. The influence of the programme leader can play a critical role in the success of the intervention. For example, Gould et al. (2005) demonstrated that individual coaching philosophies had played a key role in developing life skills. Similarly, leaders of the SUPER programme are given several hours of tutor training so that they have the skills to deliver the life skills programme (Danish, 2002). Hence, the skills of the intervention practitioner need to be measured to understand how they influence how life skills are developed. Keeping reflective accounts do not directly measure practitioner skills; however, they do highlight critical issues in the actual delivery of the programme. Moreover, reflective practice has been shown to improve the skills of the practitioner (Schön, 1987) and therefore reflective practice should be integrated within life skills programmes to improve the delivery of the individual practitioner as well as improving the delivery of the programme across practitioners.

The evaluation of life skills is dependant upon life skills being conscious. It is possible that some life skills are unconscious, and thus cannot be assessed by asking individuals about their experiences. For example, Eccles and Barber (1999) suggested internalising group norms is a less conscious process; similarly identity formation could be considered as a less conscious process and as such cannot be



easily assessed using traditional approaches. This is particularly apparent given the results of Study Two, which suggested life skills were only learnt when the participant reflected back on what she had experienced. The participant in Study Two had described how she did not realise she was learning skills at the time of the specific sporting experience. She felt learning was an unconscious process that only became conscious when she reflected back on what had been learnt. In essence, she demonstrated knowledge in action. Schön (1987) suggested that when individuals go about the spontaneous, intuitive performance of actions of everyday life, they demonstrate specific knowledge. However, often this knowledge cannot be articulated; individuals cannot say what they know, they do what they know. Thus, the results from Study Two highlight this issue in relation to learning life skills. Specifically, Linda demonstrated life skills but was not aware of the life skills she had until she reflected on her experience and identified these skills.

### *Practical implications*

Results of this thesis drew attention to a range of life skills, which were needed by British adolescent competitive sport participants. In addition to these life skills potential methods for developing life skills were highlighted in Study Two, which were subsequently tested in Study Three. Based on these results and the practical aims of positive youth development as an applied field, several implications have been raised.

Previous research has been conducted focusing on the role of the coach in developing life skills (e.g., Conroy & Coatsworth, 2006; Gould, Lauer, Collins & Chung, 2005). The results of the current thesis supplement existing coach education research by providing a range of practical implications that can be used to educate coaches regarding how to develop life skills in their athletes.



Study One provides a list of skills that are important for British adolescent competitive sport participants to learn, which coaches need to be aware of if they are interested in the development of the young people both as sport performers and as people. Results from Study Two highlighted how one particular coach created situations, which required the people in his charge to learn skills in order to be successful. This idea of experiential learning was integrated into the ELITE life skills programme procedures and tested in Study Three. Results showed that experiential learning, specifically reflective practice, could be used to highlight the life skills learnt through participation in sport.

With these findings in mind, coaches should be taught to recognise potentially teachable moments so they can structure their coaching sessions in a way that promotes the development of life skills. For example, coaches may set “tests” in which participants are required to cooperate with one another to reach a common goal, thereby learning how to work in teams. Similarly, encouraging participants to experiment with roles that require the use of these skills can teach life skills. In terms of the theory behind this suggestion, reflective practice theory suggests people develop knowledge in action. Specifically, when faced with these scenarios young people will have to “think on their feet” in order to complete these tasks and tests. Once young people have been exposed to these learning experiences coaches should encourage reflection on action so that young people understand the skills that have been learnt and increase their self-awareness of the knowledge in action acquired by participating in these activities.

By taking an interest in the development of the whole person, as opposed to the athletic sports performer, coaches can have a positive influence beyond the realms of the sporting experiences. Gould and colleagues (2005) proposed that coaches, who



adopt a developmental philosophy, where they are focused on developing life skills as a primary objective of the sporting experience, could develop athletes who learn life skills and excel on the sports field. Results of the current thesis (specifically Study Two) support the idea that the actions of coaches can influence life skills development. Results from Study Two suggested that the participant did not believe her coach had deliberately taught her life skills. Thus, it may be that skilled coaches create scenarios to covertly teach life skills without the participants knowing they have been learning life skills. Experiences of teaching the SUPER programme, which influenced the development of the ELITE life skills programme, support this notion. Specifically, when participants knew they were learning life skills they questioned why they were not playing tennis. If sport skills and life skills can be integrated by using the sporting experiences life skills will be best taught (Miller & Kerr, 2002).

Several authors have advocated the use of reflective practice to teach coaches about coaching practicing and developing professional competencies (e.g., Knowles, Gilbourne, Borrie, & Nevill, 2000; Knowles, Tyler, Gilbourne, & Eubank, 2006). However, to date reflective practice has not been promoted as a strategy to teach life skills. Coaches who have been exposed to reflective practice as part of their continual professional development may be more inclined to adopt reflective practice as a method to increase awareness of the life skills learnt as a result of the sporting experience. Thus, coaches should be taught how to reflect on their own coaching alongside teaching their athletes how to reflect on their own sporting experience.



### *General limitations and delimitations*

Specific limitations were written up as part of the discussion sections of individual chapters. As such, this section presents the general limitations and delimitations of the thesis as a whole.

Across the studies participants were recruited who were aged between 15 and 22 years. The participants who were over 20 years of age were still classified as adolescents because they were full time students. As such, they were financially dependent on their parents/guardians, and had not undertaken adult roles in society (e.g., full time employment, paying tax, buying property). Since Lerner (2005) suggested that adolescence might be regarded as the second decade of life (i.e., 10-20 years) and the World Health Organisation define adolescence as the period of life between 10-19 years some of the participants in the current thesis may not be regarded as adolescents. Clearly there are overlapping definitions of adolescence. As such, the United Nations (2005) added to a definition of adolescence by defining youth as individuals aged between 15- 24 years and young people, as those aged between 10-24 years. Consequently, the research in this thesis represents positive youth development research, but may not be classified as adolescent research (if the Lerner or World Health Organisations definition is employed).

The ELITE life skills programme procedures are grounded in the belief that life skills can be learnt through the experience of sport (i.e., knowledge in action) and can be improved by reflecting on those experiences. Since participants need to have sporting experiences upon which to reflect the programme would not be suitable for participants who either have never participated in sport or who have had negative experiences of sport. As such, the ELITE life skills programme could not be used as a stand-alone programme. It must be integrated with well-designed sports



programmes with positive youth development objectives that provide opportunities for developing knowledge in action regarding the life skills described in Study One. Without the well-designed sports programmes it is left to chance whether the participants have had the relevant experiences that can be reflected upon. This may account for the differences in results across participants in Study Three. Specifically, some participants may not have had the requisite experiences during their sporting careers and therefore would not have the material upon which to reflect.

The current thesis was delimited in the following ways. Firstly the study was restricted to British adolescent competitive sport participants from one area of the United Kingdom. Specifically, participants from Study One were from high schools and Universities in the East Midlands area and the participants in Studies Two and Three were all from the same University in the East Midlands area. This sample, in Studies Two and Three, was therefore representative of British adolescent competitive sport participants, who are in full time education at that particular university. The sample sizes of adolescent sport participants from high schools and other universities across the United Kingdom are too small for the purpose of making generalisations across academic institutions. Finally, the current thesis was restricted to the time period between 2004 and 2007 and therefore may need further research before generalisations can be made across time periods.

### *Strengths*

Strengths of the current thesis were that it extends previous positive youth development research by demonstrating that a life skills intervention, based on reflective practice theory, can be developed to improve the life skills of British adolescent competitive sport participants, who are full time education.



The current thesis presents the only example of life skills research with British young people using sport as the context for change. Previous studies have all used North American subjects. As such, this thesis presents an alternative insight of positive youth development. The results of Study One supplement extant research by adding a participant-centred definition of life skills and highlighting the life skills needs of British adolescent competitive sport participants. No other studies have accessed the participants' opinions in the same way despite the fact that existing research has consistently drawn attention to the role of young people in their own development (e.g., Dworkin, Hansen, & Larson, 2003).

Study Two extends the literature in several ways. Few studies use single case studies. The use of a single case in this case has allowed a great amount of detail to emerge. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis has also never been used to investigate how life skills have been learnt. Previous researchers have suggested the processes of life skills and positive youth development are not known (e.g., Larson, Hansen, & Moneta, 2006). Since only five interviews from one person were taken a model of processes can not be delivered, however, the findings from Study Two do contribute to the process literature by describing how life skills were learnt, which could be used to inform future research and practical efforts in developing life skills.

Study Three had several strengths. The use of a single subject research design has shown that individuals develop life skills differently. This may suggest that future life skills interventions should target the individual rather than the group. The use of experiential learning theory, in particular reflective practice, demonstrated that life skills could be improved without systematically teaching young people specific life skills. Finally, Study Three integrated qualitative research into the evaluation of the ELITE life skills programme procedures. Single subject research advocates the



use of social validation however evaluation of positive youth development programmes does not typically include qualitative research. The depth of information regarding the programme outcomes and how the participants felt about participation in the programme revealed interesting findings that would have been masked by a purely quantitative evaluation. Thus, the qualitative element of the intervention is a definite strength.

Study Four provided an alternative evaluation of the ELITE life skills programme. Strengths associated with this confessional tale included drawing attention to the role of the programme developer, leader, and researcher in the outcomes of the intervention. By delving into how the intervention was developed and delivered additional insights were uncovered which can help future practitioners develop life skills interventions. Furthermore, by reflecting on how I delivered the intervention I can improve my own delivery style when delivering life skills interventions, delivering applied sport psychology services, when teaching, and conducting research presentations.

#### *Future research directions*

Specific research directions associated with each study and specific thesis aims can be found in the discussion sections of the study chapters. As such, more general future research directions related to the broader thesis are discussed.

Given that aim of the thesis was to develop an intervention to improve the life skills of British adolescent competitive sport participants it is now important to expand this research by bringing together the intervention procedures tested in Study Three and conducting efficacy trials, effectiveness trials, and dissemination trials with this population. To supplement these trials the actual programme can be supplemented by conducting research that analyses the ecological assets associated



with the environments in which British adolescent participate. By conducting an analysis of the ecological assets present in organised sports it will be possible to match the needs of the young people with the assets available to them. For example, future studies would investigate which ecological assets are present and how those assets can be matched with the needs of the young people participating in the programme. Ethnographic research could be conducted where the researcher becomes part of a sport club to understand how the ecological assets contribute to positive development.

Future research should consider the intricacies of the sport in which the young person is participating. The participant in Study Two suggested that different sports would result in different experiences, and therefore different life skills. Existing research has largely taken sport as a homogenous experience. However, results from Study Three suggest people from different sports may learn different skills (e.g., hockey vs. Tennis). Future research may investigate different sports as contexts for positive youth development to understand how the unique experiences of separate sports provide grounds for improving life skills. This line of research could be comprised of a series of studies that investigate the differences in developmental experiences associated with different sports (e.g., teams vs. individuals, competitive vs. recreational, invasion vs. striking etc). This could be linked with research that investigates the ecological assets and structures of these sports to understand why these sports promote specific skills.

It may be possible that within sports there are also differences that contribute to how people develop knowledge in action. For example, coaching styles, organisational issues, parenting styles, and peer interactions could all influence how young people develop life skills through their participation in sport. Therefore, how



these assets affect young people's life skills development needs to be investigated so that optimal developmental experiences can be allocated; providing the basis for the reflections in the ELITE life skills programme.

Existing research (including the research included in the current thesis) has yet to distinguish differences in gender and ethnicity in developing life skills. To date males and females have been grouped together in most life skills and positive youth development interventions, particularly in a sporting context. Future research should investigate whether males and females develop life skills differently and interventions should be developed tailored to the needs of specific genders based on those differences. Similarly, ethnicity has not been investigated and as such should be considered when developing and testing life skills programmes.

### *Final thoughts*

This thesis raises several issues related to positive youth development and learning life skills through sport and fills several gaps in the literature. The literature review highlighted several problems with existing literature. The research in this thesis addressed these problems.

The first problem identified was that it is unclear whether existing definitions of life skills reflect how British adolescent competitive sport participants define the term. Results from this thesis demonstrate that British adolescent competitive sport participants defined life skills as ranges of transferable skills needed for everyday life, by everybody, that help people thrive above and beyond the normal requirements of everyday existence.

The second problem was it was unclear whether existing models of positive youth development (e.g., 5Cs, 40 developmental assets) reflect the needs of British adolescent competitive sport participants, and more specifically which life skills this



population needs. It was revealed that British adolescent competitive sport participants require ranges of interpersonal and personal life skills, but particularly require communication and organisation skills. Existing models of positive youth develop included many of the interpersonal and personal life skills described in the current thesis. However, these models did not specify which life skills were the most important for British adolescent competitive sport participants.

The third problem was that it was unclear how British adolescent competitive sport participants improve their life skills (i.e., taught vs. caught?). Results from Study Two suggested that life skills could be improved through experiential learning. Specifically, reflecting on sporting experiences to highlight the things that were learnt during the actual experience. The use of reflective practice was then tested in Study Three, which revealed that British adolescent competitive sport participants could improve their life skills through experiential learning.

In closing these combined findings contributed to the overall thesis of developing an intervention to improve the life skills of British adolescent competitive sport participants (e.g., the ELITE life skills programme). However, it is clear that positive youth development and improving life skills through sport literature is by no means comprehensive. As such, this burgeoning area should continue to grow so that sport can be used to help improve the lives of young people worldwide.



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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Participant recruitment email

Address Line 1  
Address Line 2  
Address Line 3  
Address Line 4  
Postcode

16 November, 2005

Dear .....

#### **RE: Sport Psychology PhD Research Participation**

My name is Martin Jones and I am a PhD student in sport psychology at Loughborough University. As part of my PhD in Sport Psychology I am conducting research focused on using sport as a vehicle to develop life skills in adolescent sports participants. Your name and details have been passed onto me by .....

My research will investigate which life skills are deemed important for the youth of today and then apply these valuable life skills in an applied youth development programme that will be taught to adolescent sport participants.

It is hoped that by teaching life skills to adolescents, they will have the resources to ease the potentially stressful transitions in sport (e.g., junior to senior competition and retirement) as well as giving athletes the skills and values to make them more rounded individuals. Before the programme can be developed it is important to understand which life skills are most important. For example, how important is team building compared with communication skills and developing resiliency etc?

My first study hopes to answer these questions by conducting a series of focus groups with a range of people involved in sport. Basically, I would like to interview a group of .....to get your perspective on developing life skills. The focus group will be made up of between 4-8 people and will last for around 1 hour and no longer than 2 hours.

I can appreciate that you are very busy, however, I feel the level of experience and expertise you have in sport would make a great contribution to the focus groups and my overall research and I would greatly appreciate any time you could give me.

The focus groups will take place in .....venue..... on .....date..... at .....time.....

If you wish to participate could you read the enclosed participant information, sign it, have your parent / guardian sign it, and return it to me in the enclosed pre paid envelope.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Many thanks

Martin I. Jones MSc



## Appendix B: Participant information letter

### Using Sport as a Vehicle to Develop Life Skills in Adolescents

#### Participant information:

##### Purpose and Background

My name is Martin Jones, and I am conducting a study looking at how Sport can be used as a Vehicle to Develop Life Skills in Adolescents. In particular I am interested in how people learn skills and lessons through their experiences in sport and how the sport experience can be facilitated to ensure these life skills are learnt. I would like to talk to you about your understanding of life skills, and your experiences in sport to try to gain a richer understanding of the research area.

##### Procedures:

If you agree to participate in this study, I would like to discuss this topic with you, in a focus group with 4-8 other people, for around two hours.

##### Benefits:

The information I collect will be analysed, and then written up in a thesis. This thesis should contain information to help coaches, athletes, youth sport workers, and researchers in sport psychology to understand the development of life skills through participation in sport.

##### Risks:

Given the instrumentation used to collect information in this study (i.e., focus group interviews), the risks associated with participation revolve around the disclosure of personal or sensitive information. This may make some participant's feel uncomfortable. To guard against this every step will be taken to ensure anonymity.

##### Confidentiality:

To ensure anonymity, personal information will be coded and stored in a secure computer, which only the investigator will have access to. Nobody will receive any information that has been attributed to you. Furthermore, by signing this consent form you are agreeing not to divulge any information heard in the focus group to any others.

##### Freedom to withdraw:

If you decline to continue, or you withdraw from the project, your information will be removed from the study upon your request.

##### Additional Contacts:

If you have concerns about this study you may contact the research supervisor Dr David Lavalley at Loughborough University (Tel: +44 (0) 1509 226328 E mail: d.e.lavalley@lboro.ac.uk)



Appendix C: Written consent form

**INFORMED CONSENT FORM**  
(to be completed after Participant Information Sheet has been read)

The purpose and details of this study have been explained to me. I understand that this study is designed to further scientific knowledge and that all procedures have been approved by the Loughborough University Ethical Advisory Committee.

I have read and understood the information sheet and this consent form.

I have had an opportunity to ask questions about my participation.

I understand that I am under no obligation to take part in the study.

I understand that I have the right to withdraw from this study at any stage for any reason, and that I will not be required to explain my reasons for withdrawing.

I understand that all the information I provide will be treated in strict confidence.

I agree to participate in this study.

Your name \_\_\_\_\_

Your signature \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of parent/  
guardian if under 18  
years of age \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of investigator \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix D: Focus group questioning route

### **Assessing life skills needs of adolescent sports participants.**

#### ***Opening questions:***

Name, D.O.B., Highlight of career to date, What are your goals in life?

#### ***Introductory questions***

What are the positives that can be learnt through sport?

What are the negatives that can be learnt through sport?

What do you understand by the term life skills? – how would you define life skills?

#### ***Key questions:***

What life skills do adolescents need for successful sport performance? - Why

What life skills do adolescents need to manage the demands of being a student athlete / amateur athlete? - Why

What life skills do adolescents need when they retire / make the transition out of sport? - Why

What life skills do adolescents need to manage your life in sport? - Why

Which group of people do you think would benefit most from being taught life skills? - Why

#### ***Closing questions:***

Of all the things we discussed today which life skills are the most important? Why are they important?

Have we missed anything out – is there anything we should have talked about that we haven't?



## Appendix E: IPA interview schedule questions

Interview	Main Question	Probe
1 <sup>st</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Describe your involvement in sport?</li> <li>Describe how tennis influences your day to day life</li> <li>Can you describe a usual session / lesson?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Probe for specific scenarios</li> </ul>
2 <sup>nd</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What do you think about when you are at the range / on the course?</li> <li>How do you feel when you are playing tennis?</li> <li>If you had to describe what playing tennis means to you what would you say?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Probe for specific experiences</li> <li>Physically &amp; emotionally?</li> <li>Playing well vs. poorly</li> <li>Competition vs. recreation</li> </ul>
3 <sup>rd</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How would you describe yourself as a person?</li> <li>How has tennis contributed to you being that person?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How would friends describe you?</li> <li>How would family describe you?</li> <li>Differences?</li> <li>What experiences have you had that make you that person</li> </ul>
4 <sup>th</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Describe specific skills and behaviours you feel you learn through playing tennis</li> <li>How do you think you learn these skills and behaviours?</li> <li>How much do you think about the skills and behaviours you are learning through playing tennis whilst actually playing?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Probe for specific skills</li> <li>Probe for specific examples of skills and experiences in which the skills have been learnt</li> <li>How about after playing?</li> <li>Is it something you'd considered before participating in this research?</li> </ul>
5 <sup>th</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How have you changed over time as a result of playing tennis?</li> <li>How will playing tennis will help you in the future?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Probe for past experiences</li> <li>Probe for example of how they feel they've changed</li> <li>Probe for specific scenarios</li> </ul>



Appendix F: Adapted YES

The Youth Experiences Survey

Initials: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Sport: \_\_\_\_\_

D.O.B \_\_\_\_\_

Number of years playing sport: \_\_\_\_\_

Instructions:  
Based on your involvement in sport please rate whether you have had the following experiences. Place an x in the box to show much you agree with the statement. (See example)

	Yes definitely	Not at all
	<div><div></div><div></div></div>	
e.g., Tried new things	x	
1. Observed how others solved problems and learnt from them		
2. Used my imagination to solve a problem		
3. Practiced self discipline		
4. Learnt about controlling my temper		
5. Became better at dealing with fear and anxiety		
6. Became better at handling stress		
7. Learnt that my emotions affect how I perform		
8. I have improved academic skills (reading, writing, maths, etc.)		
9. I have improved skills for finding information		
10. I have improved computer/internet skills		
11. I have improved artistic/creative skills		
12. I have improved athletic or physical skills		
13. Learnt about helping others		
14. Learnt to stand up for something I believed was morally right		
15. Learnt about morals and values		
16. Learnt that working together requires some compromising		
17. Became better at sharing responsibility		
18. Learnt to be patient with other group members		
19. Learnt how my emotions and attitude affect others in the group		
20. Learnt that it is not necessary to like people in order to work with them		
21. I became better at giving feedback		
22. I became better at taking feedback		
23. Learnt about the challenges of being a leader		
24. Others in my sport counted on me		
25. Had an opportunity to be in charge of a group of peers		
26. My sport improved my relationship with my parents/guardians		
27. I had good conversations with my parents/guardians because of my sport		
28. My sport opened up job or career opportunities for me		
29. Tried a new way of acting around people		
30. I do things in my sport I don't get to do anywhere else		
31. Started thinking more about my future because of my sport		
32. My sport got me thinking about who I am		
33. My sport has been a positive influence in my life		
34. Learnt to consider possible obstacles when making plans		
35. I put all my energy into my sport		
36. Learnt to push myself		
37. Learnt to focus my attention		







## Appendix G: Social validity interview guide

# Social Validity interview guide

### *The effectiveness of the intervention procedures*

1. Describe what you have learnt by participating in this intervention?
2. What was your favourite part of the intervention?
3. Do you feel the questionnaires have accurately captured your experiences of the intervention? Why / why not?

### *The perceived influence of the intervention on use of communication and organisation within the sporting domain and in other life domains*

4. Describe how the intervention has influenced your use of communication skills?
5. Describe how the intervention has influenced your use of organisation skills?
6. Describe how the intervention has influenced our sport performance?
7. Describe how the intervention has influenced your performance in other life domains?

### *The utility of developing communication and organisation skills*

8. Why are communication skills important?
9. Why are organisation skills important?

### *Implications of the intervention for the future*

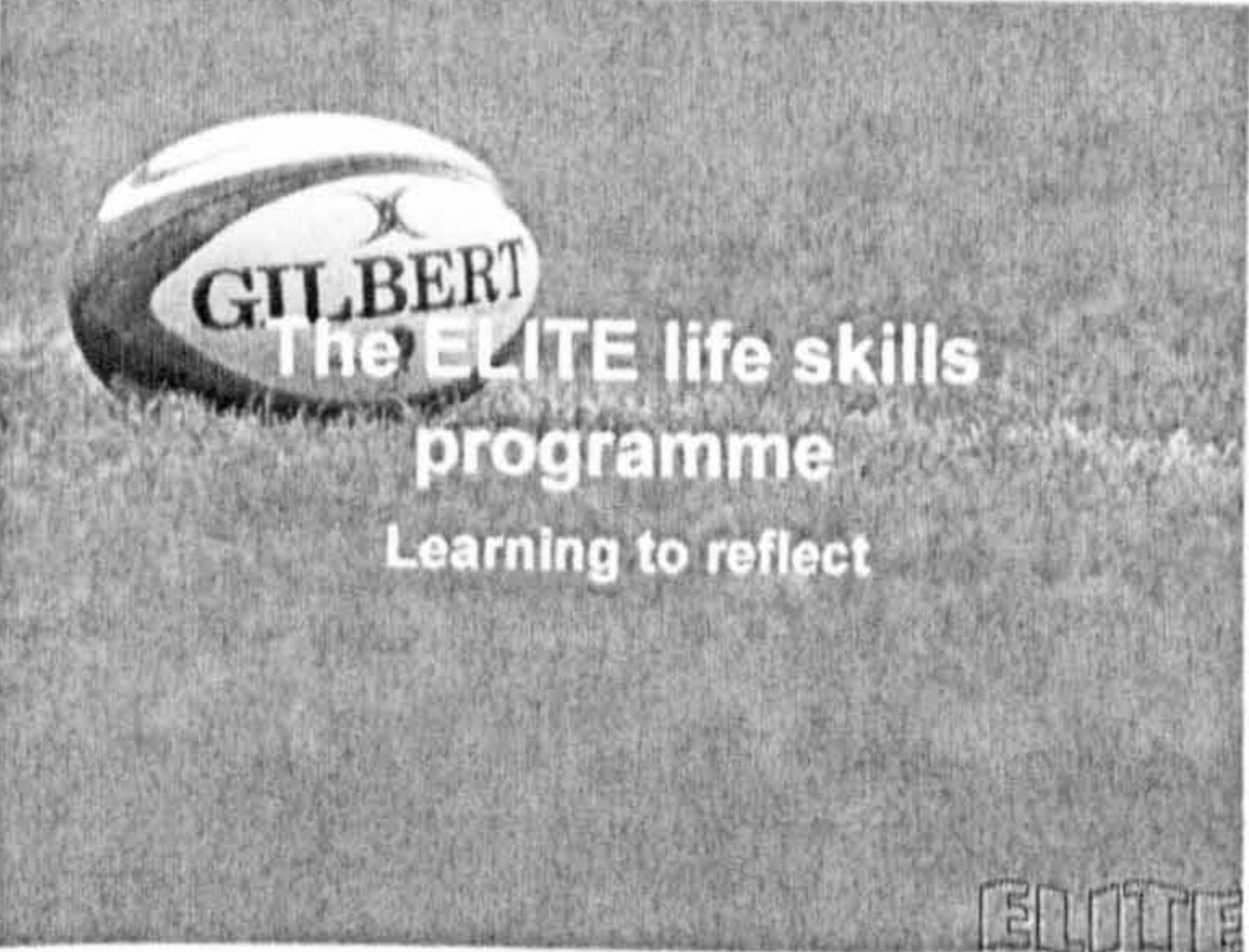
10. How will the things learnt in this intervention help you in the future?

### *Possible improvements to the intervention*

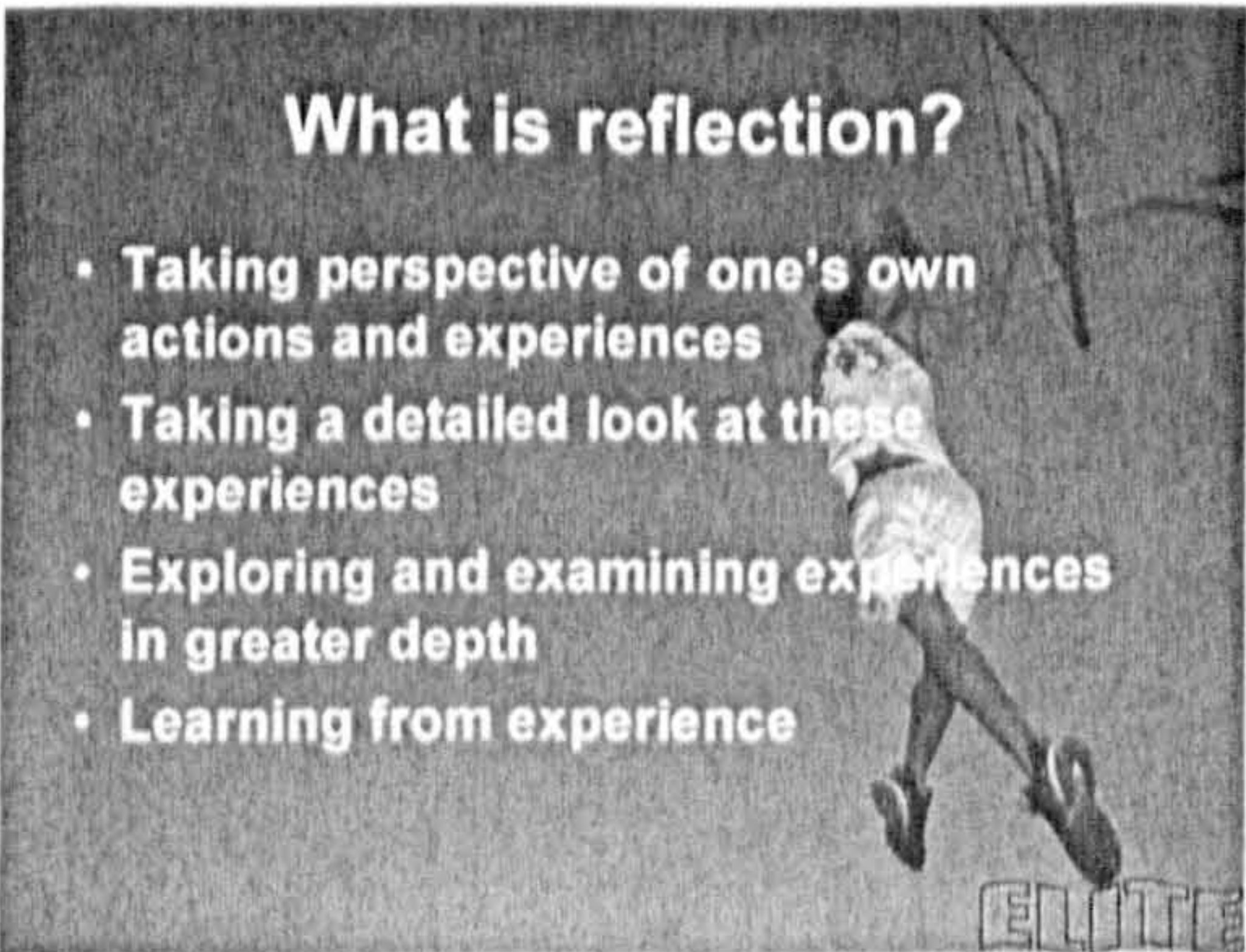
11. What was your least favourite part of the intervention?
12. What could be improved?
13. Would you recommend it to others? Why / why not?



Appendix H: ELITE life skills programme introduction presentation

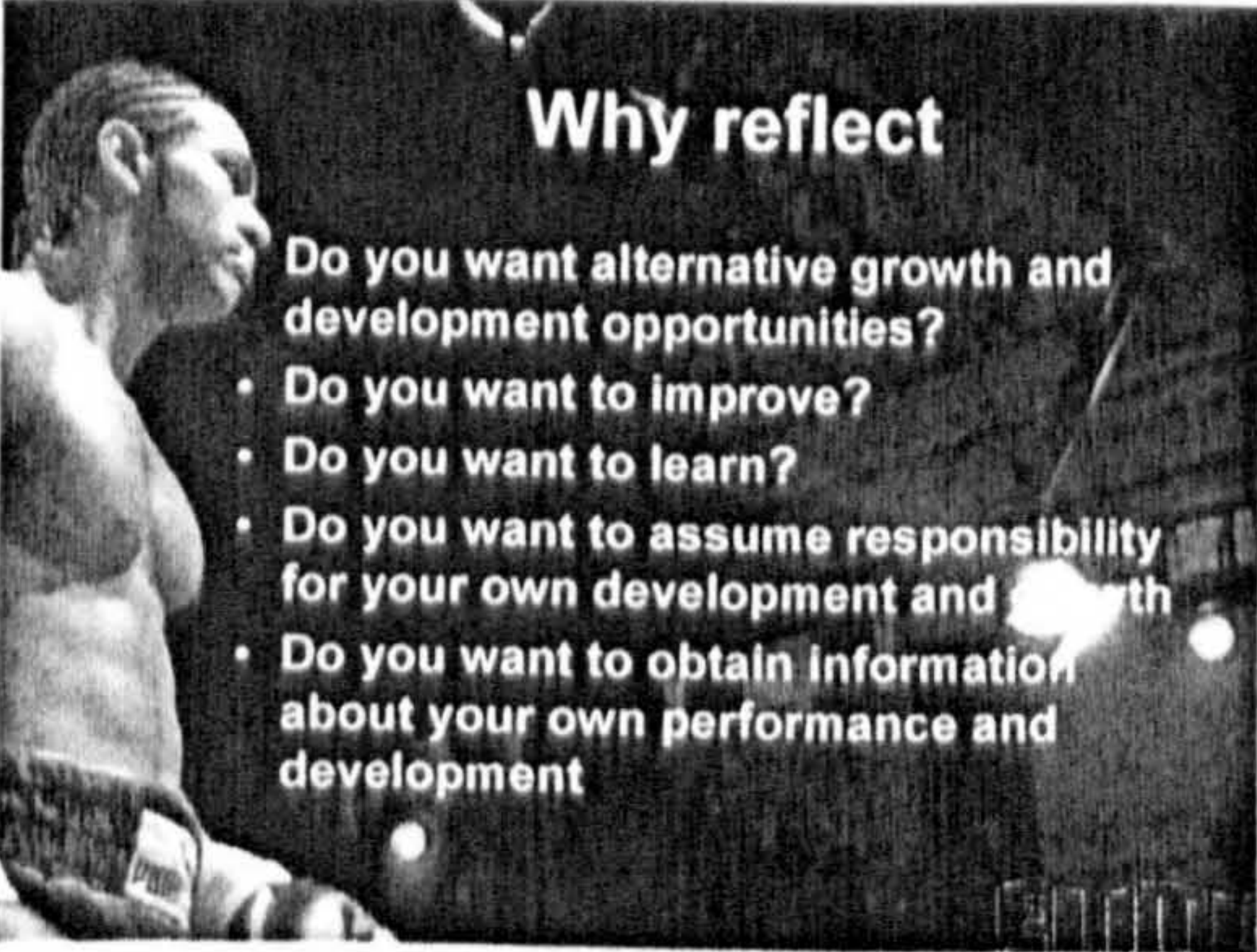


**GILBERT**  
**The ELITE life skills programme**  
Learning to reflect



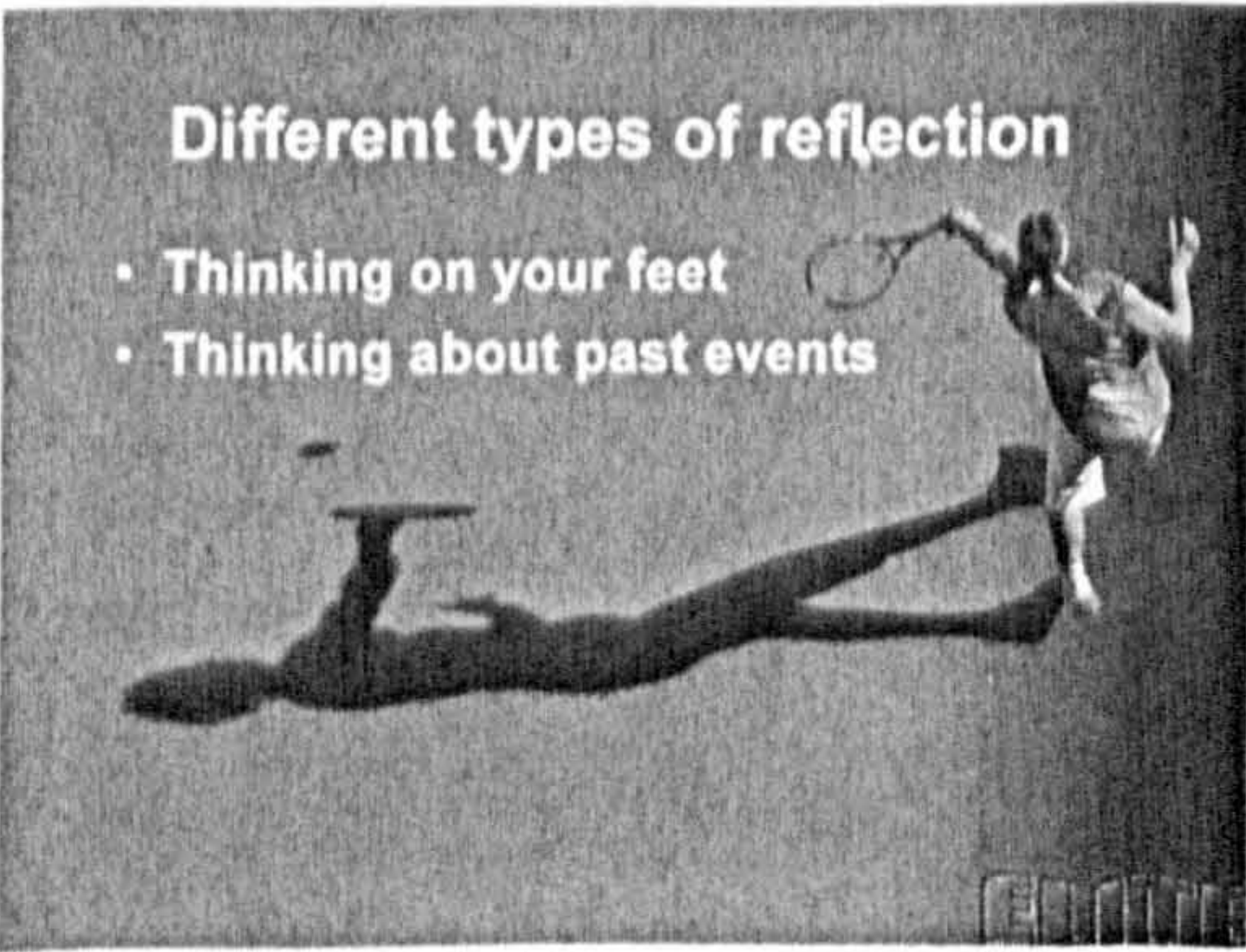
**What is reflection?**

- Taking perspective of one's own actions and experiences
- Taking a detailed look at these experiences
- Exploring and examining experiences in greater depth
- Learning from experience



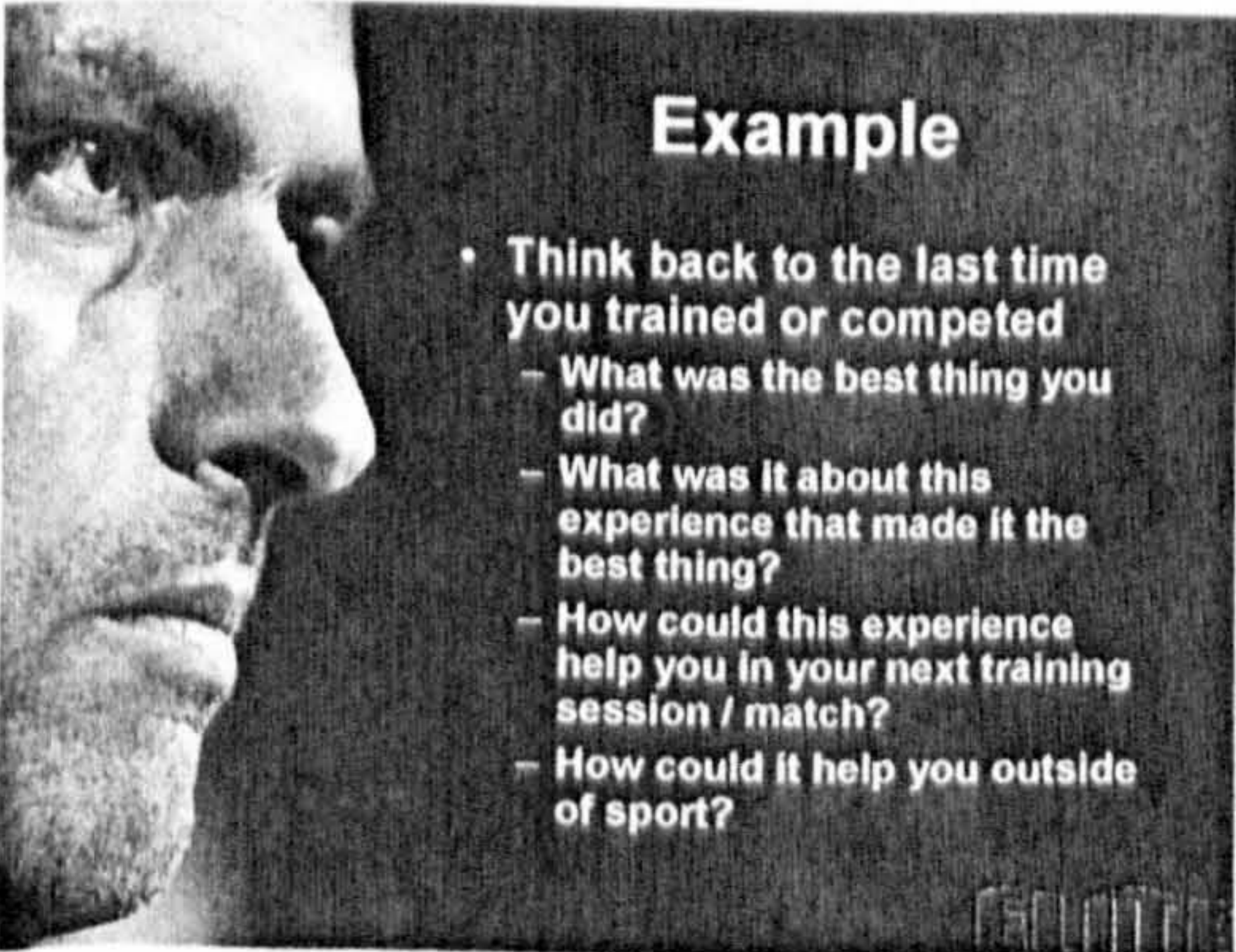
**Why reflect**

- Do you want alternative growth and development opportunities?
- Do you want to improve?
- Do you want to learn?
- Do you want to assume responsibility for your own development and growth
- Do you want to obtain information about your own performance and development



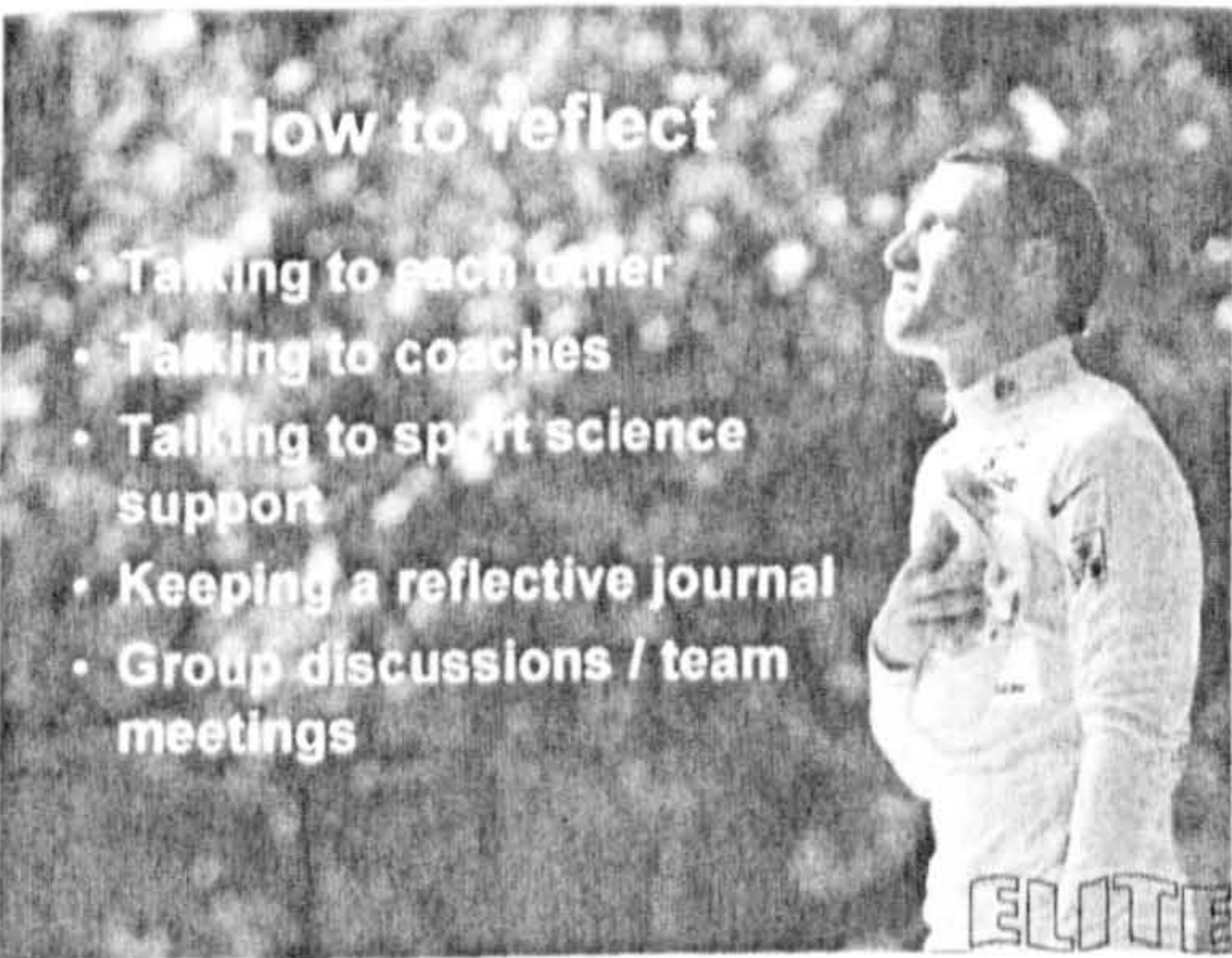
**Different types of reflection**

- Thinking on your feet
- Thinking about past events



**Example**

- Think back to the last time you trained or competed
  - What was the best thing you did?
  - What was it about this experience that made it the best thing?
  - How could this experience help you in your next training session / match?
  - How could it help you outside of sport?



**How to reflect**

- Talking to each other
- Talking to coaches
- Talking to sport science support
- Keeping a reflective journal
- Group discussions / team meetings



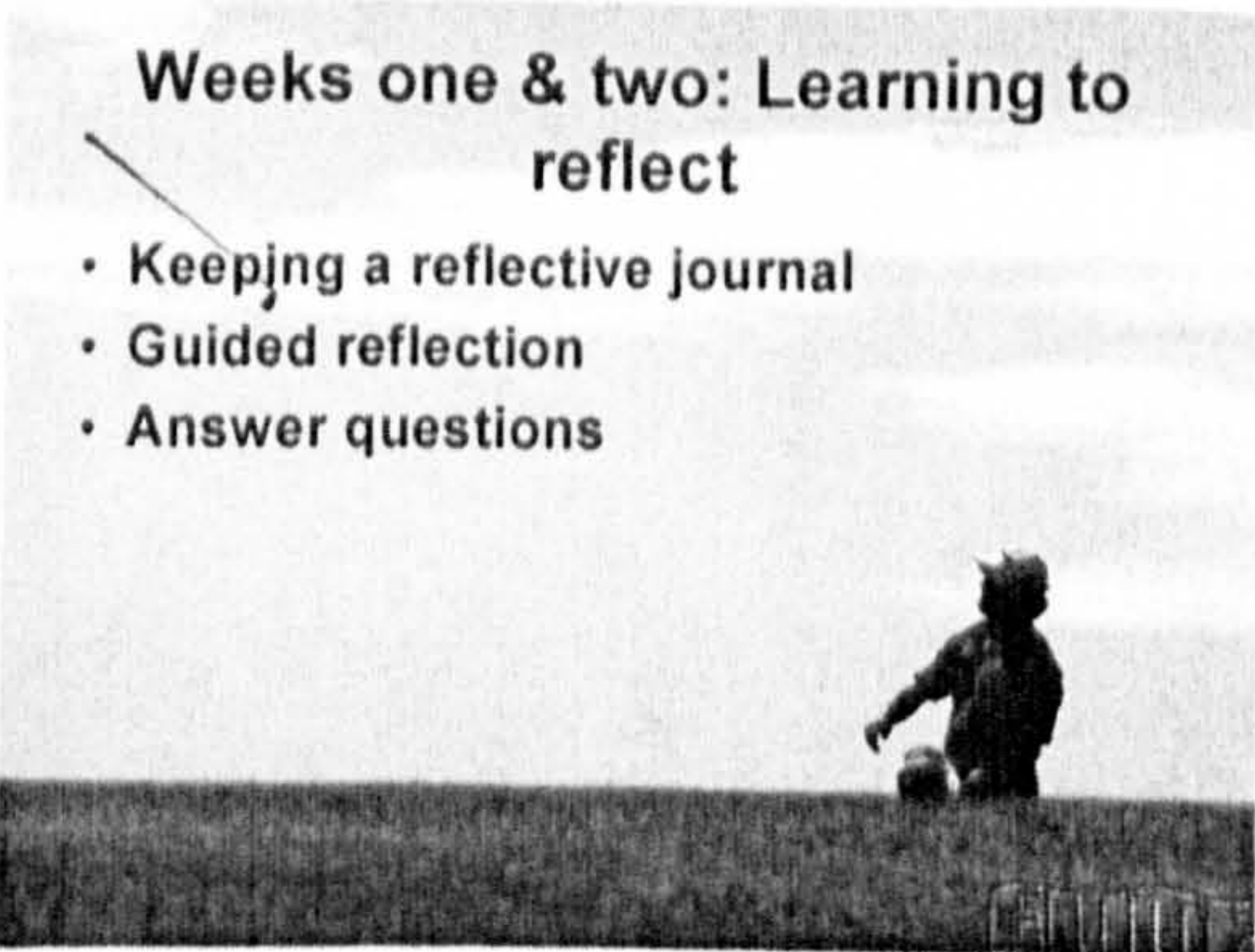
**The ELITE life skills programme**

- Enhancement of Leadership
- Intercommunication
- Teamwork
- Excellence



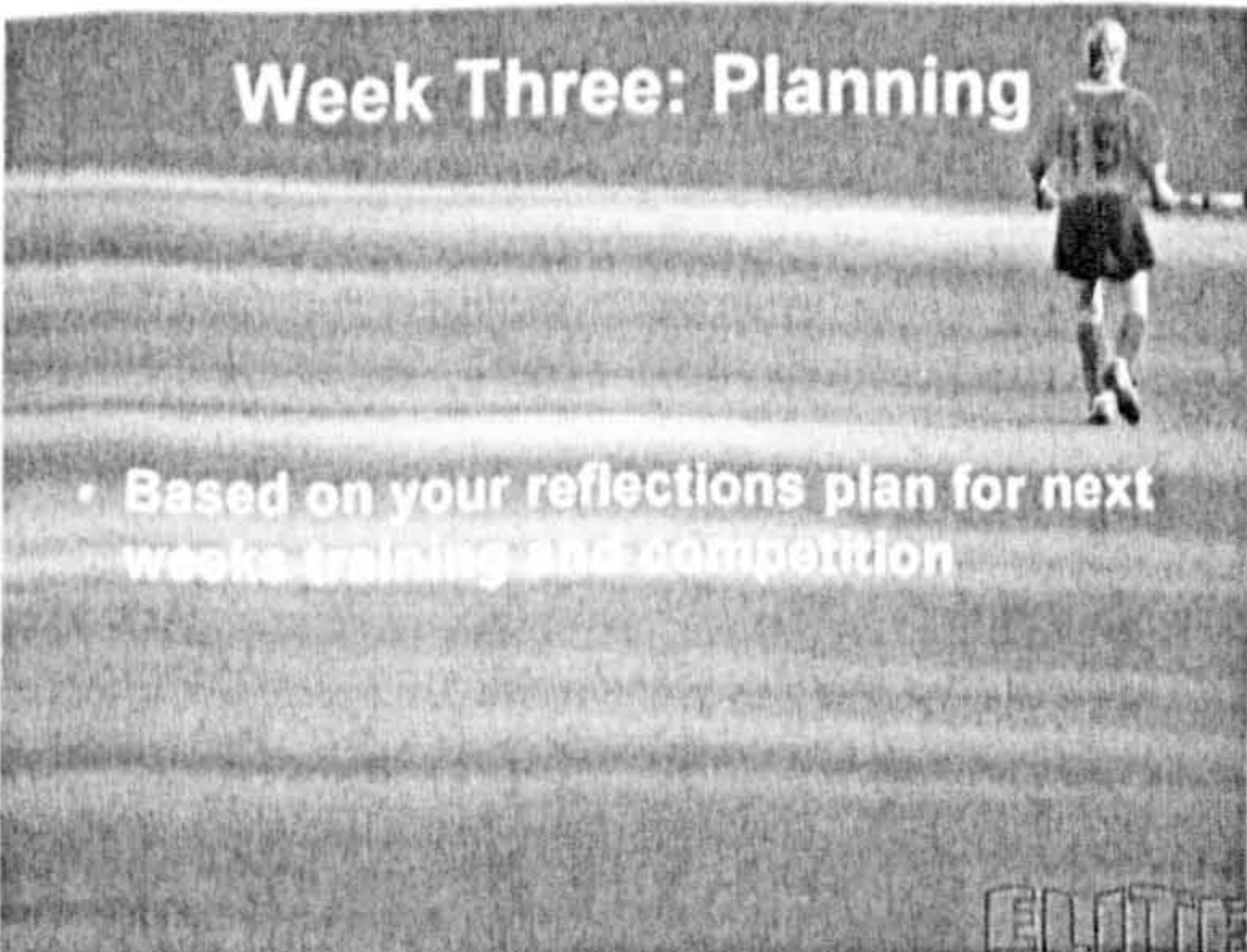
**The ELITE life skills programme**

- Two phases
- Phase one is four weeks
- Phase two is four weeks
- Wrap up



**Weeks one & two: Learning to reflect**

- Keeping a reflective journal
- Guided reflection
- Answer questions



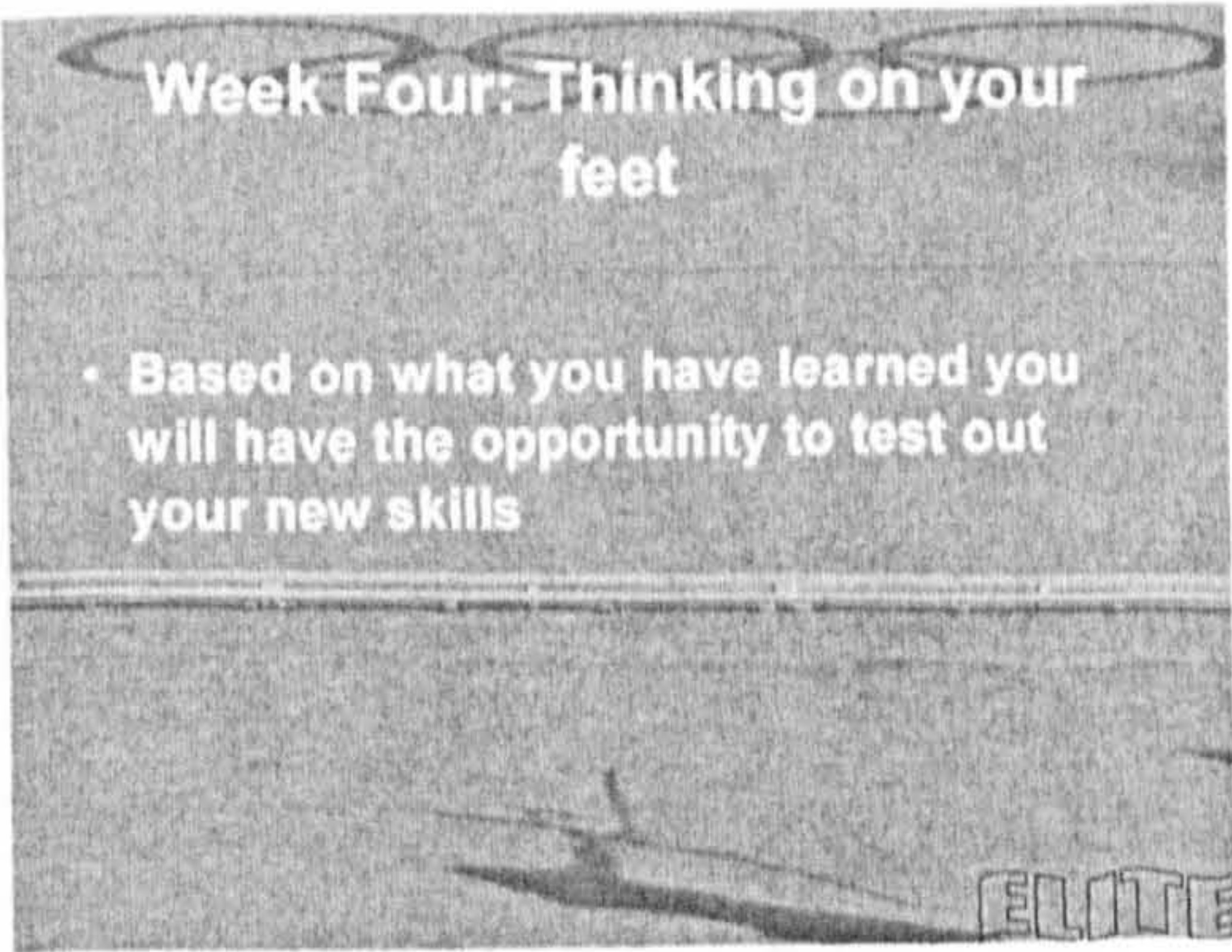
**Week Three: Planning**

- Based on your reflections plan for next weeks training and competition



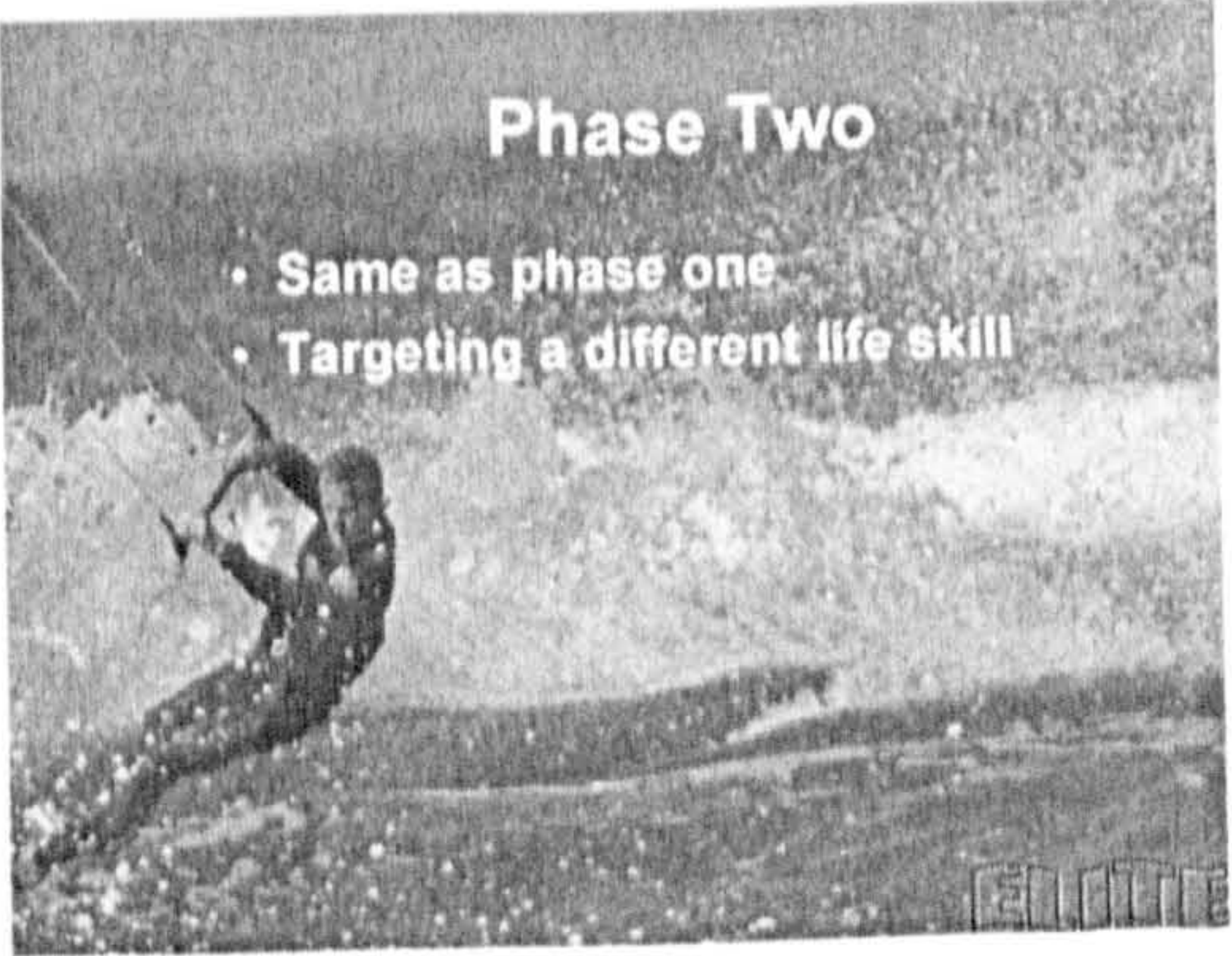
### Week Four: Thinking on your feet

- Based on what you have learned you will have the opportunity to test out your new skills



### Phase Two

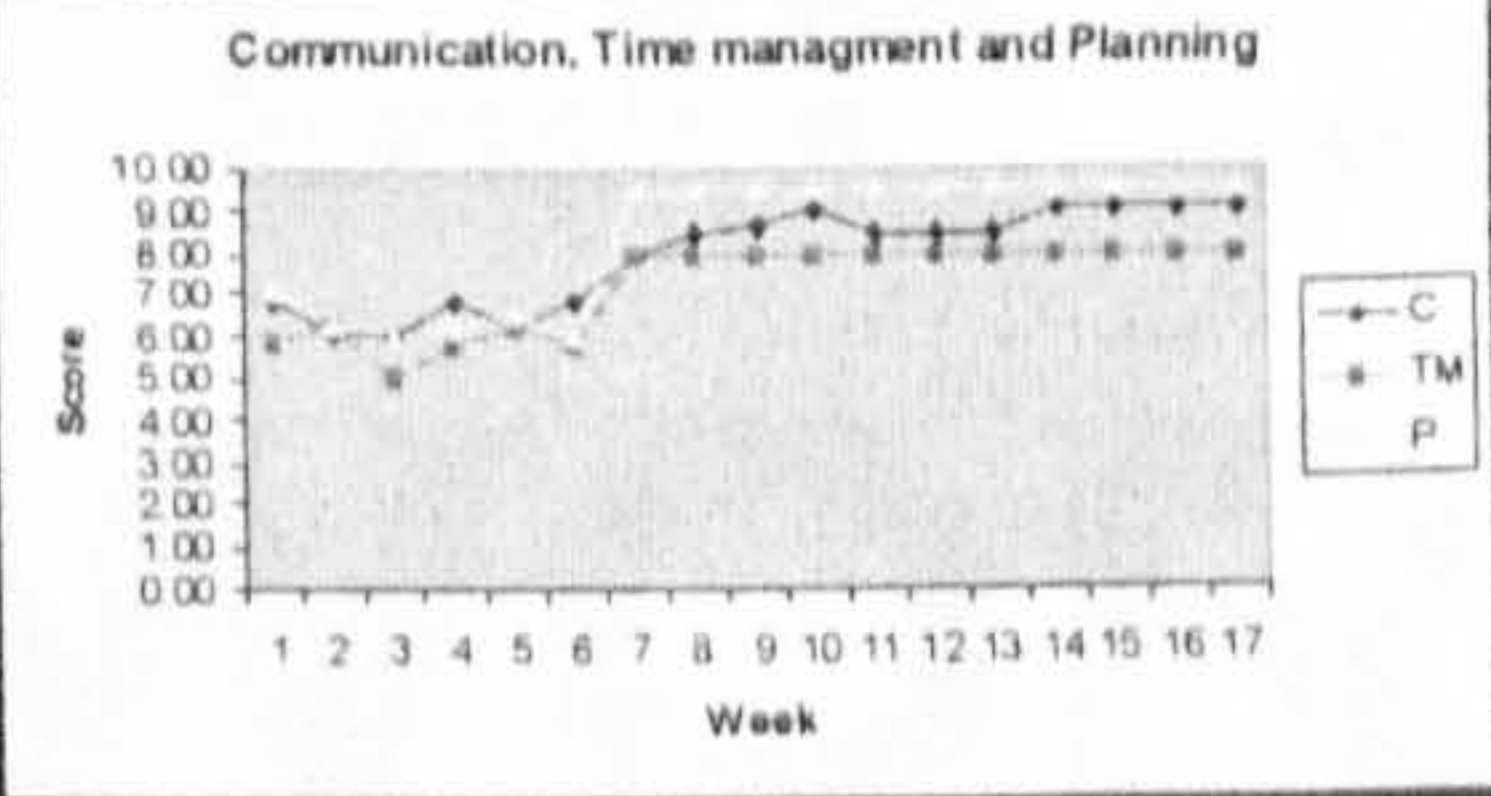
- Same as phase one
- Targeting a different life skill



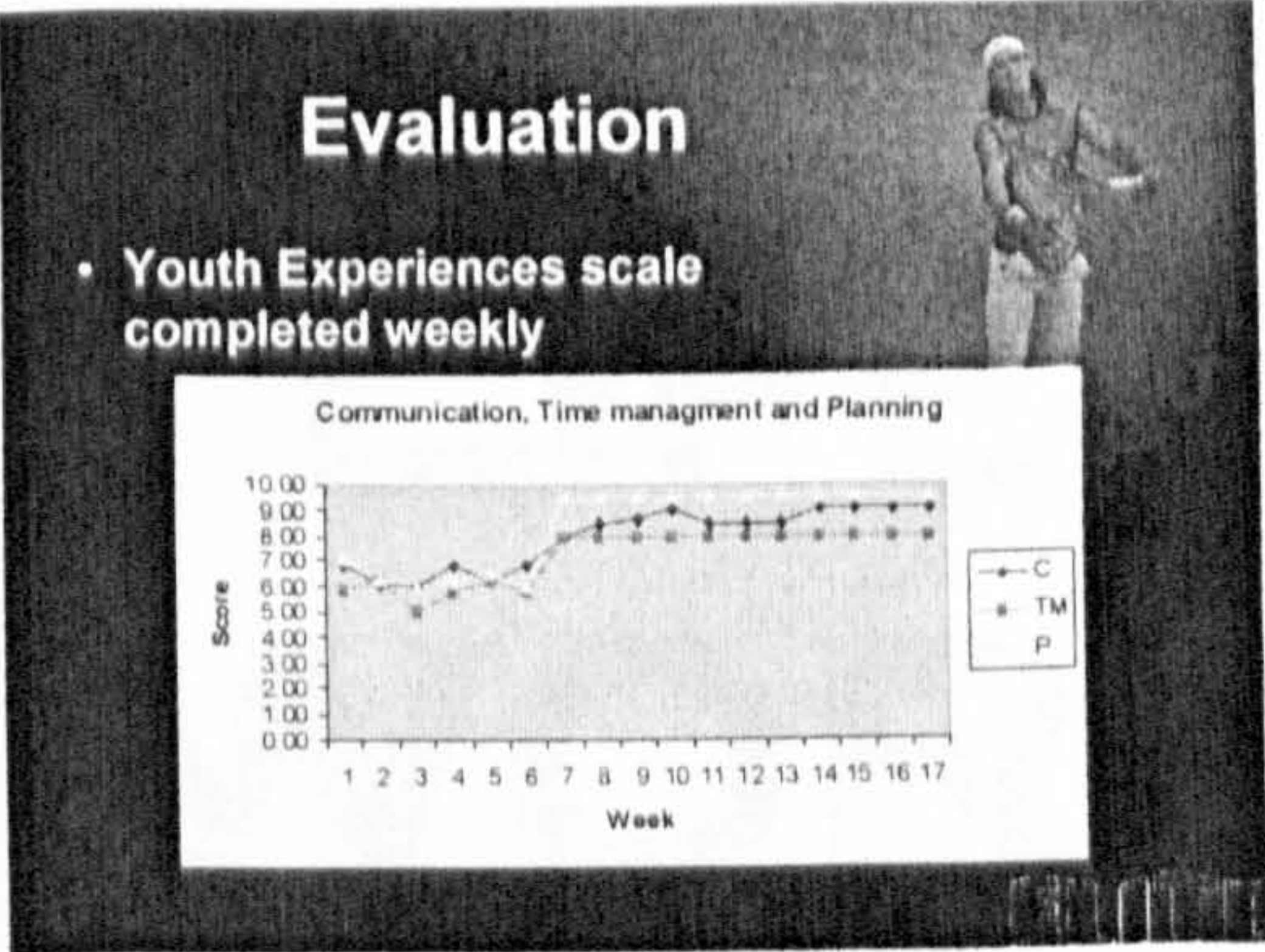
### Evaluation

- Youth Experiences scale completed weekly

Communication, Time management and Planning

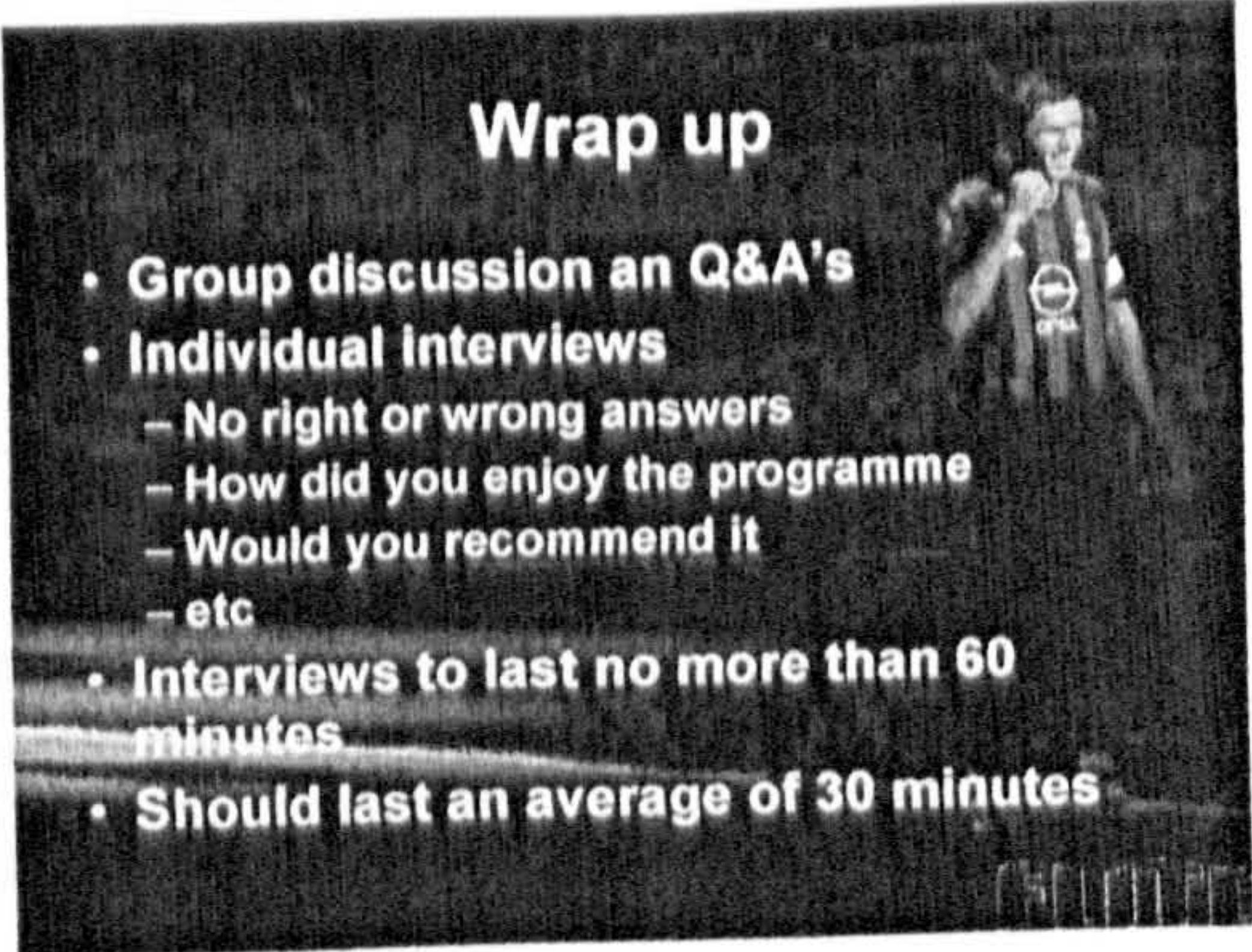


Week	C	TM	P
1	6.0	5.5	5.0
2	6.0	5.5	5.0
3	6.0	5.5	5.0
4	6.0	5.5	5.0
5	6.0	5.5	5.0
6	6.0	5.5	5.0
7	6.0	5.5	5.0
8	6.0	5.5	5.0
9	6.0	5.5	5.0
10	6.0	5.5	5.0
11	6.0	5.5	5.0
12	6.0	5.5	5.0
13	6.0	5.5	5.0
14	6.0	5.5	5.0
15	6.0	5.5	5.0
16	6.0	5.5	5.0
17	6.0	5.5	5.0



### Wrap up

- Group discussion and Q&A's
- Individual interviews
  - No right or wrong answers
  - How did you enjoy the programme
  - Would you recommend it
  - etc
- Interviews to last no more than 60 minutes
- Should last an average of 30 minutes

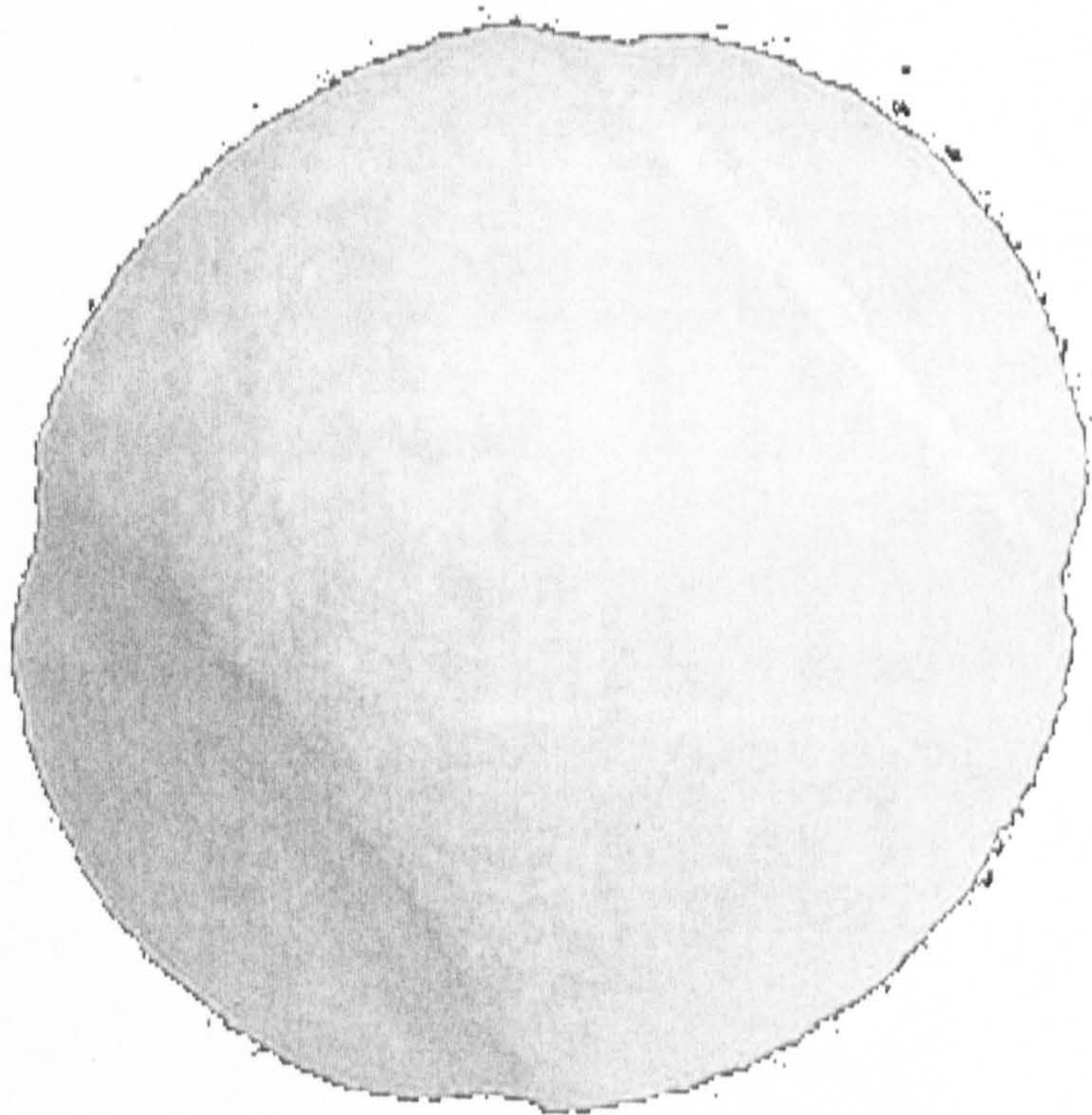


### Questions?





# **ELITE LIFE SKILLS WORKBOOK**





“What information do I need to develop life skills through this sporting experience”?



## **What Are Life Skills?**

Life skills are ranges of skills needed for everyday life, by everybody, that help people thrive above and beyond the normal requirements of everyday existence.

Sport is a great environment for developing life skills that transfer into other life domains. As a result, sports people are often successful in non sport endeavours.

However, it has been shown that the process of learning life skills does not happen automatically!

Life skills must be systematically taught so that you can benefit.

A good method of teaching life skills is through reflective practice. Thus, this reflection journal has been produced to give you the resources to learn life skills and give you the best chance to increase your success both on and off the field of play.



## **Reflection Journal**

This journal aims to provide guidance when engaging in reflective practice.

Reflective practice is increasingly becoming a key element in teacher training, management training, medical education and coach education and therefore it is a very useful skill to acquire.

The questions in this journal are there to stimulate your reflections and guide you through the reflective process. Feel free to write down pertinent thoughts feeling and ideas in the spaces provided. Also, use these questions to augment discussions with teammates, coaches and significant others.

By using the journal each week after every practice, gym session and match each week you give yourself the best chance of improving your life skills and bringing success.

Finally, the journal is for you alone. Your entries are confidential and will not be read by anyone, unless you instruct someone to do so.



# **ELITE life skills programme: Week One**

## **Introduction**

### **Learning Objective**

- To introduce reflective practice and the give an overview of the ELITE life skills program

### **Progressions**

- Continue reflecting on past events over the next week. Think about optimal experiences, poor performances or any other experiences that hold relevance to you. Specifically think about what you learnt

### **Notes**

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## **ELITE life skills programme: Week Two**

### **Introducing communication**

#### **Learning Objectives**

- To learn how to fill reflection journals
- Introduce communication skills as the first life skill
- Begin to complete reflection journal

#### **Progressions**

- Reflect on other past experiences (e.g., training camps, memorable training sessions etc)
- Think about what you have experienced in competition and what they have learnt
- Get together in groups, talk to me and / or talk with coaches about your reflections

#### **Notes**

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Read through the following reflection questions and note down any pertinent thoughts, feelings, and opinions

# Describe the role of communication skills in tennis

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

## Describe the communication skills you used in your last training session

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## Describe a non sporting experience in which communication skills helped your performance

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

# Why is communication important in tennis?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.



## How did communication skills help you in your last training session?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

When thinking about your communication skills, what worked well today in these weeks' training sessions?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper appears to be from a notebook or a standard sheet of stationery. There is no handwriting or other markings on the page.



When thinking about your communication skills, what needs to be improved for your next training session

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

## Finally, how can I improve my communication skills?

[illegible]



## **ELITE life skills programme: Week Three**

### **Reflecting on communication**

#### **Learning Objectives**

- To introduce the theme of reflecting on competition
- To fill in reflection journals

#### **Progressions**

- Reflect on other past experiences (e.g., tournaments, memorable competitions etc)
- Get together in groups, talk to me and / or talk with coaches about your reflections

#### **Notes**

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Describe a match, competition or tournament in which communication skills helped your performance

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Describe which communication skills you used in your last match

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This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

[illegible]



When thinking about your communication skills, what worked well in today's competition / match?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

When thinking about your communication skills, what needs to be improved for your next competition?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



## What is it about tennis that helps me learn communication skills?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



# ELITE life skills programme: Week Four

# Planning

## Learning Objective

- Use what they have learnt from previous experiences to plan for anticipated future experiences

## Progressions for next week

- Plan for using communication skills in other life domains

## Notes

[illegible]



## **ELITE life skills programme: Week Five**

### **Thinking on your feet**

#### **Learning Objectives**

- To introduce a new task to see if you can move from reflecting on previous events to thinking on your feet
- To demonstrate that you can employ communication skills in non sporting domains

#### **Progressions**

- Reflect on this session to examine how this experience taught you different skills.
- Use this experience to supplement planning for subsequent training sessions, matches and other non sport domains

#### **Notes**

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## **ELITE life skills programme: Week Six**

### **Introducing organisation skills**

#### **Learning Objectives**

- Introduce organisation skills as a new life skill
- Reintroduce the reflection journal as a method of reflecting on how organisation skills have been developed and employed in previous events they have experienced.

#### **Progressions**

- Reflect on other past experiences (e.g., training camps, memorable training sessions etc)
- Think about what you have experienced in competition and what you have learnt
- Get together in groups, talk to me and / or talk with coaches about their reflections

#### **Notes**

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Read through the following reflection questions and note down any pertinent thoughts, feelings, and opinions

Describe the role of organisation skills in tennis

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Describe the organisation skills you used in your last training session

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Describe a non sporting experience in which organisation skills helped your performance

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

# Why is organisation important in tennis?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



# How did organisation skills help you in your last training session?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.

When thinking about your organisation skills, what worked well today in this weeks training sessions

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.



When thinking about your organisation skills, what needs to be improved for your next training session

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



## **ELITE life skills programme: Week Seven**

### **Reflecting on organisation**

#### **Learning Objectives**

- To elaborate on the theme of reflecting on competition
- To fill in reflection journals

#### **Progressions for next week**

- Reflect on other past experiences (e.g., tournaments, memorable competitions etc)
- Get together in groups, talk to me and / or talk with coaches about their reflections

#### **Notes**

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Describe a match, competition or tournament in which organisation skills helped your performance

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Describe which organisation skills you used in your last match

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## How did organisation skills help you in your last competition / match

[illegible]

# Which scenarios in the future do you anticipate you will need good organisation skills?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins or other markings on the paper.



When thinking about your organisation skills, what worked well in today's competition / match?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

When thinking about your organisation skills, what needs to be improved your next competition?

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with ten horizontal black lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, providing a template for handwriting practice or simple drawing. There is no text or other markings on the paper.



# What is it about tennis that helps me learn organisation skills?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



## **ELITE life skills programme: Week Eight**

### **Planning**

#### **Learning Objective**

- To elaborate on using what they have learnt from previous experiences to plan for anticipated future experiences

#### **Progressions**

- Plan for using organisation skills in other life domains

#### **Notes**

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## **ELITE life skills programme: Week Nine**

### **Session Title: Thinking on your feet**

#### **Learning Objectives**

- To introduce a new task to see if you can move from reflecting on previous events to thinking on your feet
- To demonstrate that you can employ organisation skills in non sporting domains

#### **Progressions**

- Reflect on this session to examine how this experience taught you different skills.
- Use this new experience to supplement planning for subsequent training sessions, matches and other non sport domains

#### **Notes**

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# **ELITE life skills programme: Week Ten**

## **Wrap up**

### **Learning Objectives**

- To wrap up the intervention and answer any final questions
- To organise times and dates for final interviews



## **Activities**

### **Communication Skills**

#### **Game 1: ordering game**

##### **Equipment:**

- An area on the floor designated as the line upon which participants order themselves

##### **Set up:**

- Order the team along the line in accordance with instructions from a facilitator in the quickest possible time.
- All team members must participate
- The task will be finished when the group agree they are in the correct order
- Once completed another instruction will be given to arrange the group in a different order (e.g., height, shoe size, weight, month of birth, day of birth etc)



## **Game 2: They think it's all over**

**Equipment:**

- List of words on cue cards (e.g., sports men and women, pieces of equipment etc)

**Set up:**

- Have one member of the group read out descriptions of the word with using the actual words
- The other members of the group then have to shout out the answers
- Go head to head with another group to see who can get the most correct answers

## **Game 3: The great communicator**

**Equipment:**

- A pencil and one piece of paper per drawing for each group member, a picture to describe.

**Set up:**



- The group sits in a semicircle or random pattern in front of the Great Communicator.
- Each group member attempts to draw a picture from the descriptions given by the Great Communicator.
- Group members may not ask the Great Communicator any questions.

## **Game 4: Rope game**

### **Equipment:**

- 1 length of 5m rope tied so that it forms a circle
- Blindfolds ( $n = \text{Number of group} - 1$ )

### **Set up**

- Have the group decide who is the leader of the group
- This person is then responsible for giving instructions to the rest of the group.
- Have the group pick up the rope with two hands. Allow them to slide the between there hands but they are not allowed to let go of the rope.
- Get the group to make different shapes with rope without letting go of the rope



## **Game 5: Hungry, hungry hippo's**

### **Equipment:**

- 4 teams
- 4 sets of different coloured balls
- Open space
- 4 different bins / buckets / boxes
- Stopwatch

### **Set up:**

- Have a team in each corner
- One member of the team is blindfolded
- Mix the balls up put them in the centre of the room
- Have the blindfolded member of the group stand in the middle of the room
- Instruct the group that they have to direct the blindfolded member to retrieve the balls and put them in their buckets



# Organisation Skills Patterning

- Objective: Plan one weeks activities

Patterning involves looking at the time you spend on required tasks. This helps you determine the flexible time you have during a week. By seeing the pattern of a week, you can plan your time better.

**There are 168 HOURS in each week!**

How do you spend your time each week? Below is a list of items most of us take part in on a daily basis. Next to each item, indicate how many hours EACH WEEK you spend completing it.

Sleeping	_____
In class	_____
Competing	_____
Training	_____
Grooming	_____
Eating	_____
Working	_____
Socialising	_____
Other	_____
 TOTAL:	 _____



Subtract your total amount from 168 hours.  
How many hours do you have left?

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Now think about how many hours you spend each week doing recreational activities such as going out, playing video games, watching TV., etc.

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Now think about how many hours you spend on your university work each week.

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Does that seem sufficient to meet your academic goals? If not, what can you spend less time on above so that you can add more hours to your academic work?



# Prioritising

Prioritising allows you to determine which tasks are most important to you, required, or necessary. Write a list of ten tasks that you regularly do each week, then rate out of ten how important that activity is to you.

	Importance

Now review your tasks and write down your high priority tasks (e.g., >5) and low priority tasks (e.g., <5)

High Priority

Low Priority



Now rate how much time you spend on each activity

Too little time

Too much time

	1	2	3	4	5



## Planning

Planning allows you to place these tasks on a weekly or daily schedule and then you can add other activities in your free time.

Now that you have patterned and prioritised your commitments try making one weekly plan and one daily plan.

- Draw up a wall planner for the next week. With each day starting at the time they wake up and finish when they go to bed
- Each day should be broken up into time blocks (e.g., 15, 20, 30 60-minute blocks). The duration of the time blocks used can be decided by the individual based on their individual needs.
- Highlight the importance of including all the areas of their life that requires planning. Think of different life domains e.g.:
  - Sport (e.g., training, training camps & competition dates),
  - Academic (e.g., coursework deadlines, exam dates, college times),
  - Work (e.g., part time job commitments),



- Social (e.g., birthdays, weddings, holidays, relationships)
- Use a different colour for each life domain so that the wall planner is easy to use
- Once the outline of the planner is completed with a key to show what each colour represents fill in as much of the planner as you can (e.g., the next week / month)



## Organisation activity

### Case 1

Steve is a 2<sup>nd</sup> year Economics student. In addition to studying Steve plays for the University's football 1<sup>st</sup> team. Due to the professional nature of the sport at the university Steve has to train for 2 hours on a Monday and Thursday, in addition to a fitness session for 90 minutes on Monday morning. Matches are held on a Wednesday afternoon. Steve also plays for a high performance amateur team at the weekend. Every Saturday afternoon Steve plays a match.

Practices start at 6:00pm and finish at 8:00pm. Fitness sessions start at 7:00am and finish at 8:30am. Matches start at 12:00pm and finish at 5pm (including travel time)

During the term time Steve has 3 hours of studies on a Monday morning, 2 hours on a Tuesday morning, 2 hours on a Tuesday afternoon, 1 hour on a Wednesday morning, 2 hours on a Thursday afternoon and 2 hours on a Friday morning.

Steve has various pieces of coursework due in every other week. As such, he needs to set aside time to complete his coursework.

This week it is Steve's best friend's Birthday. Steve's best friend, Cletus, has planned a night out at a local nightspot. The plan is to go out on Wednesday evening, starting at a house party at 8:00pm, heading into town at 10:00pm.



Because football is not a professional sport and Steve cannot secure any funding he finds it necessary to work at a local supermarket every Sunday. His shift starts at 10:00am and finishes at 4:00pm. Because of the physical nature of pushing trolleys all day Steve is particularly tired and may require extra rest in order to be ready for his early morning Monday gym session.

In addition to the sporting, social and academic commitments Steve feels he cannot miss his favourite TV programme that is on everyday at 6:00pm -7:00pm. Because he is at training at this time on some days Steve tapes his programme and has to find a time during the week that he can catch up.

Finally, Steve has to schedule time to eat rest and sleep so that he is able to train and compete at his best.

Plan one week for Steve so that he can manage his busy lifestyle.



## Case 2

Anthony is an accountant at a large firm in the City of London. After graduating from a leading University with 2:1 in Sport and Exercise Science Bob decided to take up a job in accountancy.

Over the last few months Anthony has found out that it is hard to manage his many commitments and still perform his roles at the office. Luckily Anthony played sport to a high level and has developed skills that help him.

Every day Anthony sets off from his flat at 7:00am. The tube trip and walk to his office takes 60 minutes. Anthony arrives at work at 8:00 and leaves at 5:00. During the day Anthony gets 1 hour lunch break and two 15 minutes breaks.

As a keen sports person Anthony likes to workout in his lunch break. Luckily his office has a gym on site so Anthony does not have to travel far to work out.

It takes Anthony a total of 20 minutes to get changed and showered and to eat his lunch leaving him with 40 minutes to complete his workout.

He aims to do three cardio sessions every week. Each session has to be on a different piece of equipment (either treadmill, cycle, cross trainer, rower) and must last a minimum of 30 minutes.



Anthony also likes to do weight sessions. He wants to work on his chest, arms, and abs on different days. Each session has to last a total of 20 minutes; however this can be split over multiple sessions. He prefers not to do chest and arms in the same session and ideally likes to leave himself a day a recovery between arms and chest sessions

Plan 5 different workouts for Anthony, one for each day of the week. Make sure he gets enough cardiovascular exercise on different pieces of equipment. Furthermore, ensure you plan for weight training targeting each body part.



## Case 3

Vic has been given a piece of coursework that requires her to work in a team of six to produce a PowerPoint presentation on a given subject.

The presentation must be on PowerPoint, must include audio visual components and must include a 10 minute question and answer session.

The presentation is to a group of potential clients and must last for two hours.

Each member of the team must play an active role in the presentation and no one person can talk for more than 30 minutes.

In your team you have the following members:

- Kate: A very strong public speaker who struggles with all things technical
- Simon: A very poor public speaker but is very good at using PowerPoint
- Steve: A moderate public speaker who is good with audio-visual equipment
- Matt: A good public speaker who is very knowledgeable about concepts
- Gareth: A moderate public speaker who is very good at answering questions
- Vic: A good public speaker who is excellent at organisation and man management

You have 6 sections to your presentation:



Introduction  
Explaining the concepts  
Interactive task one – using video  
Interactive task two – using video  
Future directions of the idea  
Wrap up and Q & A's

As the best organiser it has fallen to Vic to organise the team. She must allocate roles and responsibilities based on strengths and weaknesses. Furthermore, Vic must decide how long each person should present for relative to their public speaking capabilities.

Organise the team so that each of the sections have presenter allocated to them and you know how long each section will last for. Also give a justification as to why you have chosen each person.

**MARTIN I. JONES & DAVID LAVALLEE**

**SCHOOL OF SPORT & EXERCISE SCIENCES**

**LOUGHBOROUGH UNIVERSITY**

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# **ELITE LIFE SKILLS PROGRAMME WORKBOOK**



**MARTIN I. JONES & DAVID LAVALLEE**

**SCHOOL OF SPORT & EXERCISE SCIENCES  
LOUGHBOROUGH UNIVERSITY**



# **ELITE life skills programme: Session 1**

## **Session Title: Introduction**

### *Learning Objective*

- To introduce reflective practice and to give an overview of the program

### *Total time*

- 30-45 minutes

### *Explanation(s)*

- "The ELITE programme is a life skills programme that will help you develop skills and strategies that will help you both on and off the sports field"
- "Specific life skills will be developed by reflecting on your experiences, examining and analysing those experiences, and ultimately learning from past events".

### *Key Teaching Point(s)*

1. Go through PowerPoint presentation and explain each slide.
2. Use examples of thinking about past events and try to stimulate reflection.
3. Have participants get into small groups (3-4) and discuss their reflections and learning experiences
4. Summarise by explaining that we are going to learn and practice reflective practice over the next few weeks

### *Equipment and/ or space required*

- Seminar room
- Chairs / tables
- Pens
- Reflection diaries
- Laptop / projector

### *Progressions*

- If they feel ready, ask them to continue reflecting on past events over the next week. Reflect on optimal experiences, poor performances or any other experiences that hold relevance to them.

### *Comments*

- Make sure participants have the opportunity to ask questions
- Concentrate on "selling" the benefits of reflection
- Have them fill in the YES scale at the end of each session



## **ELITE life skills programme: Session 2**

### **Session Title: Introducing communication**

#### *Learning Objectives*

- To show participants how to fill in their reflection journals
- Introduce communication skills as the first life skill
- To begin completing reflection journals

#### *Total time*

- 30-45 minutes

#### *Explanation(s)*

- The diary is to be used as a guide. The reflective questions are there to stimulate your reflection.
- You can use the space provided to write down your reflections.
- Try to set aside a time after each training session, and/or gym session and/or to think about what you have just experienced and what you have learnt from these experiences

#### *Key Teaching Point(s)*

1. In small groups (3-4) have them note down what they understand by communication, different types of communication and why communication is important
2. Give out the reflection diaries
3. Give the participants time to have a look at the journal and also read through examples of the reflection questions
4. Have them think about and answer reflection questions in their journals using their experiences in their most recent practice sessions.
5. Specifically reflect on the development and use of communication skills

#### *Equipment and/ or space required*

- Seminar room
- Chairs / tables
- Pens
- Reflection diaries
- AO paper and flip chart pens

#### *Progressions*

- If they wish they can reflect on other past experiences (e.g., training camps, memorable training sessions etc)
- Also start to think about what they have experienced in competition and what they have learnt
- In addition to the journal they can get together in groups, talk to me directly and / or talk with coaches about their reflections

#### *Comments*

- Make sure participants have the opportunity to ask questions
- Have them fill in the YES scale at the end of each session



## **ELITE life skills programme: Session 3**

### **Session Title: Reflecting on communication**

#### *Learning Objectives*

- To introduce the theme of reflecting on competition
- To fill in reflection journals

#### *Total time*

- 30-45 minutes

#### *Explanation(s)*

- We are going to do the same as last week, However is in addition to thinking about competition I would also like you to think about your what you experienced in your recent matches and competitions and what you have learnt from those experiences
- Try to set aside a time after each training match to think about what you have just experienced and what you have learnt from these experiences
- Again, no-one is going to read it and I do not expect to get it back at the end of the intervention research

#### *Key Teaching Point(s)*

1. Give the participants time to have a look at the journal and also read through examples of the reflection questions
2. Have them think about and answer reflection questions using their experiences in their most recent match

#### *Equipment and/ or space required*

- Seminar room
- Chairs / tables
- Pens
- Reflection diaries

#### *Progressions*

- If they wish they can reflect on other past experiences (e.g., tournaments, memorable competitions etc)
- In addition to the journal they can get together in groups, talk to me directly and / or talk with coaches about their reflections

#### *Comments*

- Make sure participants have the opportunity to ask questions
- Have them fill in the YES scale at the end of each session



# ELITE life skills programme: Session 4

## Session Title: Planning

### *Learning Objective*

- To introduce the idea of using what they have learnt from previous experiences to plan for anticipated future experiences

### *Total time*

- 30-45 minutes

### *Explanation(s)*

- Learning from experience is only useful if we can apply what we have learnt
- We can ensure that lessons learnt are used productively and that mistakes are not repeated by planning for the future
- In today's session we are going to plan for the next week
- What have you learnt about communication and what do you need to do to ensure your communication is effective next week?

### *Key Teaching Point(s)*

1. In small groups (3-4) discuss what you feel you have learnt about communication. Write down key points on a poster.
2. Use your reflection questions from your journals to stimulate discussion
3. On another piece of paper note down a plan of what each person must do in future matches and competitions to ensure communication is optimal?
4. Finish by discussing and noting down which of these principals are useful in other life domains and why.
5. Employ your communication skills by presenting this information back to the group.

### *Equipment and/ or space required*

- Seminar room
- Chairs / tables
- Pens
- Reflection diaries
- A0 paper and flip chart pens

### *Progressions*

- Plan for using communication skills in other life domains

### *Comments*

- Make sure participants have the opportunity to ask questions
- Have them fill in the YES scale at the end of each session



## **ELITE life skills programme: Session 5**

### **Session Title: Thinking on your feet**

#### *Learning Objectives*

- To introduce a new task to see if participants can move from reflecting on action to reflecting in action (i.e., thinking on their feet)
- To demonstrate that participants can employ communication skills in non sporting domains

#### *Total time*

- 30-45 minutes

#### *Explanation(s)*

- As a group participate in a series of communication skills games
- Allow the group to settle down before introducing each game
- Give a couple of minutes after each game to reflect on what they have learnt and what can be used to help them in future games
- Finish by introducing an element of competition by pitting participants against each other in smaller teams

#### *Key Teaching Point(s)*

1. Ordering game (Activity 1)
2. They think it's all over (Activity 2)
3. The great communicator (Activity 3)
4. Rope game (Activity 4)
5. Hungry, hungry hippos game (Activity 5)

#### *Equipment and/ or space required*

- Seminar room
- Pens
- Reflection diaries
- Equipment for games (See appendices)

#### *Progressions*

- Reflect on this session to examine how this experience taught you different skills.
- Use this new experience to supplement planning for subsequent training sessions, matches and other non sport domains

#### *Comments*

- Make sure participants have the opportunity to ask questions
- Be prepared to cut short games dependant on time
- Have them fill in the YES scale at the end of each session



## **ELITE life skills programme: Session 6**

### **Session Title: Introducing organisation skills**

#### *Learning Objectives*

- Introduce organisation skills as a new life skill
- Reintroduce the reflection journal as a method of reflecting on how organisation skills have been developed and employed in previous events they have experienced.

#### *Total time*

- 30-45 minutes

#### *Explanation(s)*

- This section is similar to the first part of the programme in which you reflected on the use of communication skills in training and practice sessions
- We are still going to think about our training and practice but this time we are going to look specifically at organisation skills.

#### *Key Teaching Point(s)*

1. In groups discuss and note down what you understand by "organisation skills", examples of organisation skills, and why organisation is important.
2. Have them think about and answer the reflection questions in their journals using their experiences in their most recent practice sessions. Specifically reflecting on the development and use of organisation skills

#### *Equipment and/ or space required*

- Seminar room
- Chairs / tables
- Pens
- Reflection diaries
- AO paper and flip chart pens

#### *Progressions*

- If they wish they can reflect on other past experiences (e.g., training camps, memorable training sessions etc)
- Also start to think about what they have experienced in competition and what they have learnt
- In addition to the journal they can get together in groups, talk to me directly and / or talk with coaches about their reflections

#### *Comments*

- Make sure participants have the opportunity to ask questions
- Have them fill in the YES scale at the end of each session



# ELITE life skills programme: Session 7

## Session Title: Reflecting on organisation

### *Learning Objectives*

- To introduce the elaborate on the theme of reflecting on competition
- To fill in reflection journals

### *Total time*

- 30-45 minutes

### *Explanation(s)*

- We are going to do the same as last week, However is in addition to thinking about competition I would also like you to think about your what you experienced in your recent matches and competitions and what you have learnt from those experiences
- Try to set aside a time after each training match to think about what you have just experienced and what you have learnt from these experiences
- Again, no-one is going to read it and I do not expect to get it back at the end of the intervention research

### *Key Teaching Point(s)*

1. Give the participants time to have a look at the journal and also read through examples of the reflection questions
2. Have them think about and answer reflection questions using their experiences in their most recent match

### *Equipment and/ or space required*

- Seminar room
- Chairs / tables
- Pens
- Reflection diaries

### *Progressions*

- If they wish they can reflect on other past experiences (e.g., tournaments, memorable competitions etc)
- In addition to the journal they can get together in groups, talk to me directly and / or talk with coaches about their reflections

### *Comments*

- Make sure participants have the opportunity to ask questions
- Have them fill in the YES scale at the end of each session



# ELITE life skills programme: Session 8

## Session Title: Planning

### *Learning Objective*

- To introduce the idea of using what they have learnt from previous experiences to plan for anticipated future experiences

### *Total time*

- 30-45 minutes

### *Explanation(s)*

- Learning from experience is only useful if we can apply what we have learnt
- We can ensure that lessons learnt are used productively and that mistakes are not repeated by planning for the future
- In today's session we are going to plan for the next week
- What have you learnt about organisation and what do you need to do to ensure your communication is effective next week?

### *Key Teaching Point(s)*

1. In small groups (3-4) discuss what you feel you have learnt about organisation. Write down key points on a poster.
2. Use your reflection questions from your journals to stimulate discussion
3. Plan for the next week by filling out patterning, prioritising and planning worksheets (Activity 6-8)
4. Think about all of your commitments and try to organise your lifestyle.

### *Equipment and/ or space required*

- Seminar room
- Chairs / tables
- Pens
- Reflection diaries
- A0 paper and flip chart pens

### *Progressions*

- Plan for using organisation skills in other life domains

### *Comments*

- Make sure participants have the opportunity to ask questions
- Have them fill in the YES scale at the end of each session



# **ELITE life skills programme: Session 9**

## **Session Title: Thinking on your feet**

### *Learning Objectives*

- To introduce a new task to see if participants can move from reflecting on action to reflecting in action (i.e., thinking on their feet)
- To demonstrate that participants can employ organisation skills in non sporting domains

### *Total time*

- 30-45 minutes

### *Explanation(s)*

- As a group participate in a series of tasks
- Allow the group to settle down before introducing each
- Give a couple of minutes after each game to reflect on what they have learnt and what can be used to help them in future tasks

### *Key Teaching Point(s)*

1. Split the participants into smaller groups (3-4)
2. Give each group a work sheet that has a set of instructions on it
3. Have the group employ their organisational skills to fulfil the tasks on the worksheet (Activity 9)
4. Have the team organise a week for the athletes in the case study
5. Implement a time restriction so that participants have to organise their own time in order to fulfil the task

### *Equipment and/ or space required*

- Seminar room
- Pens
- Reflection diaries
- Equipment for games (See appendices)

### *Progressions*

- Reflect on this session to examine how this experience taught you different skills.
- Use this new experience to supplement planning for subsequent training sessions, matches and other non sport domains

### *Comments*

- Make sure participants have the opportunity to ask questions
- Be prepared to cut short games dependant on time
- Have them fill in the YES scale at the end of each session



# **ELITE life skills programme: Session 10**

## **Session Title: Wrap up**

### *Learning Objectives*

- To wrap up the intervention and answer any final questions
- To organise times and dates for final interviews

### *Total time*

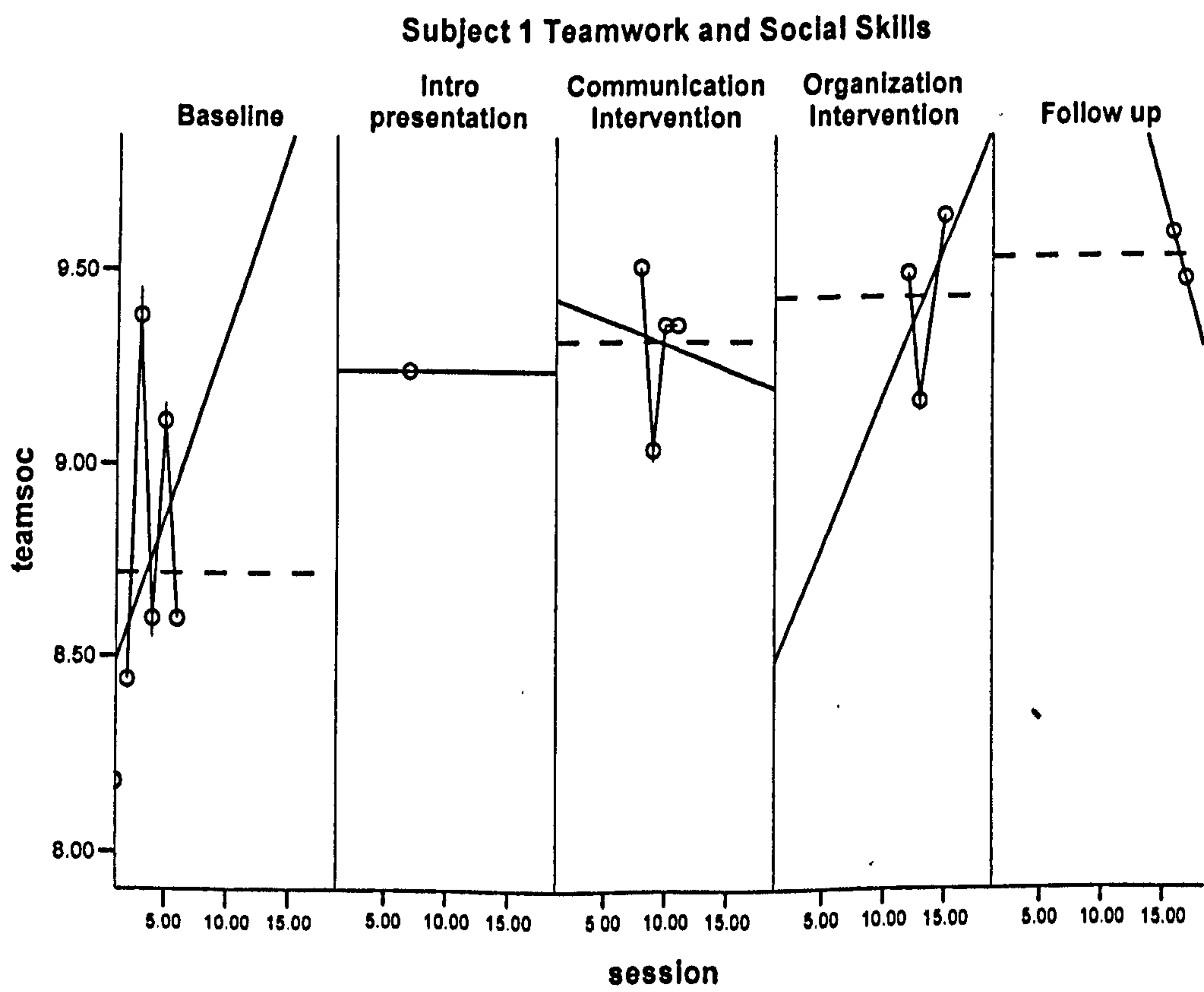
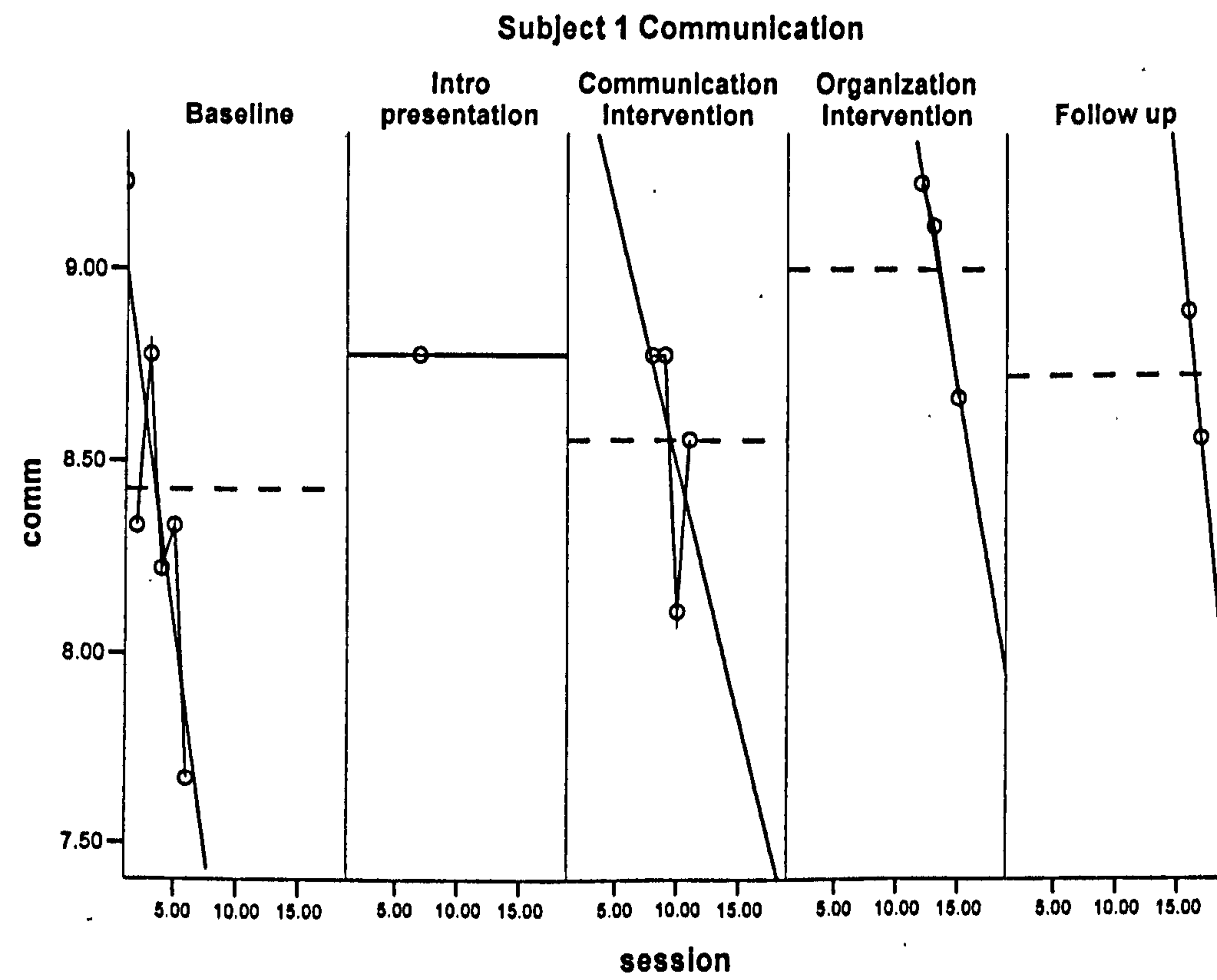
- 15-20minutes

### *Equipment and/ or space required*

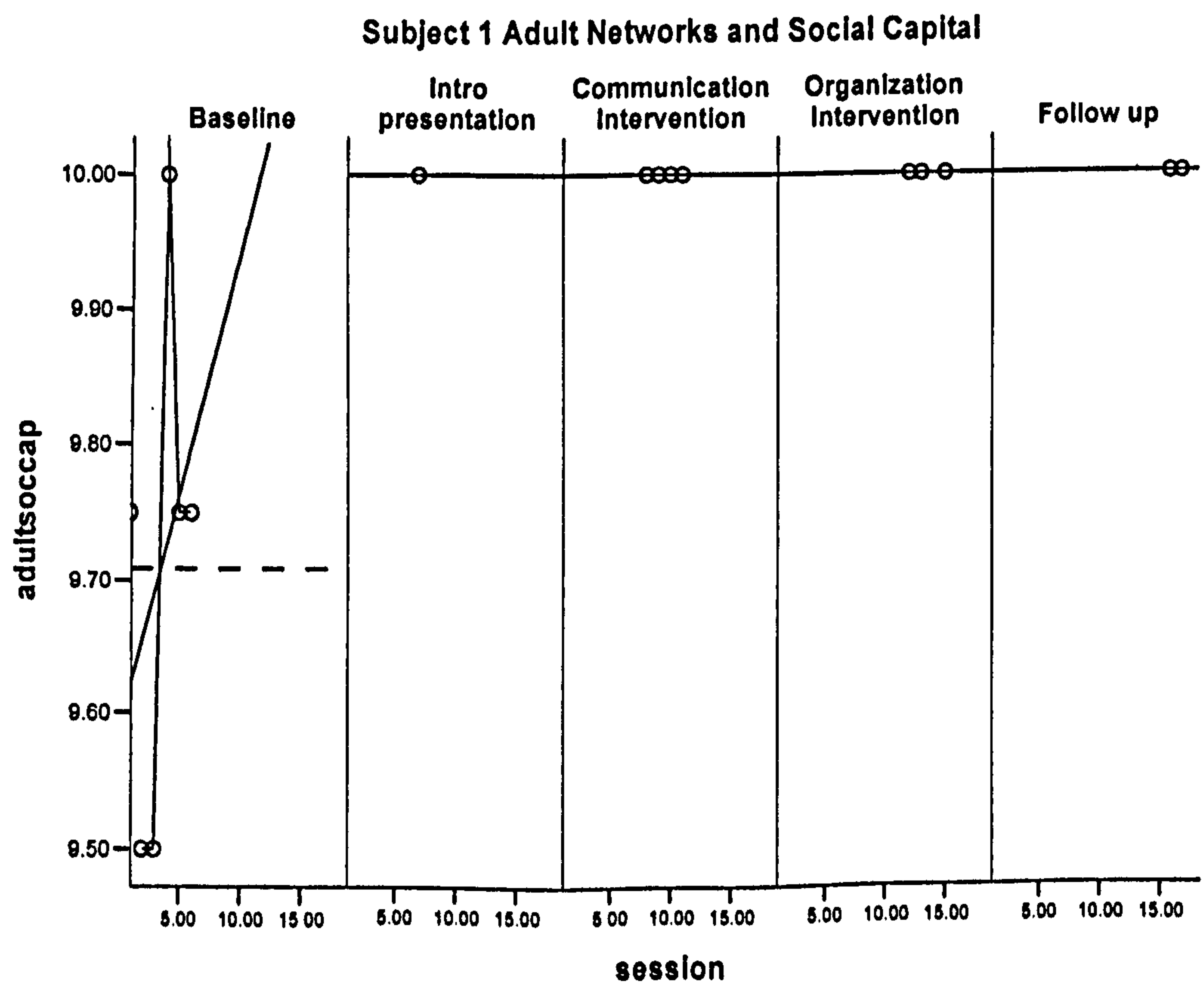
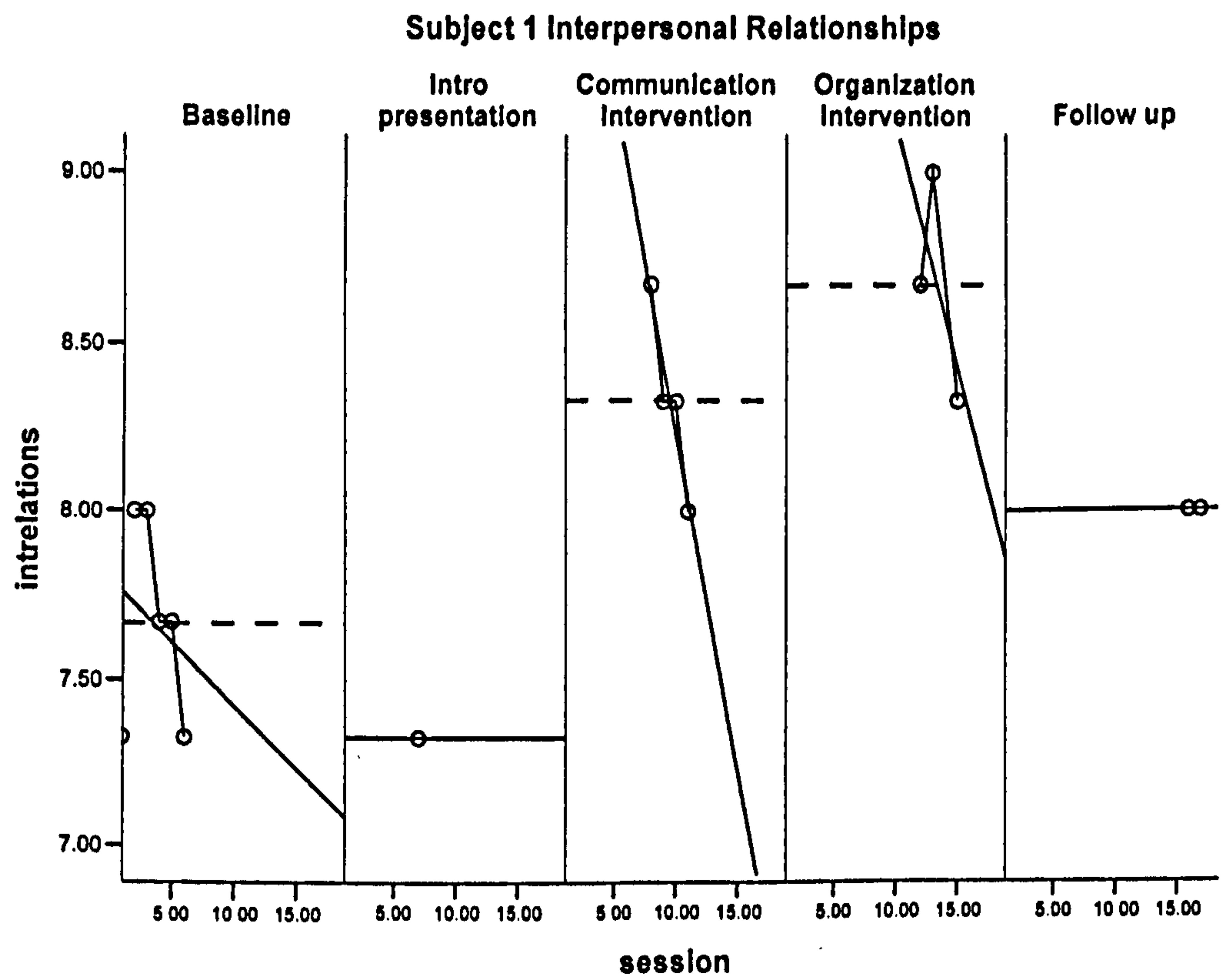
- Seminar room
- Tables and chairs



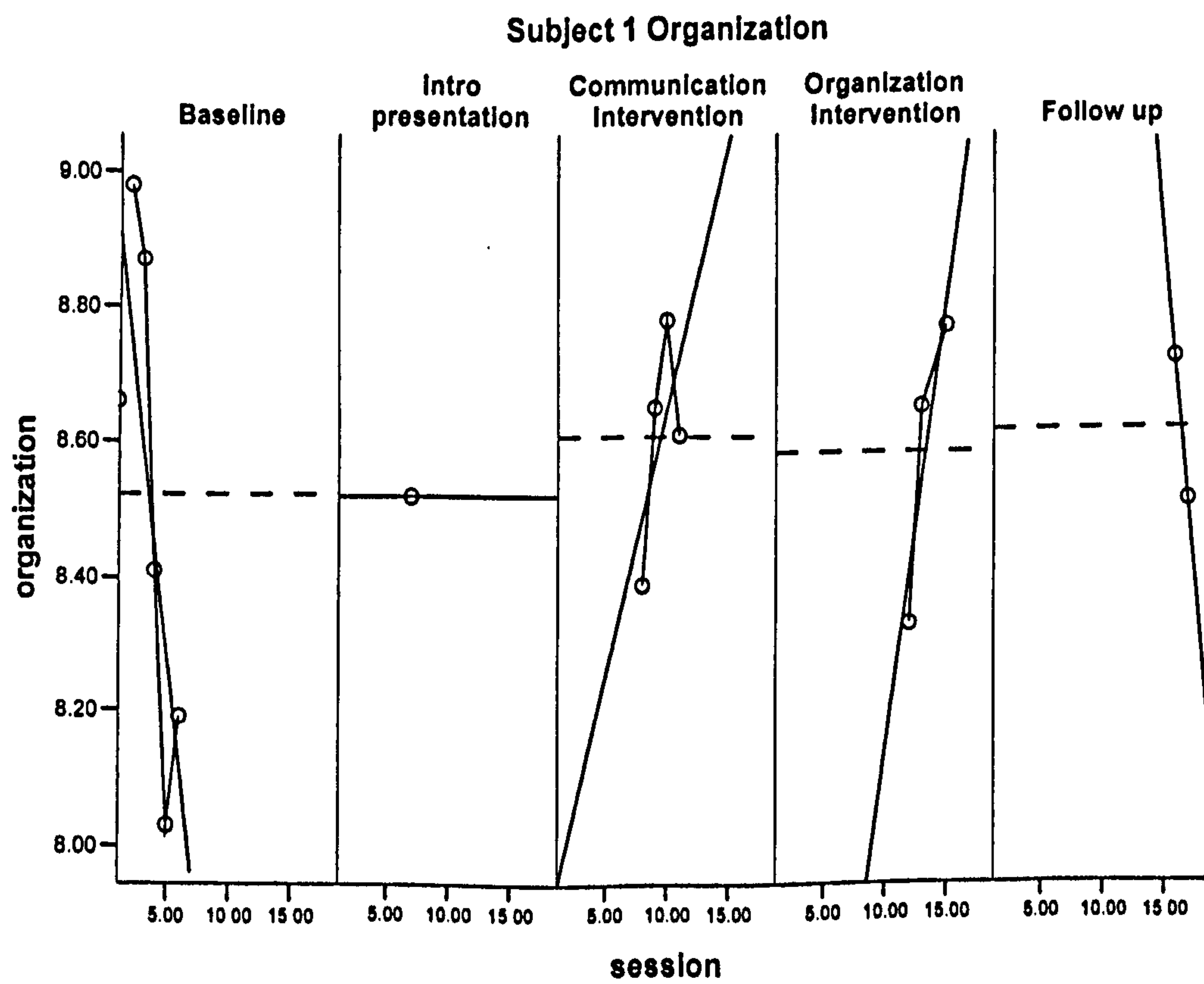
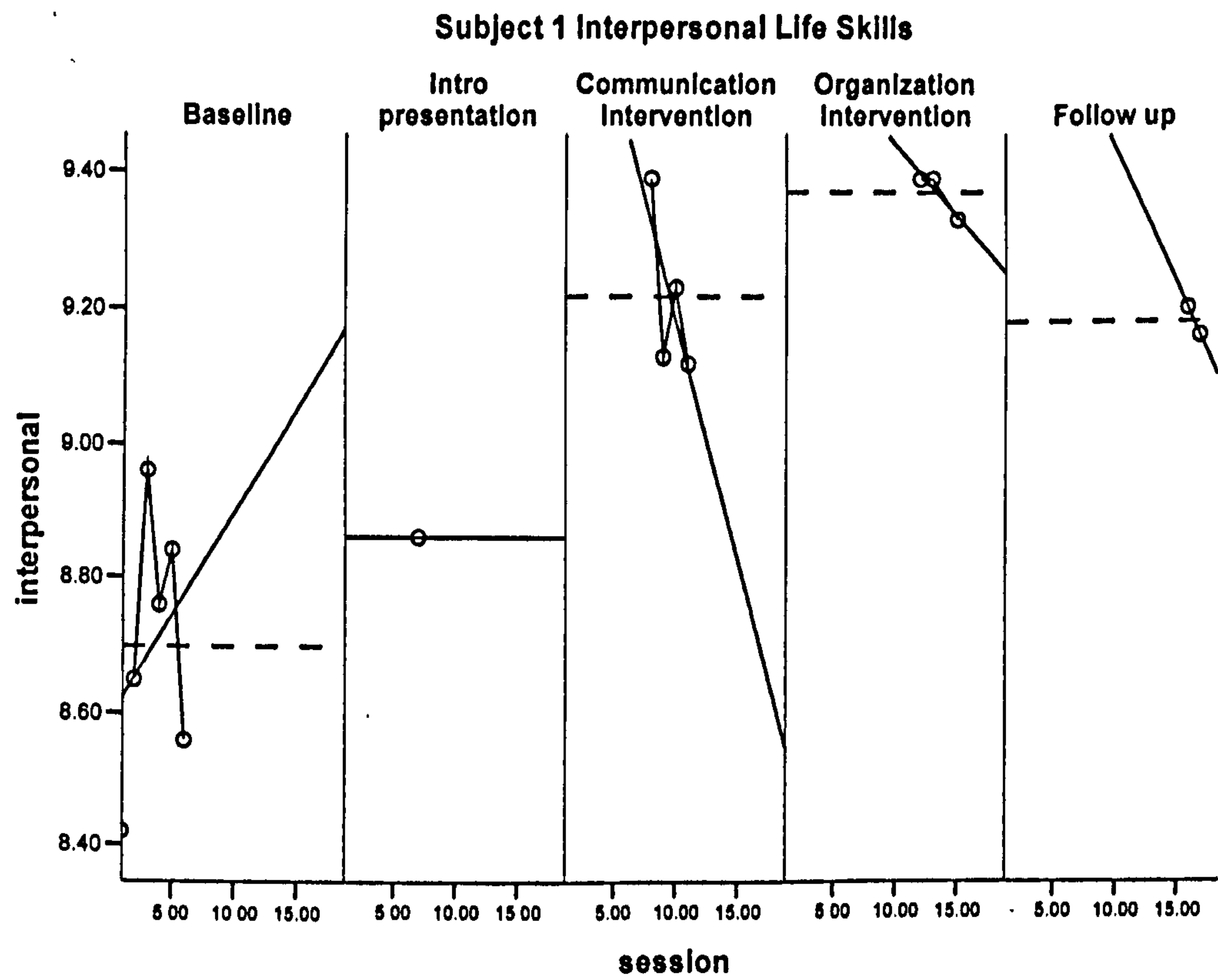
Appendix K: YES graphs



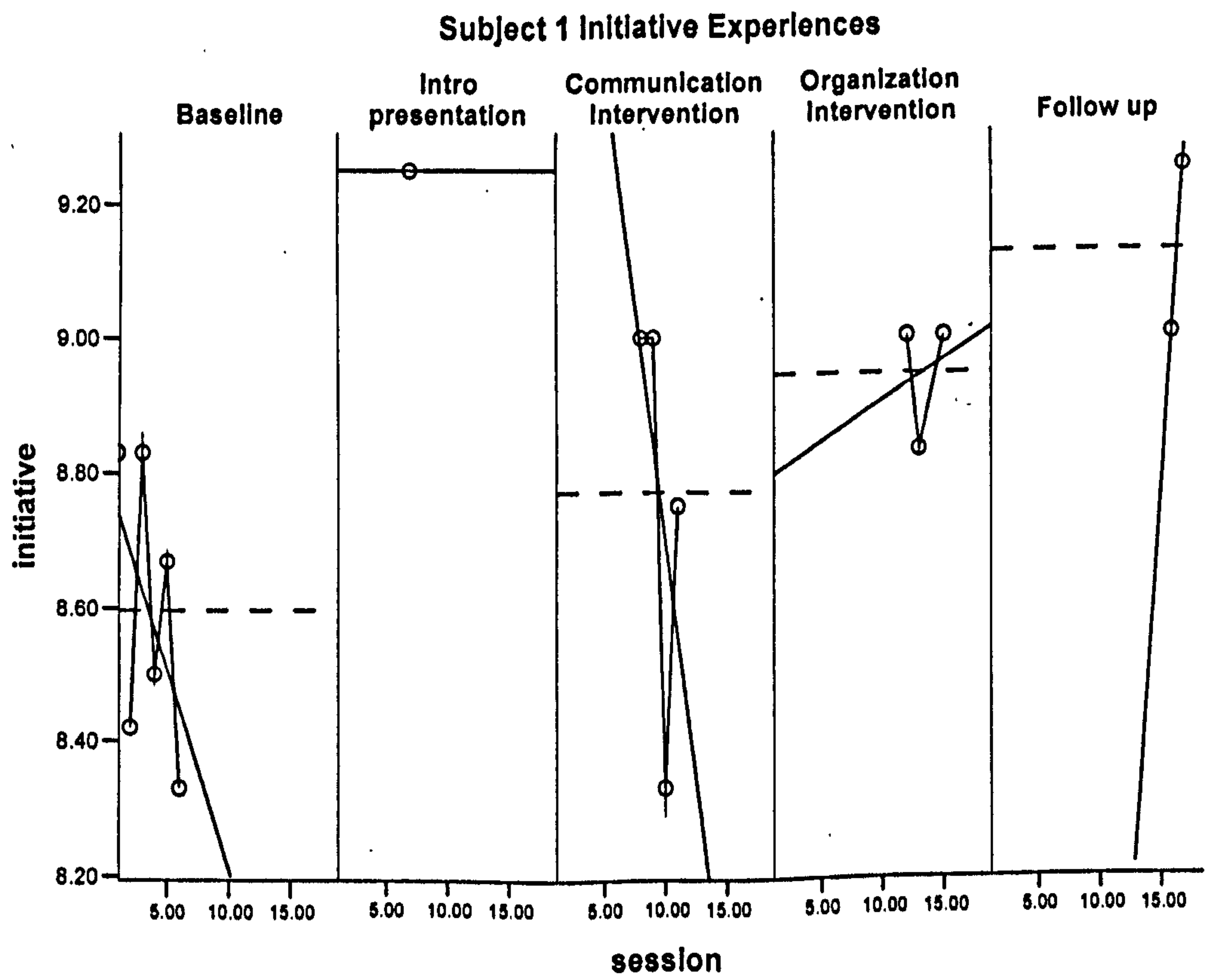
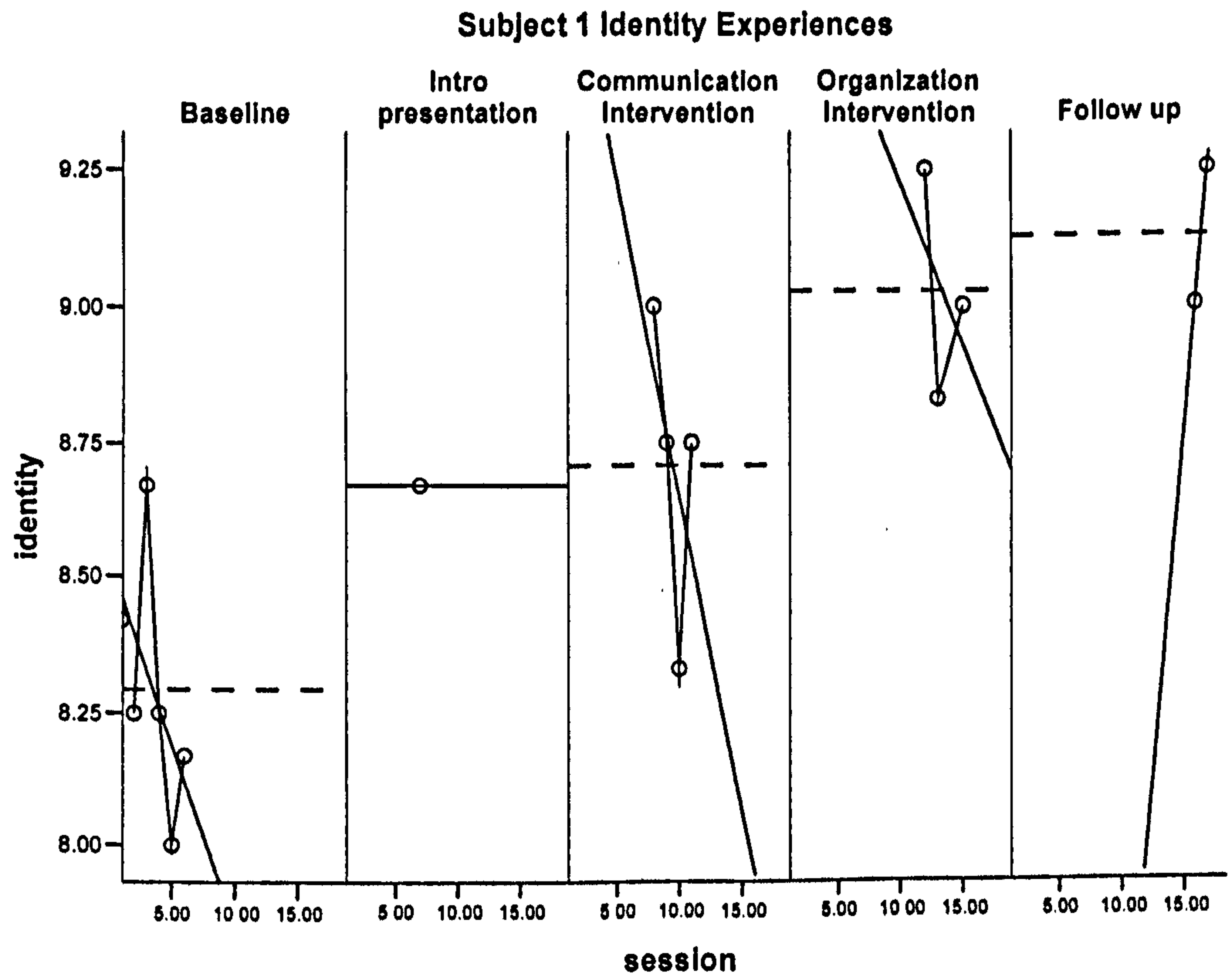




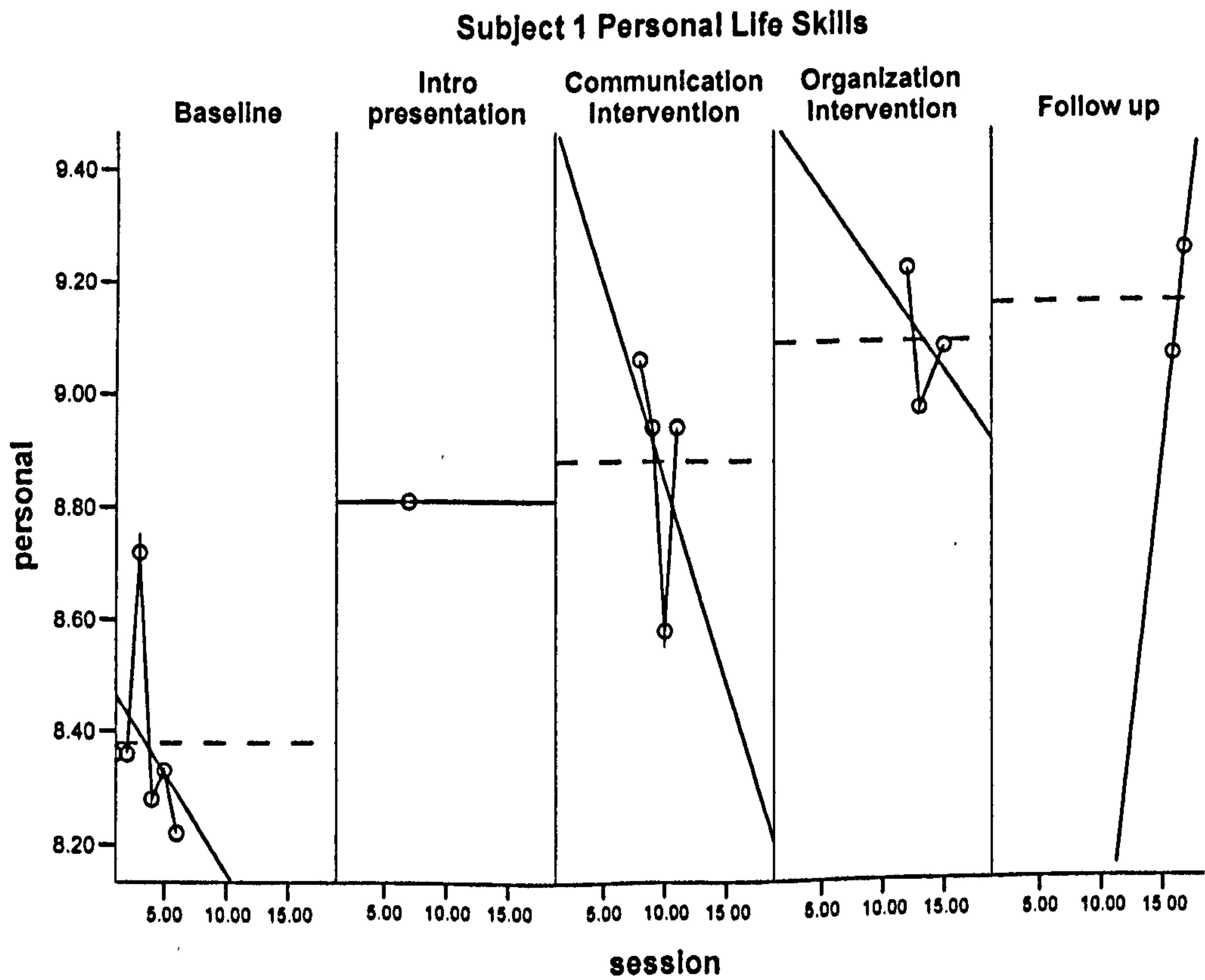
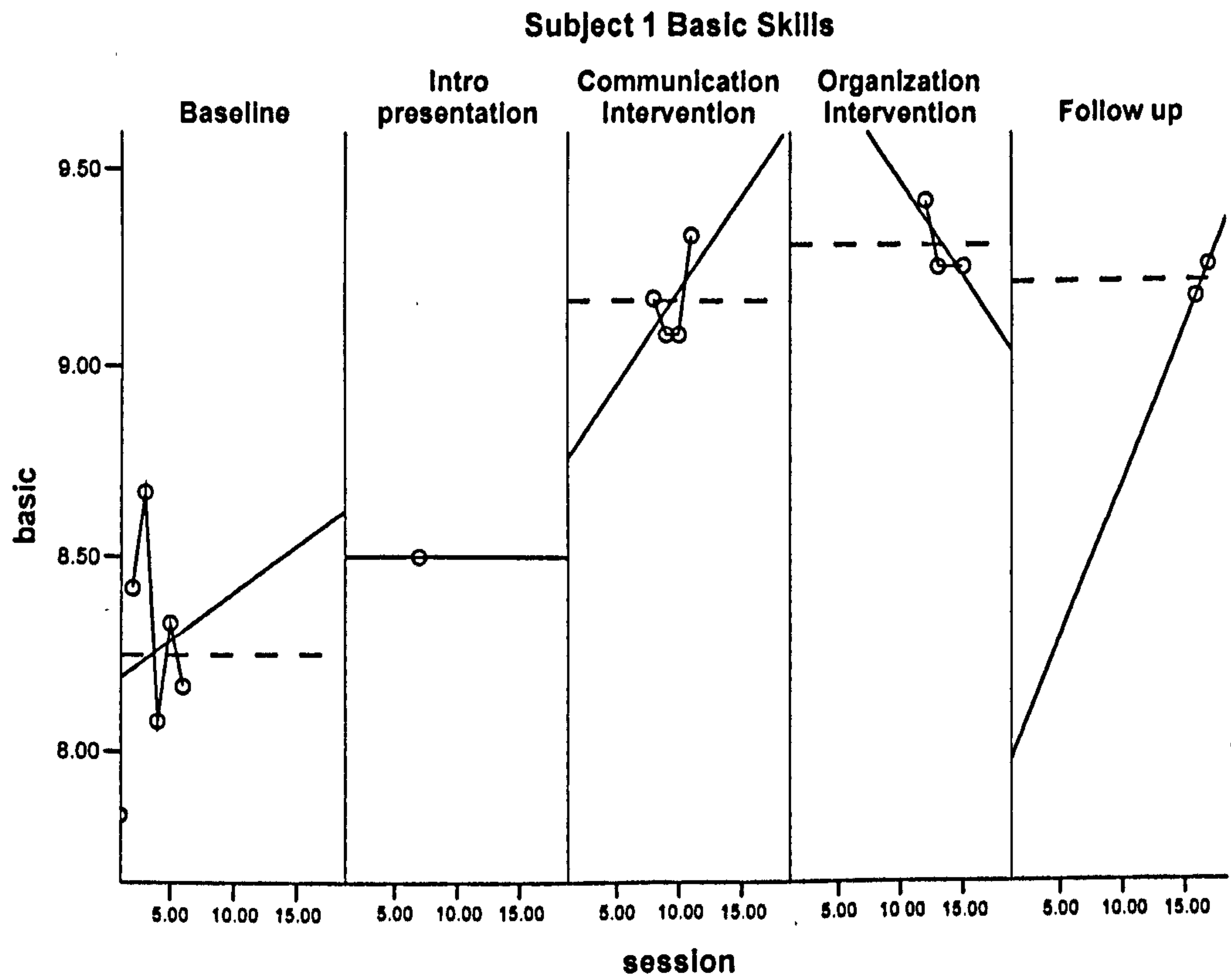




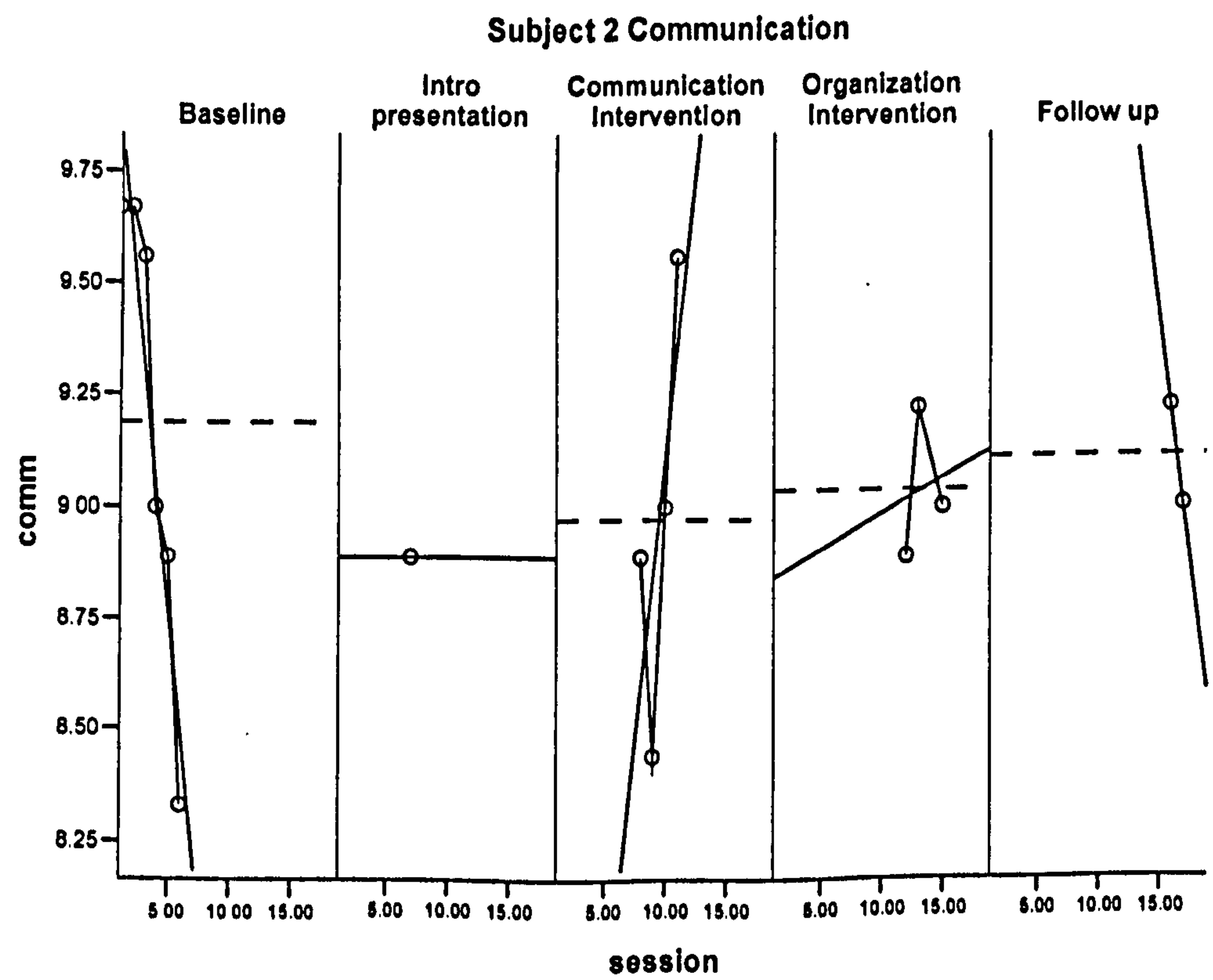
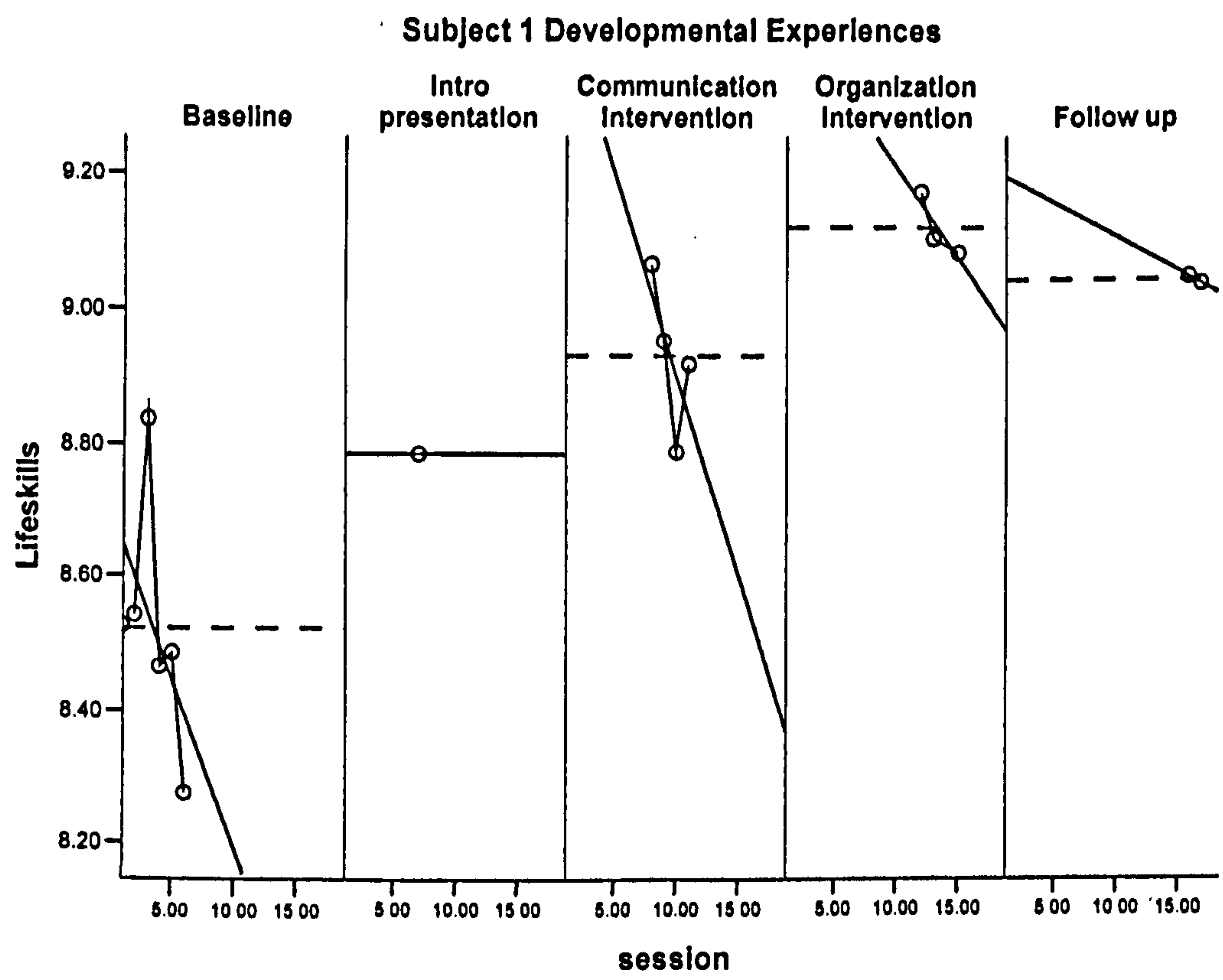






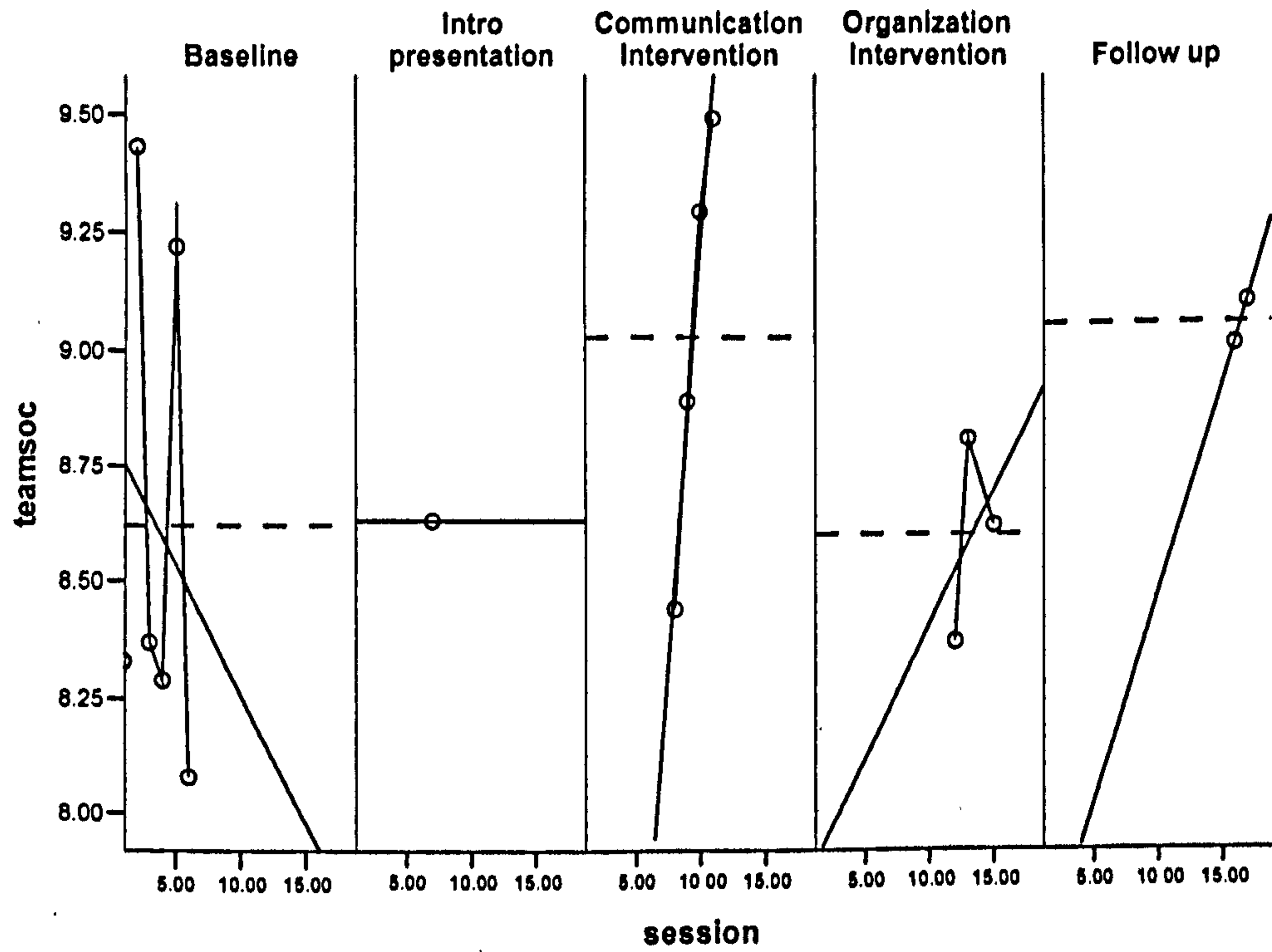




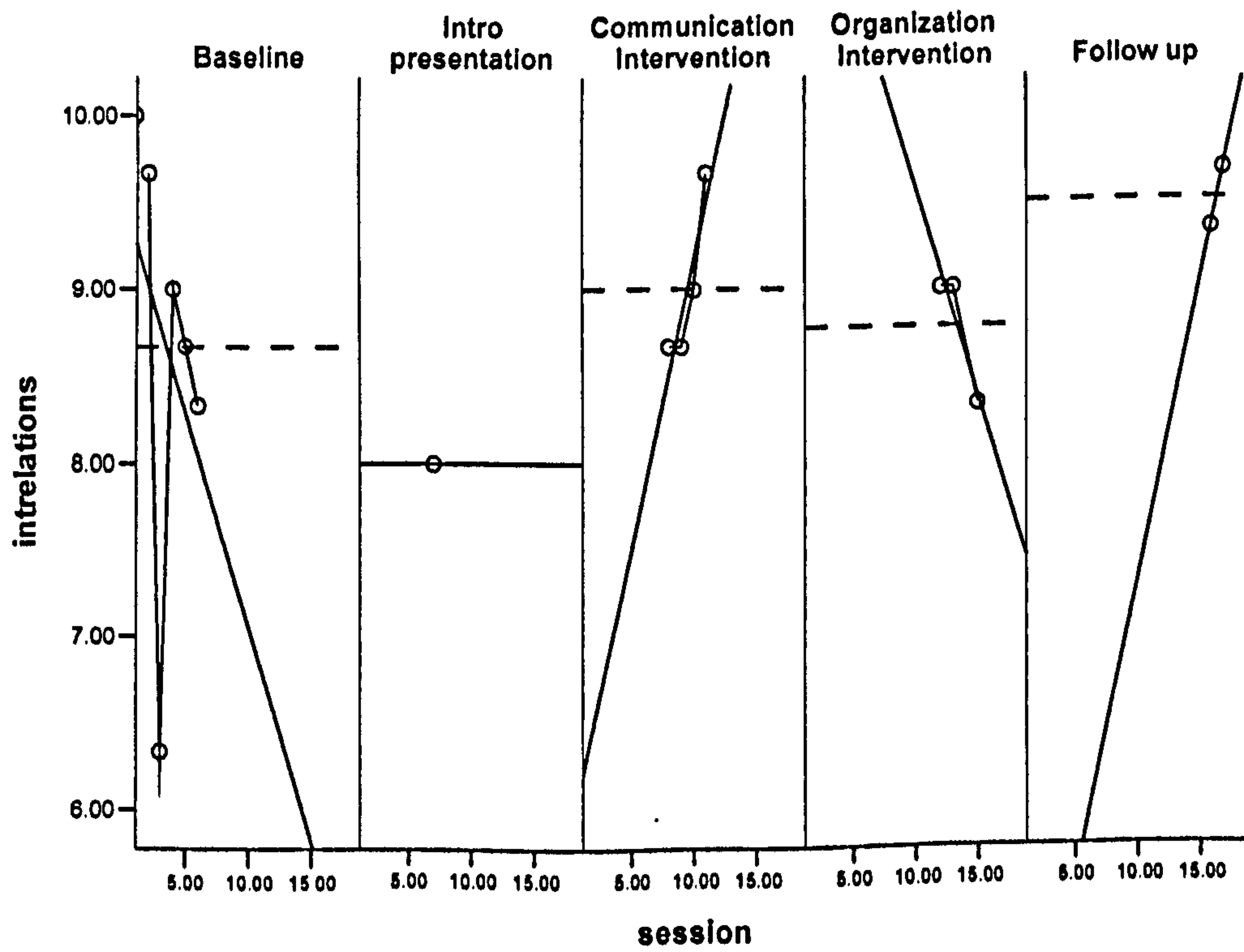




### Subject 2 Teamwork and Social Skills

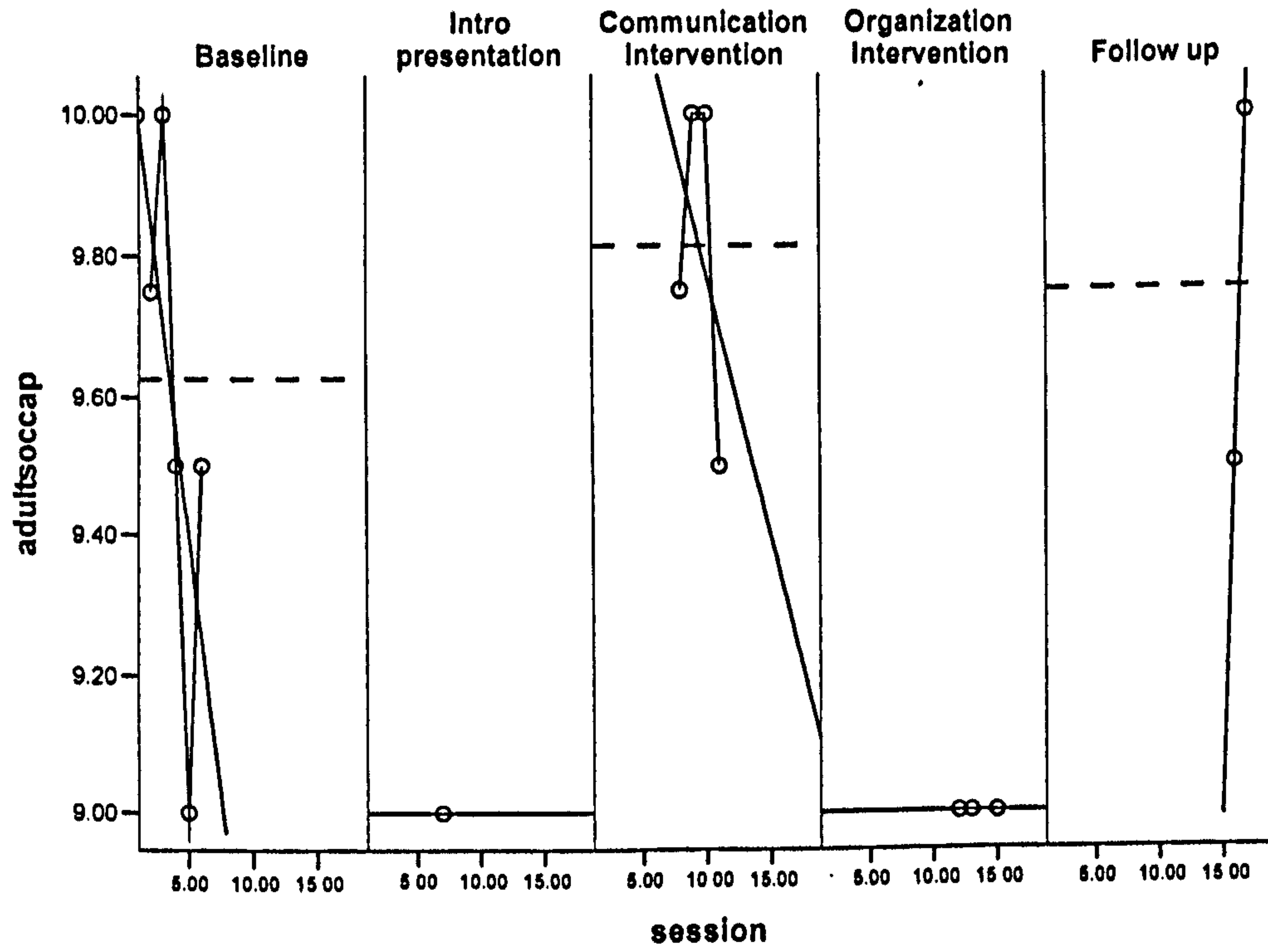


### Subject 2 Interpersonal Relationships

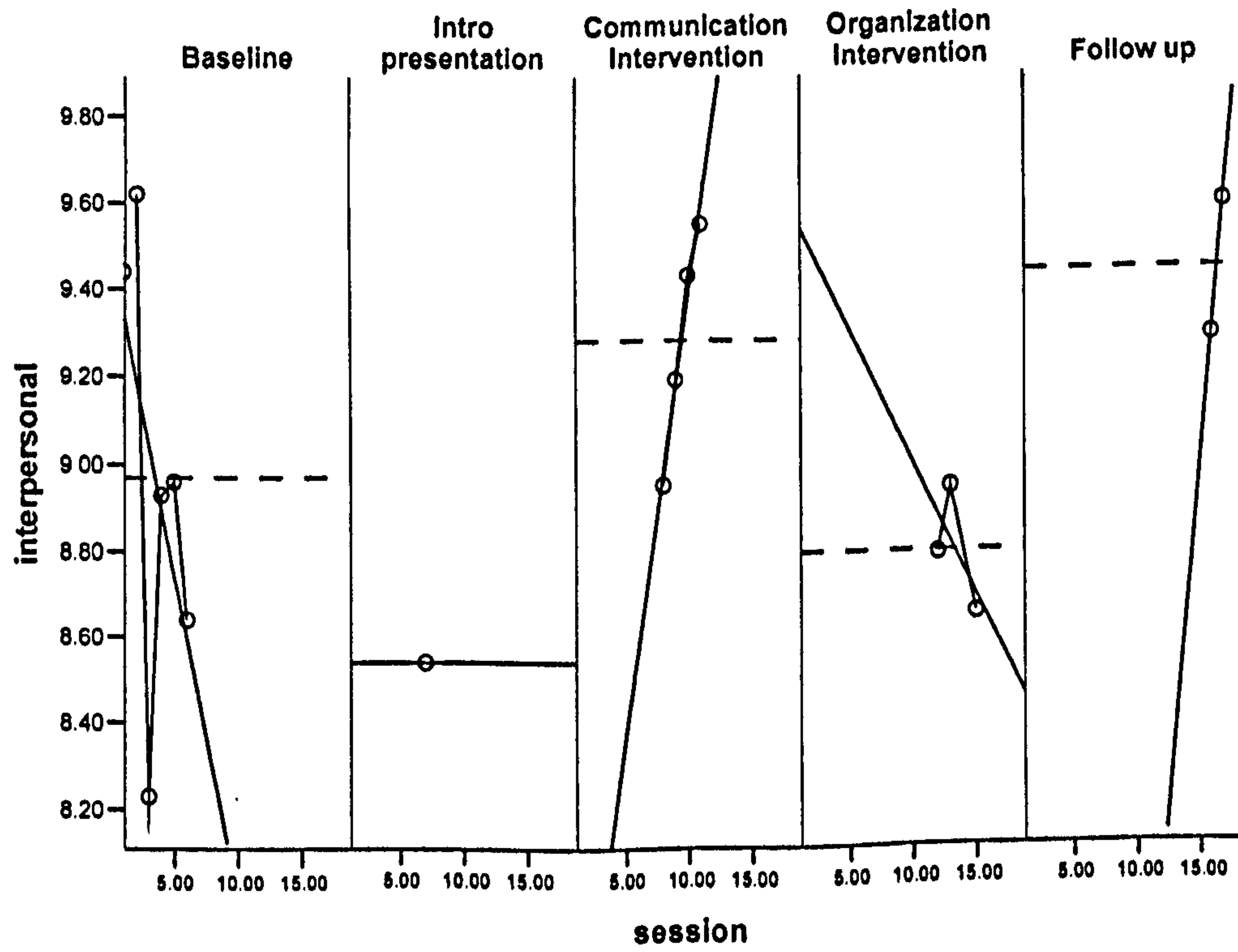




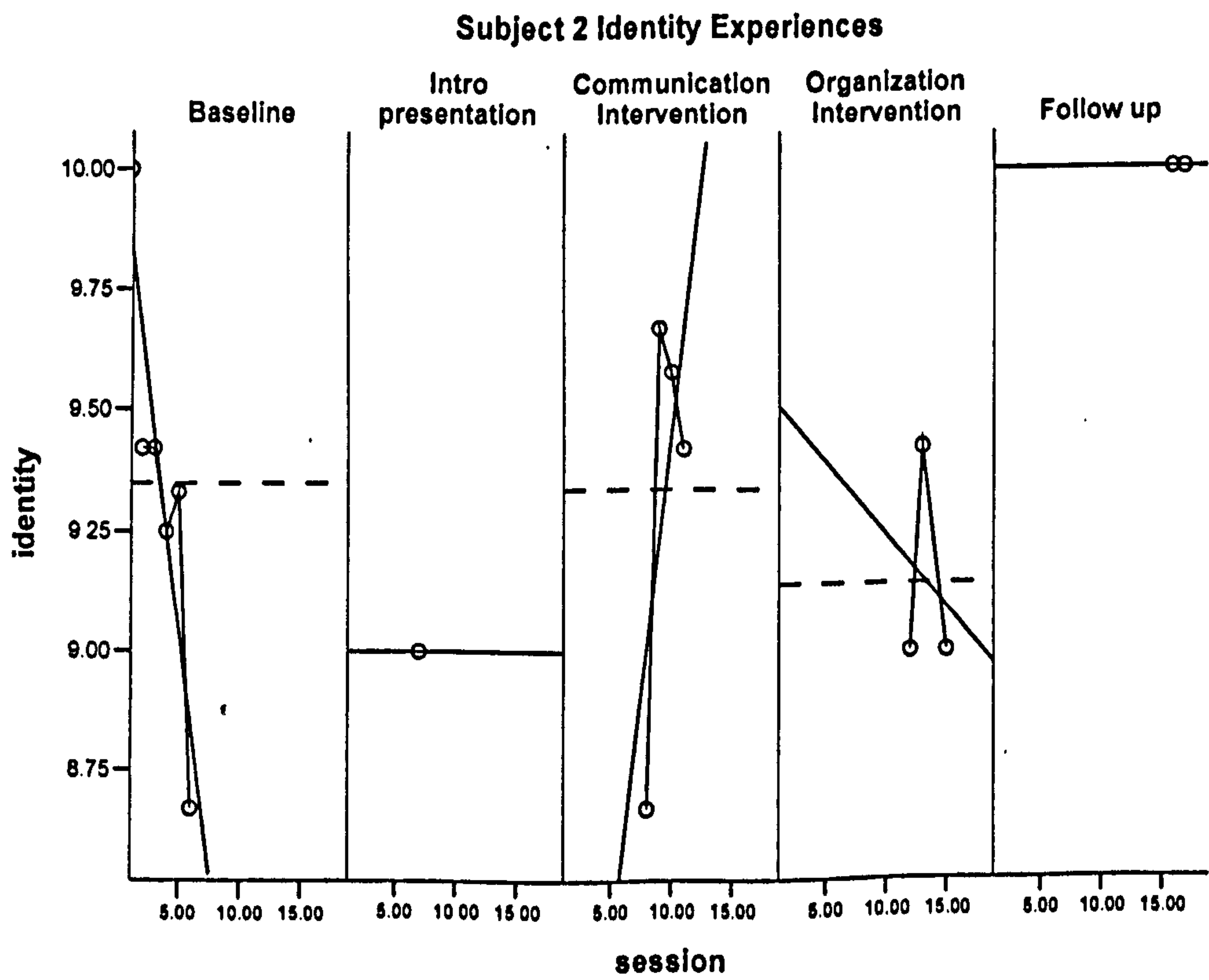
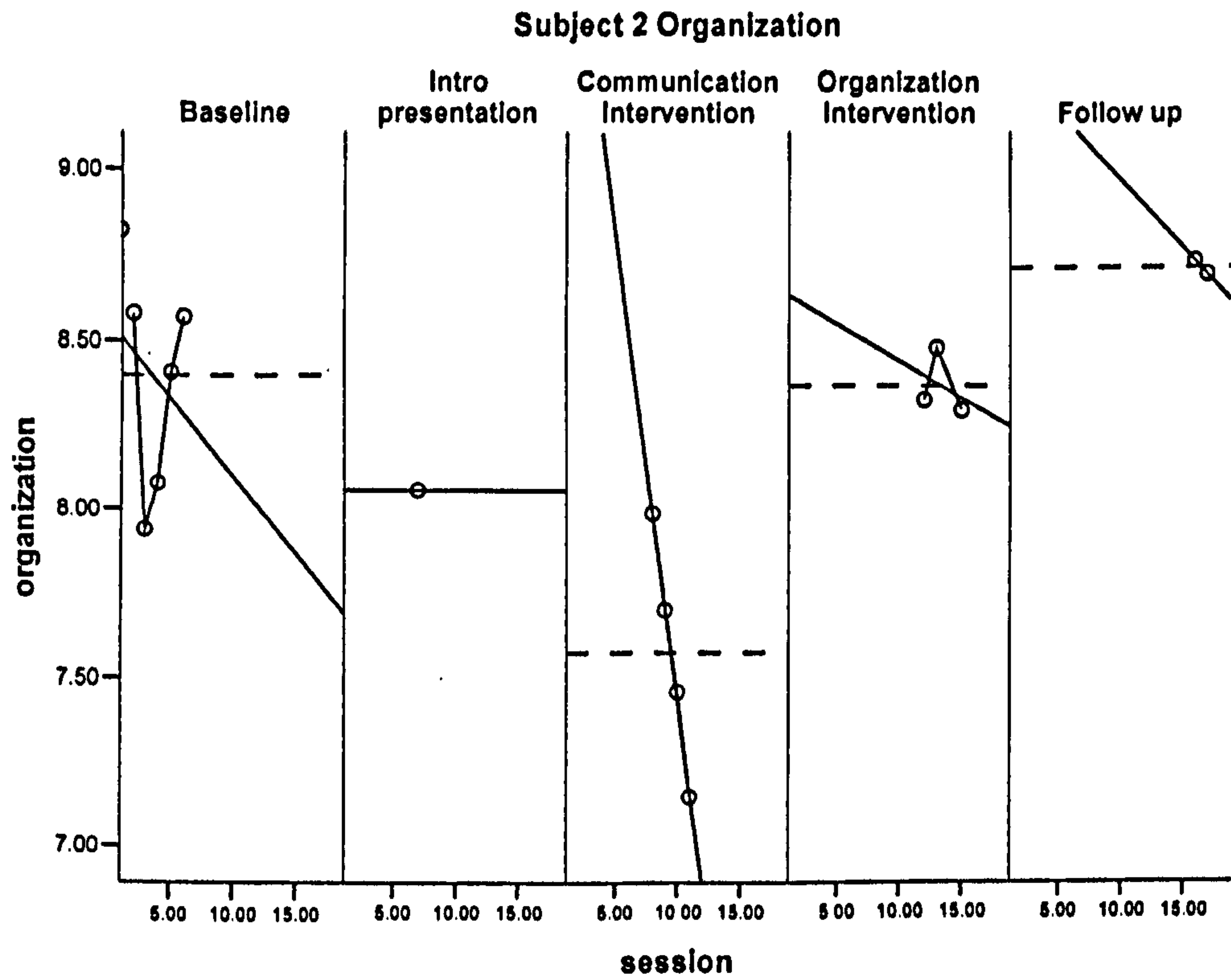
Subject 2 Adult Networks and Social Capital



Subject 2 Interpersonal Life Skills

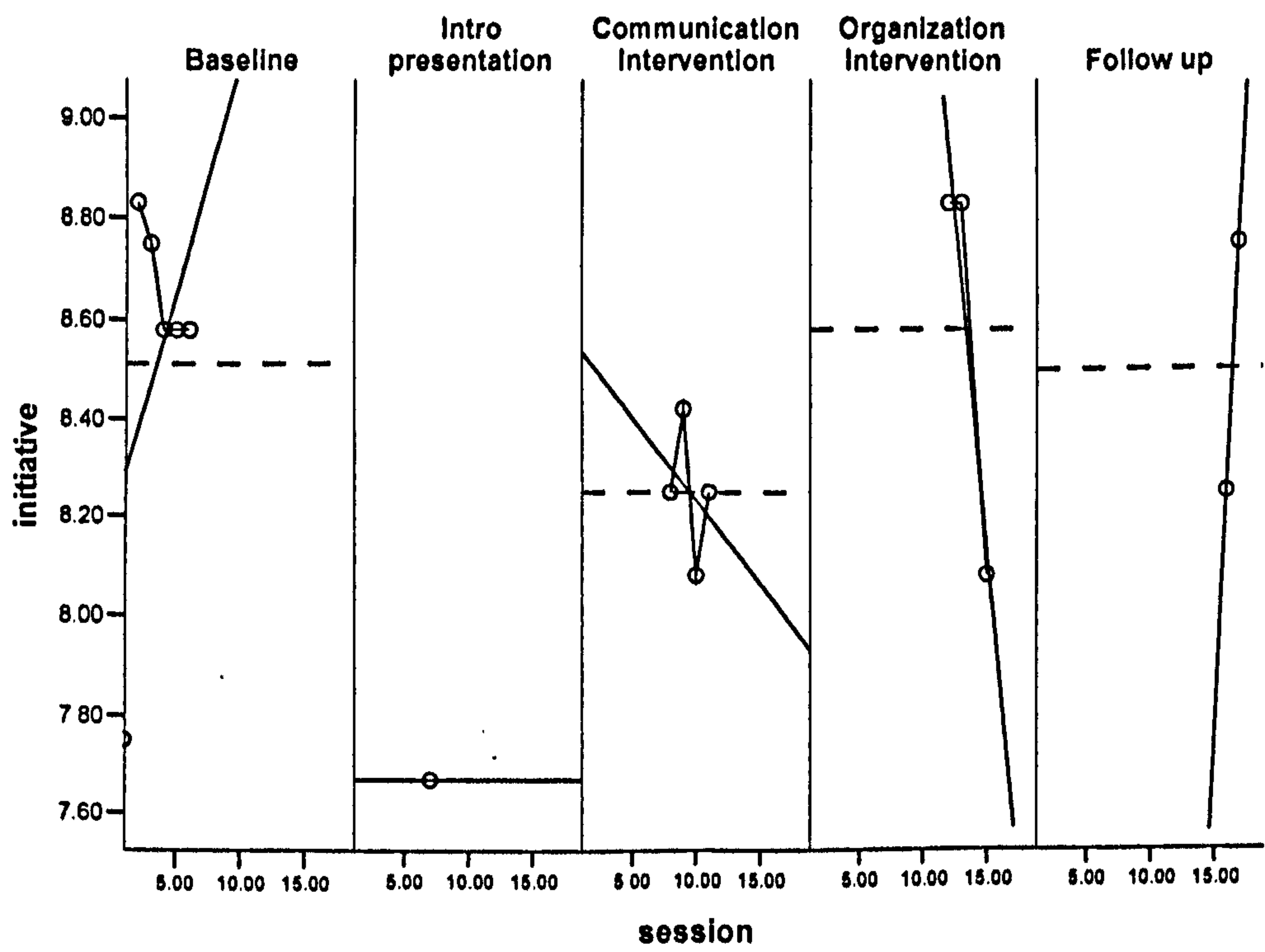




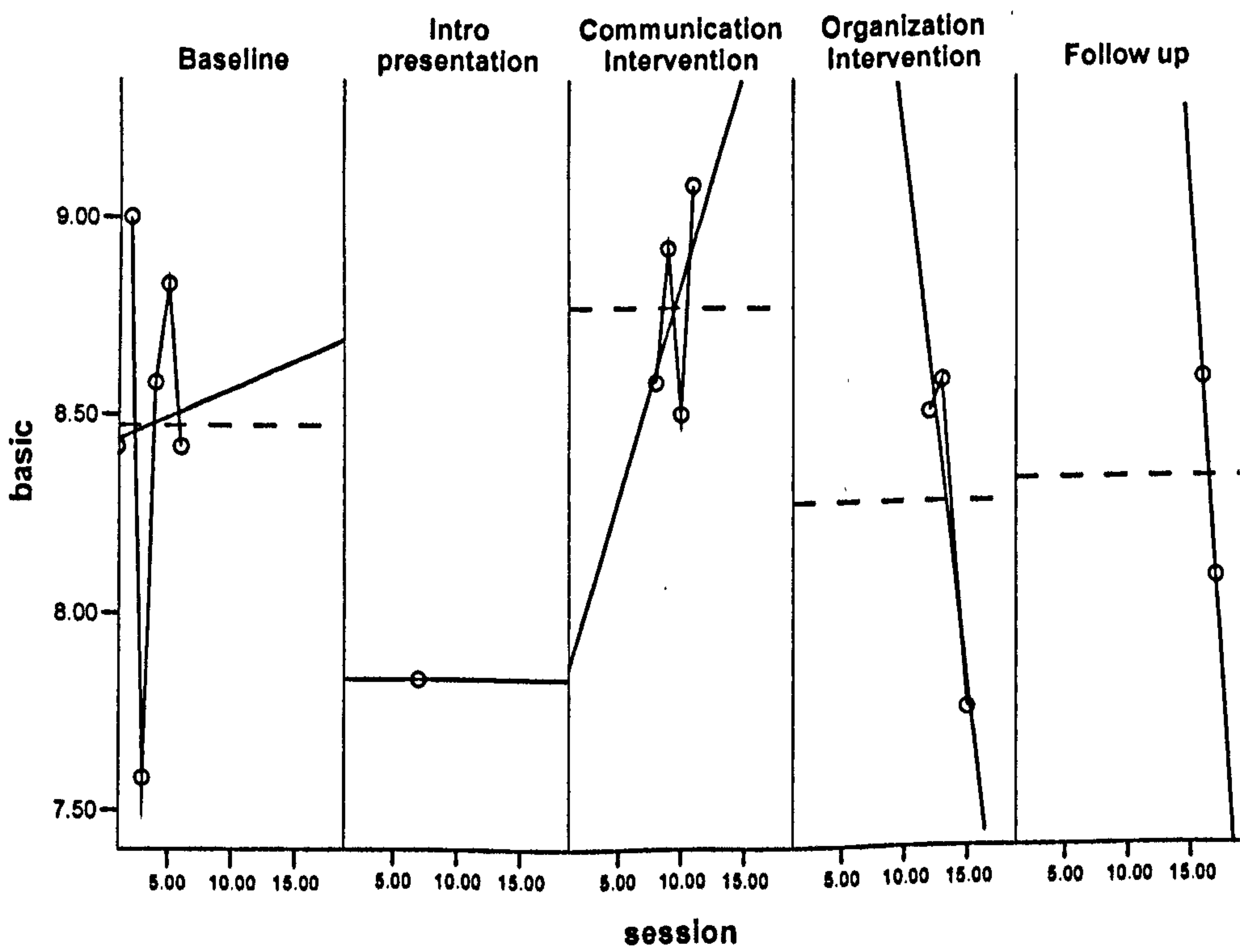




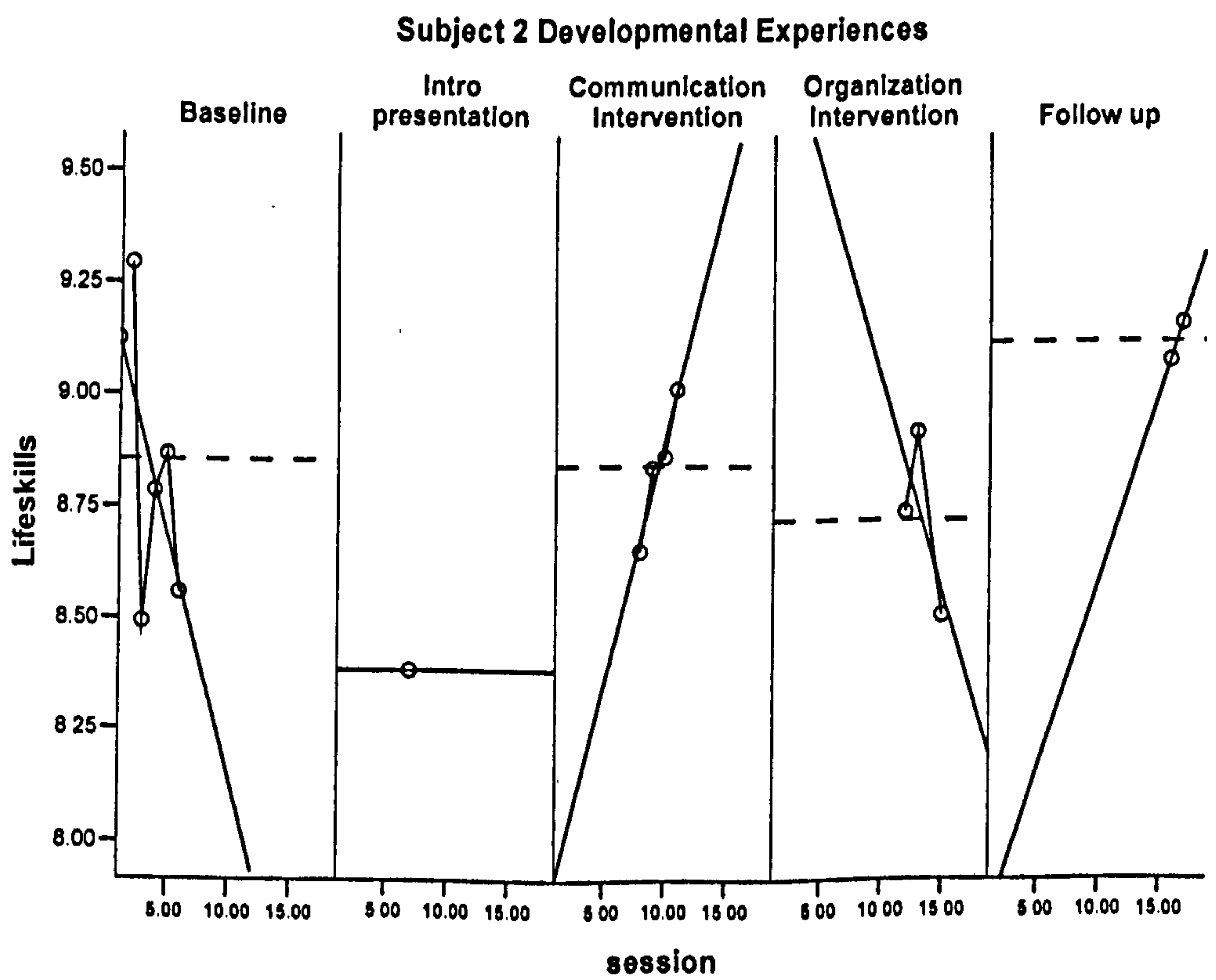
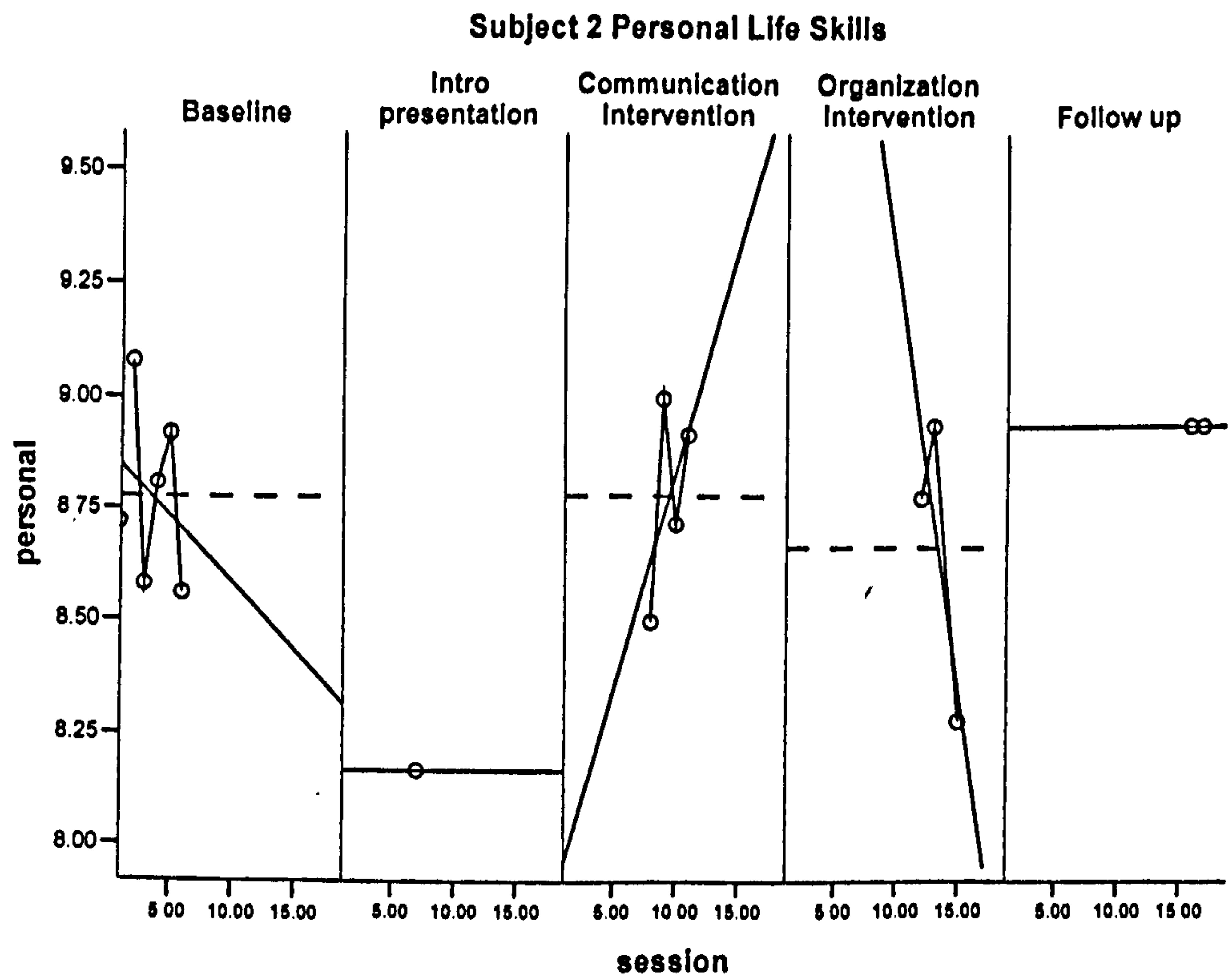
Subject 2 Initiative Experiences



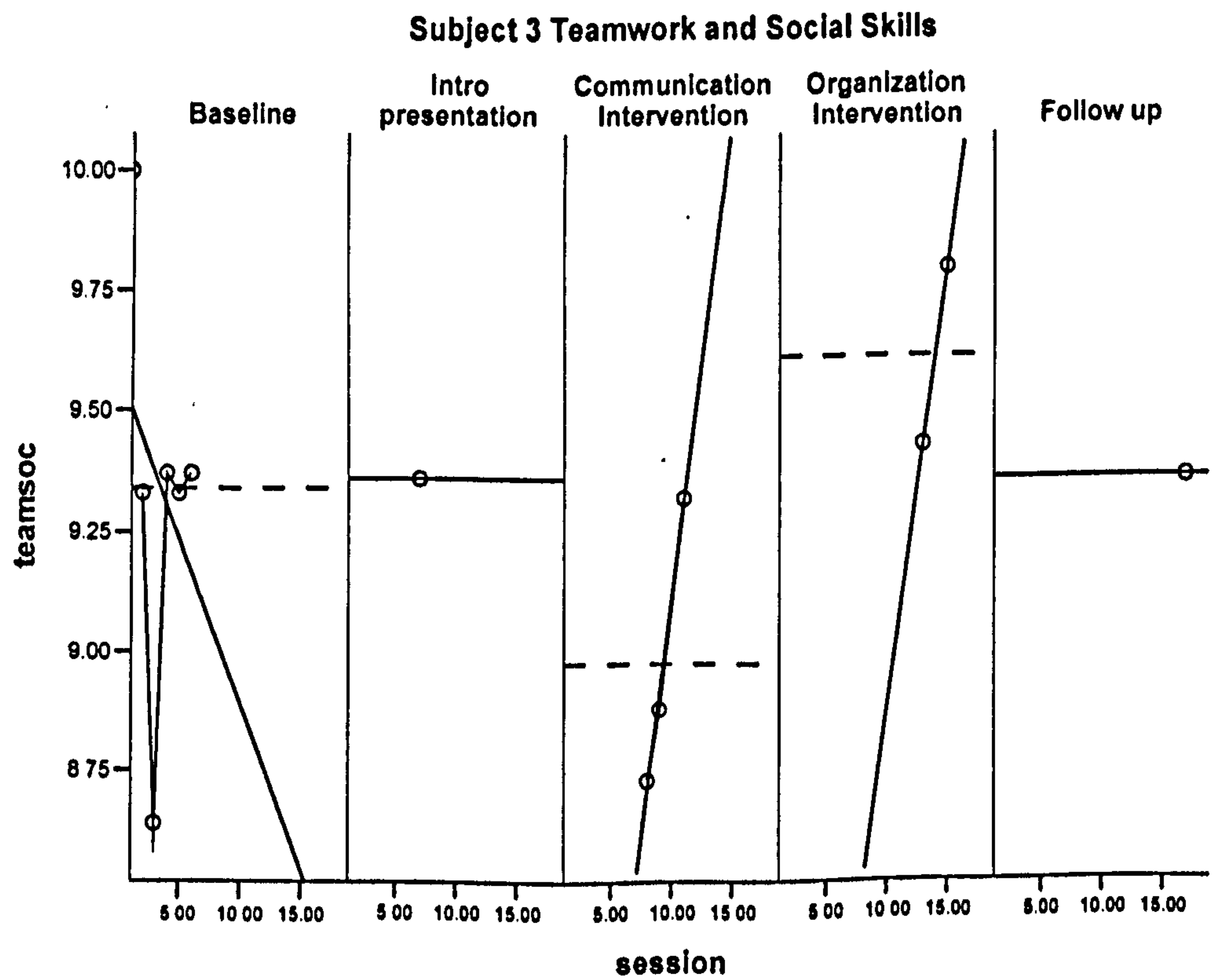
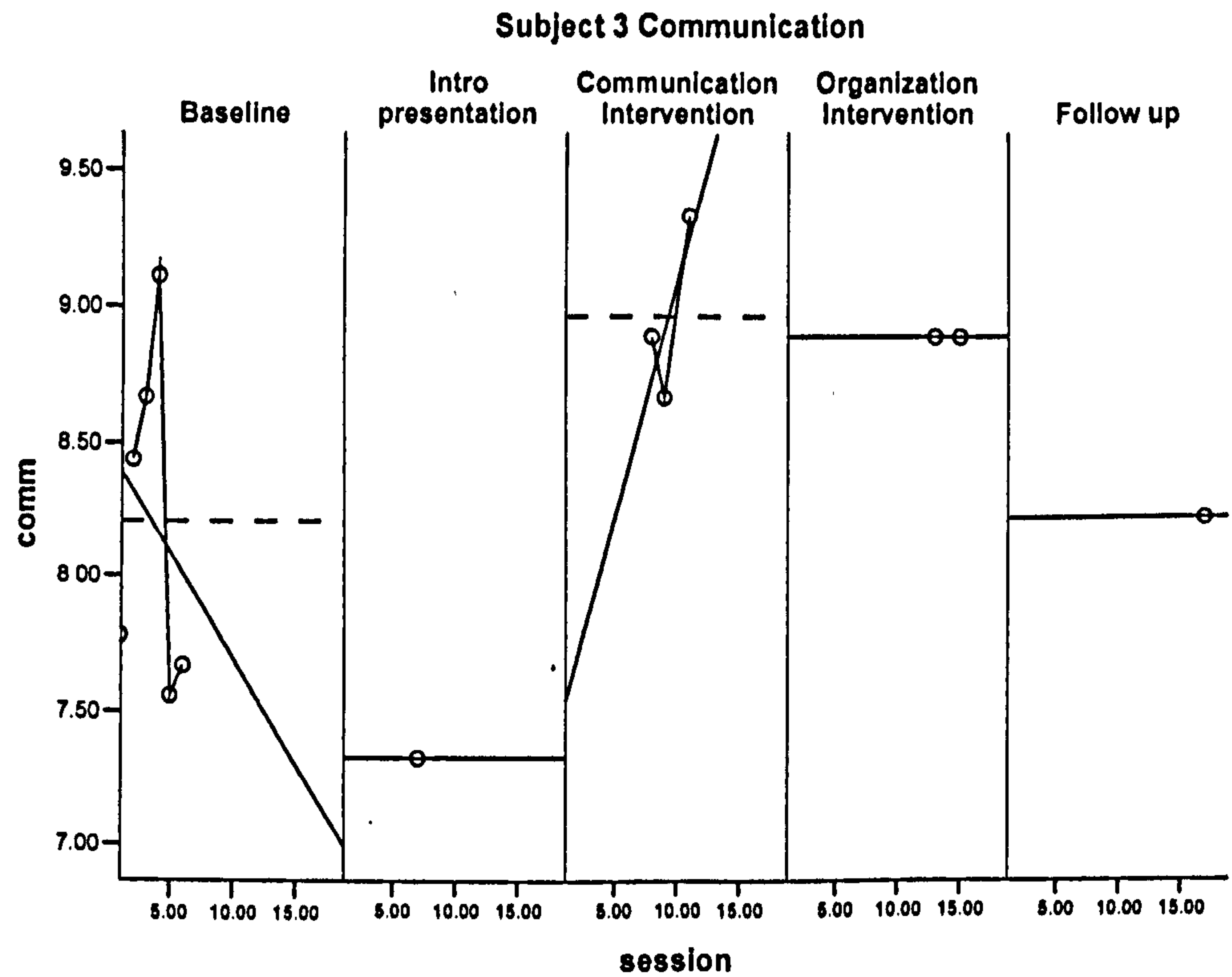
Subject 2 Basic Skills



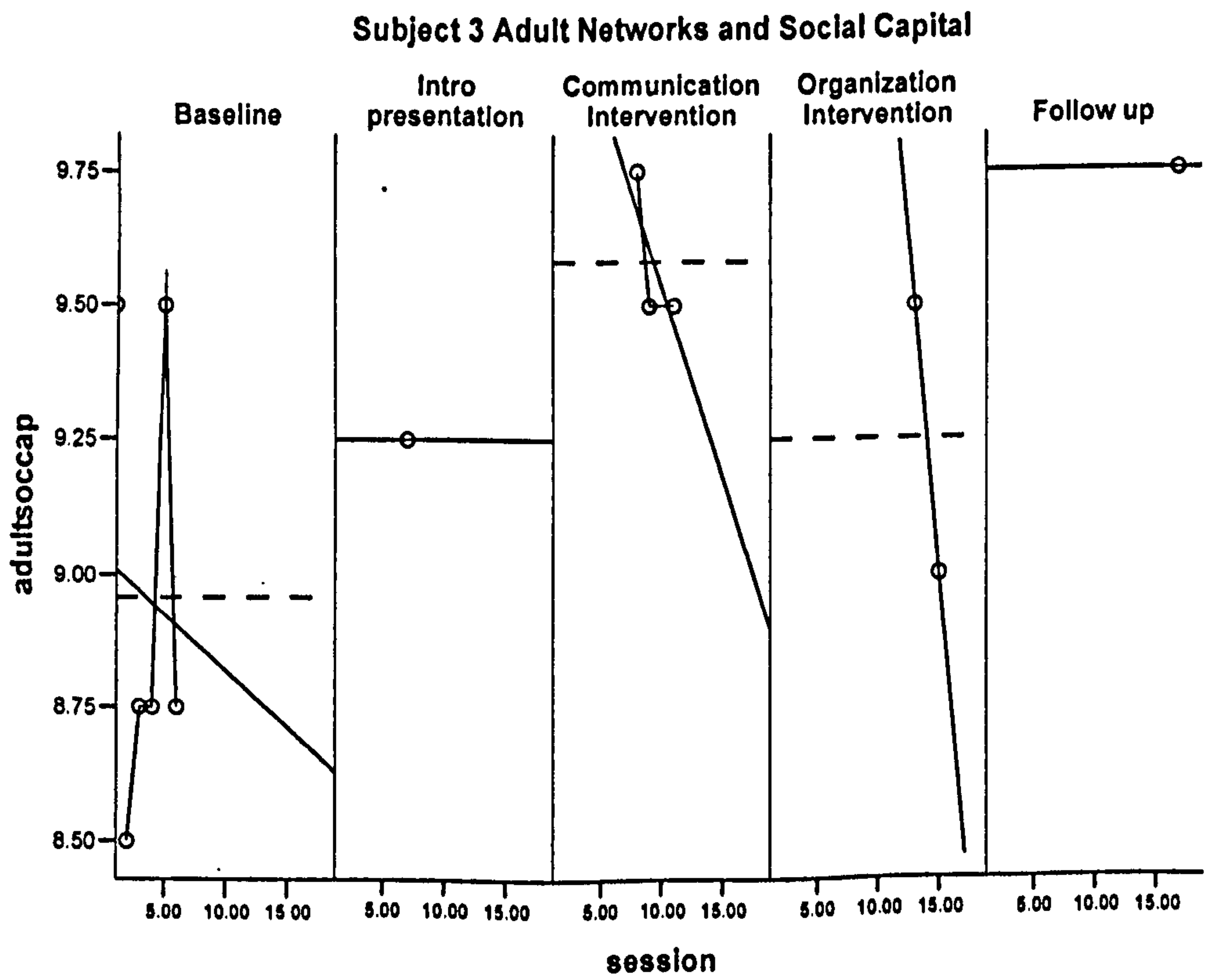
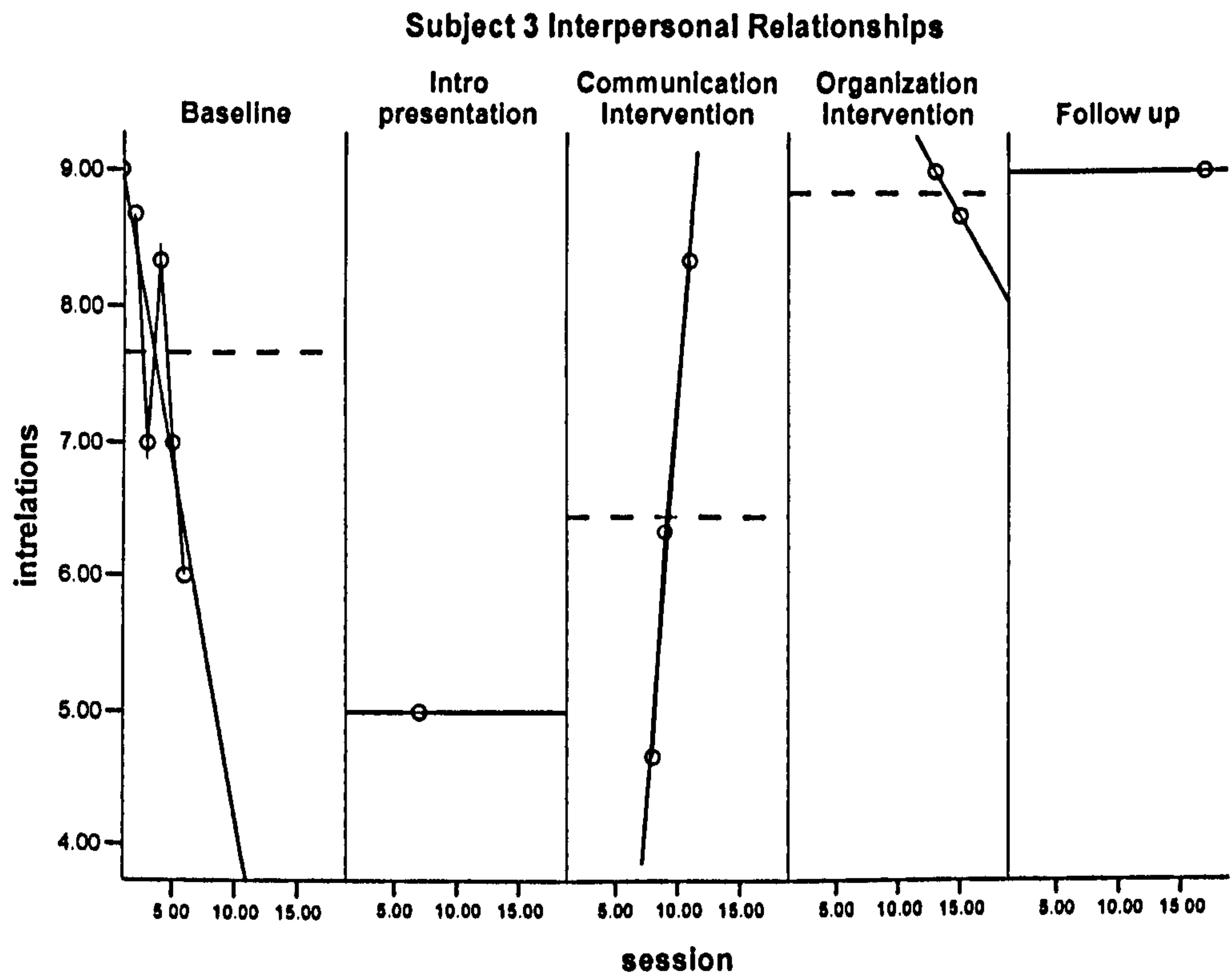




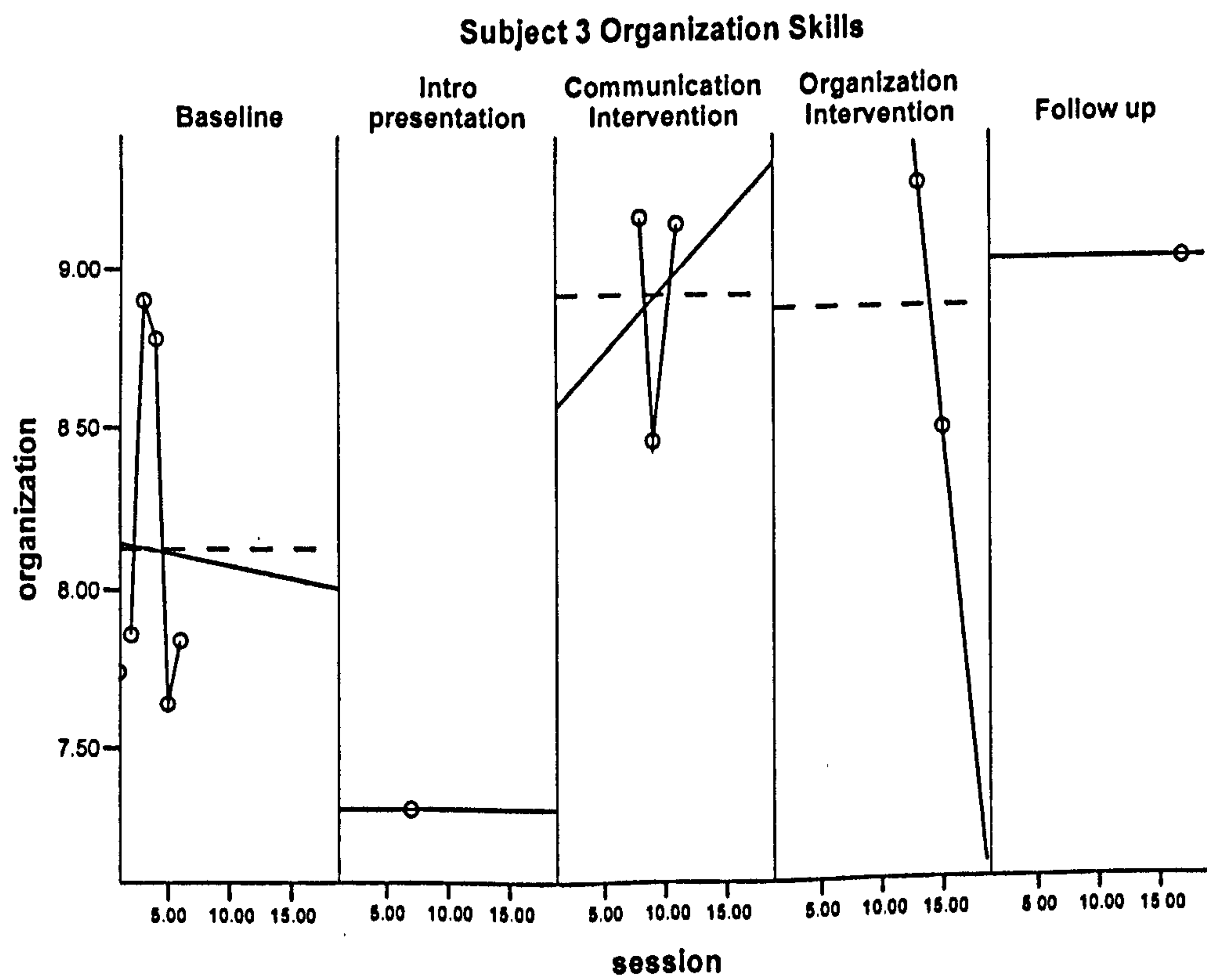
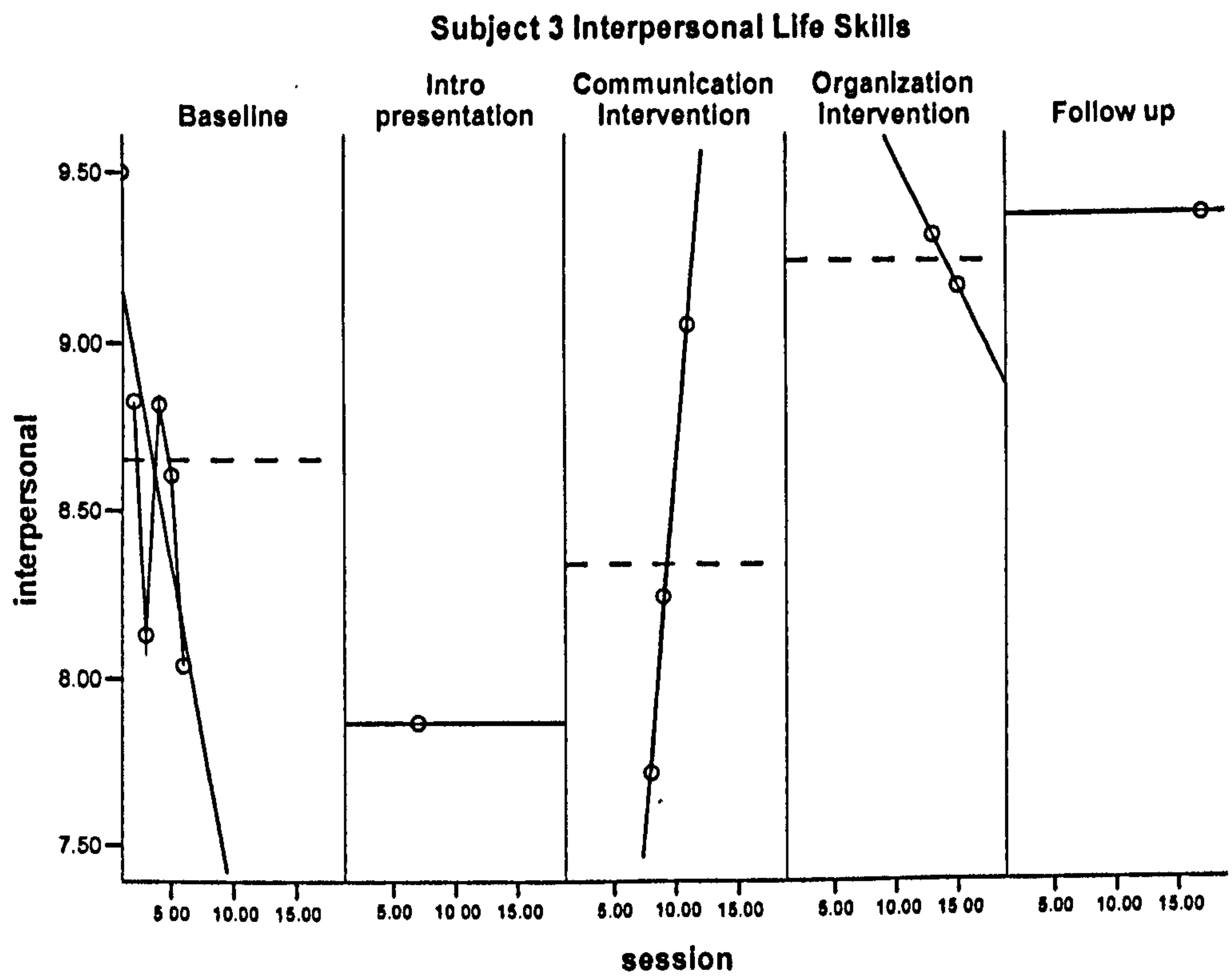




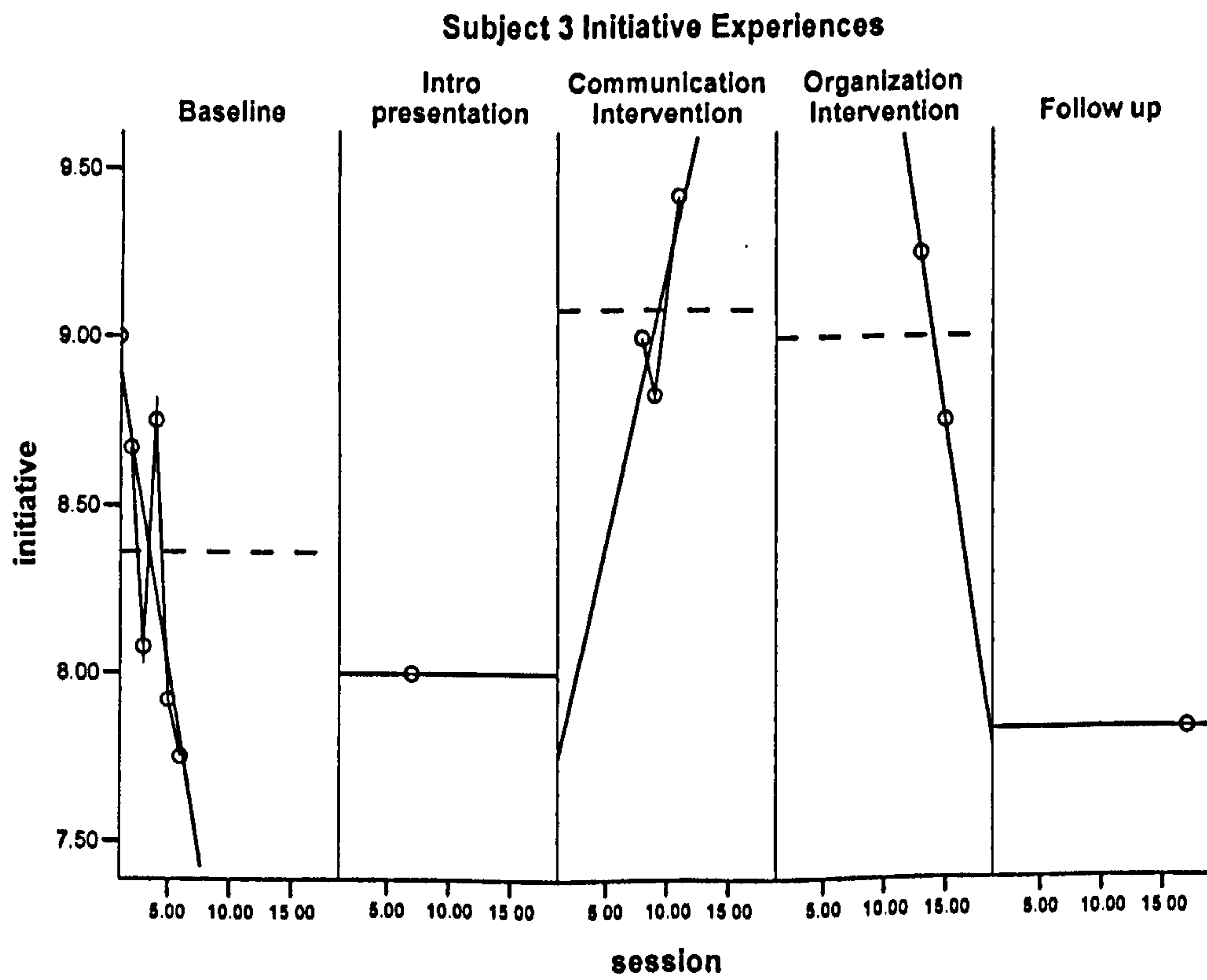
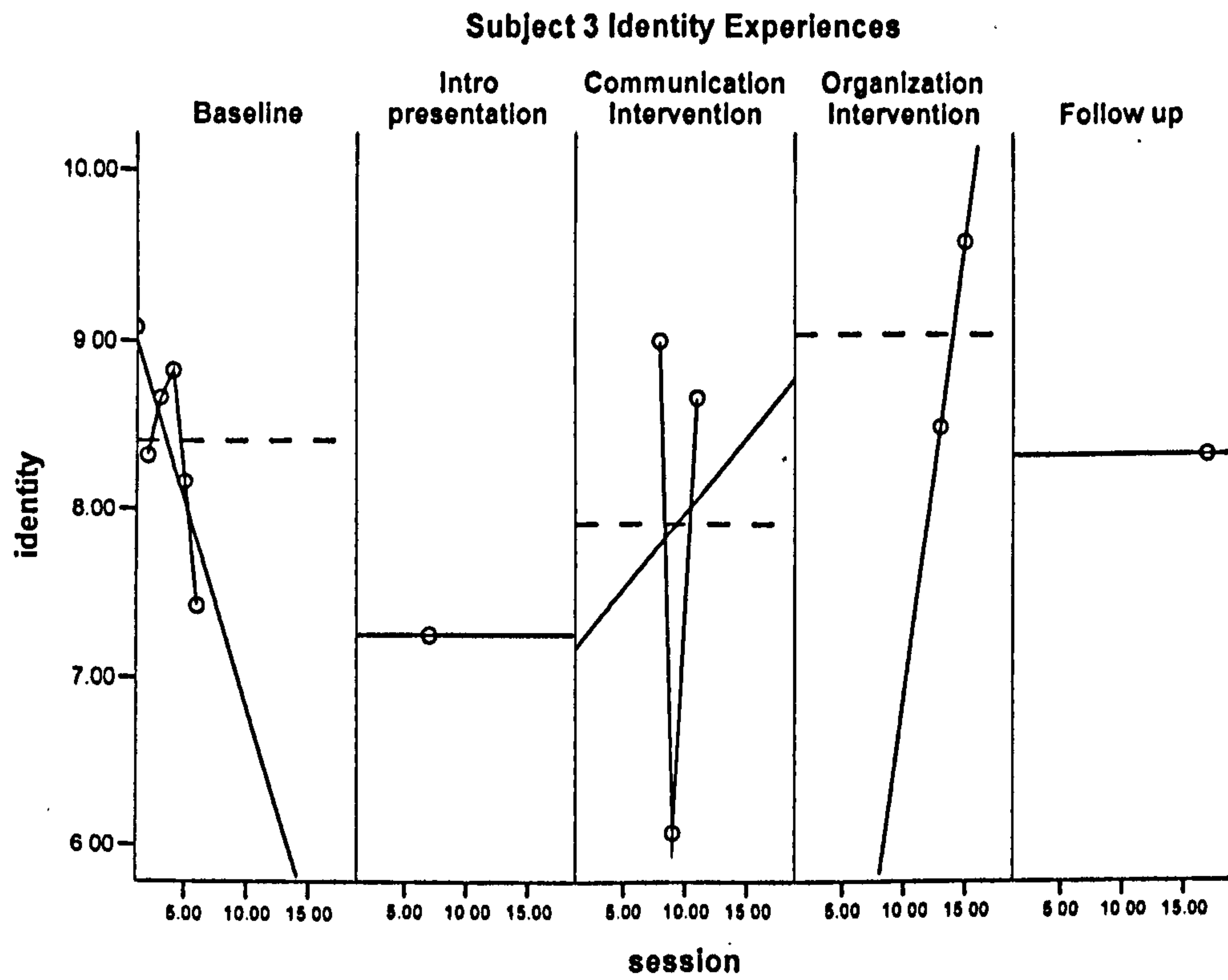




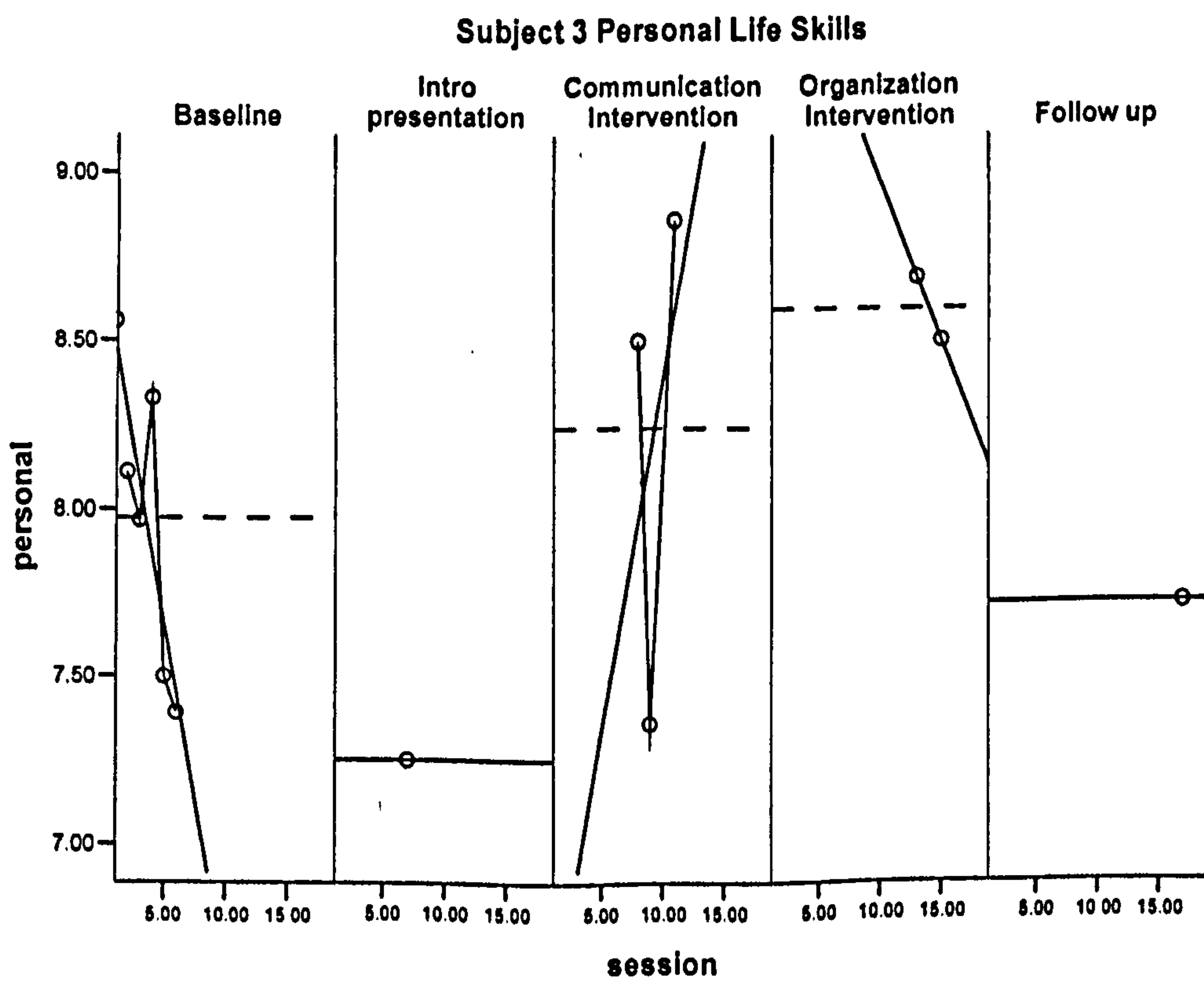
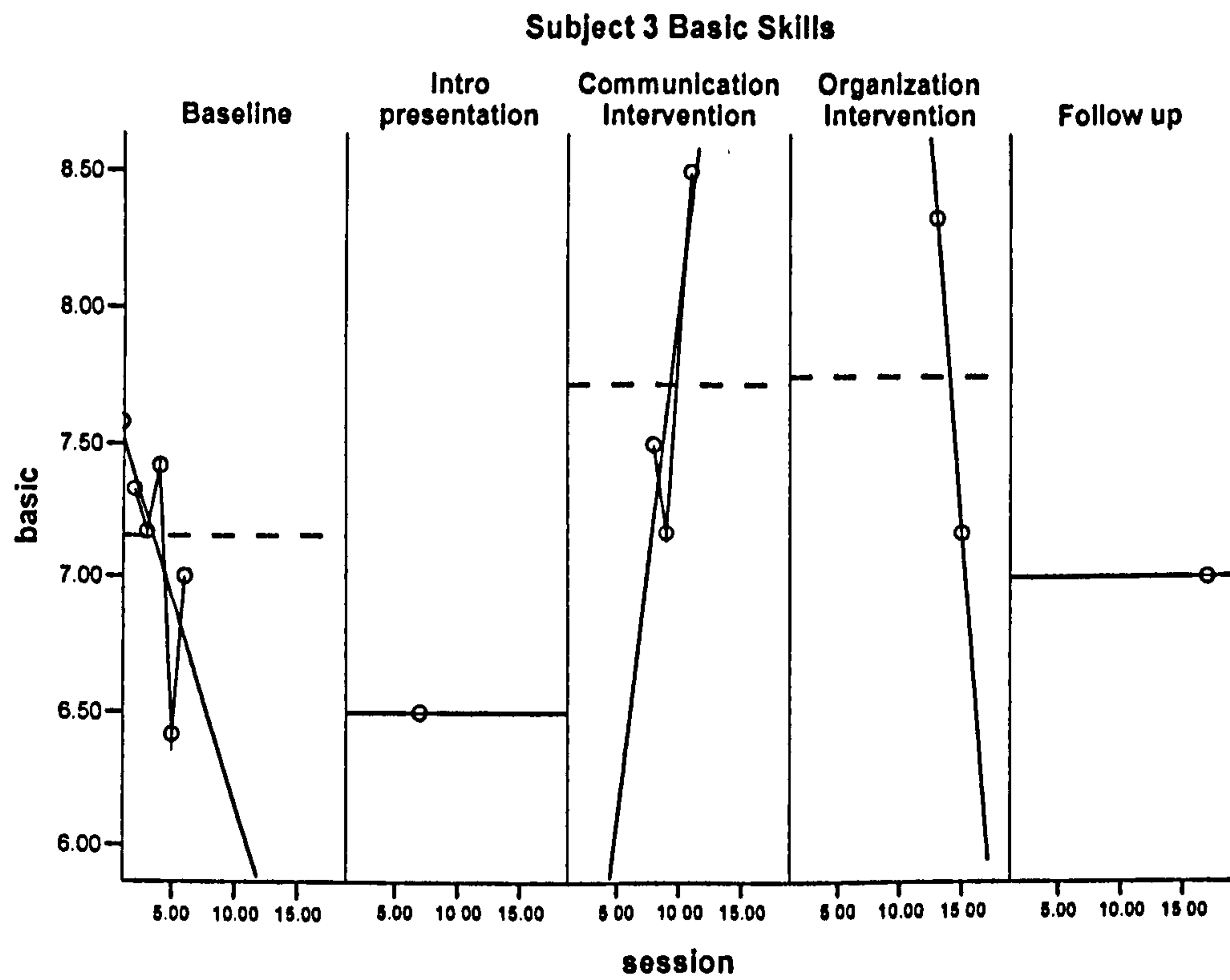




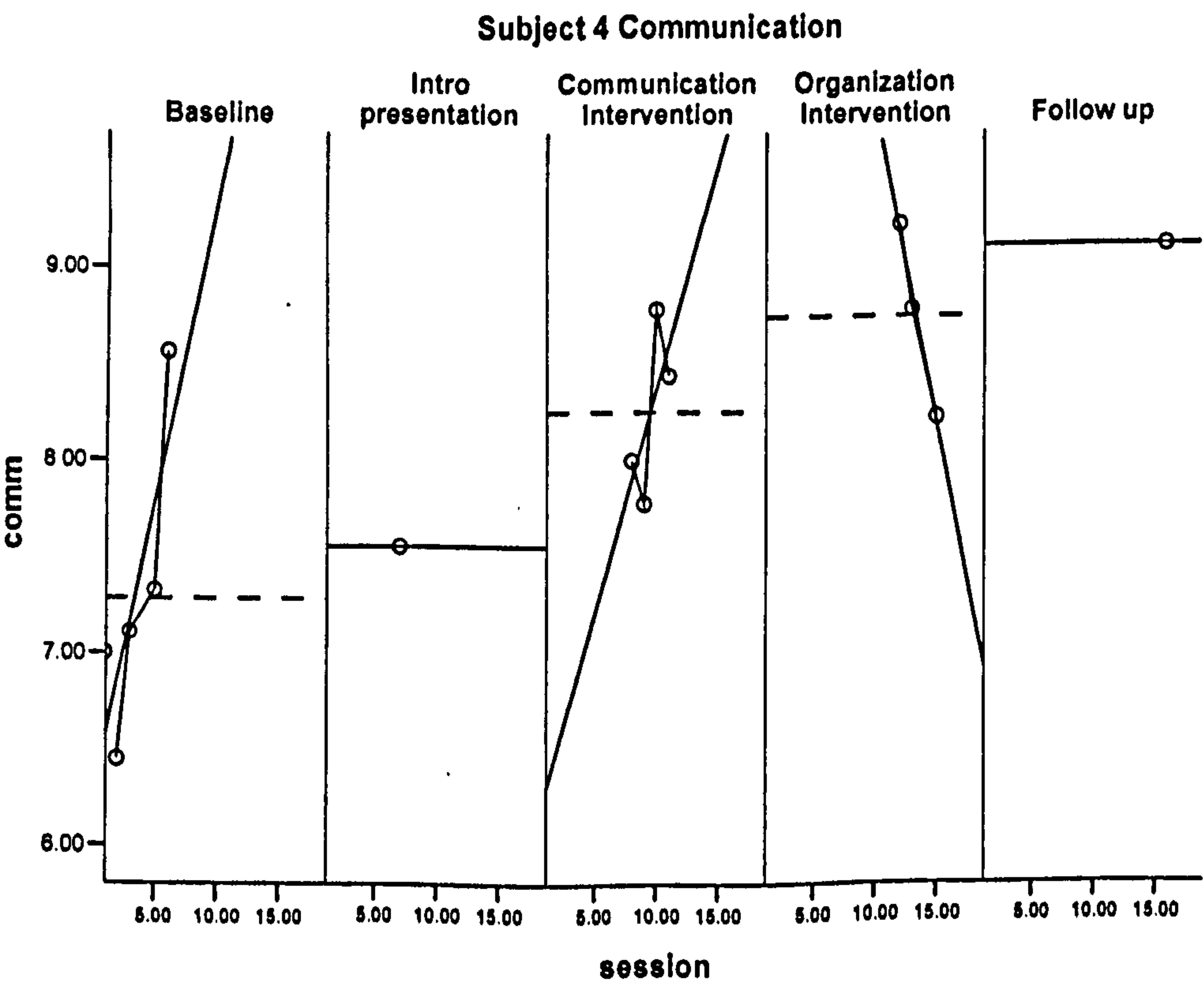
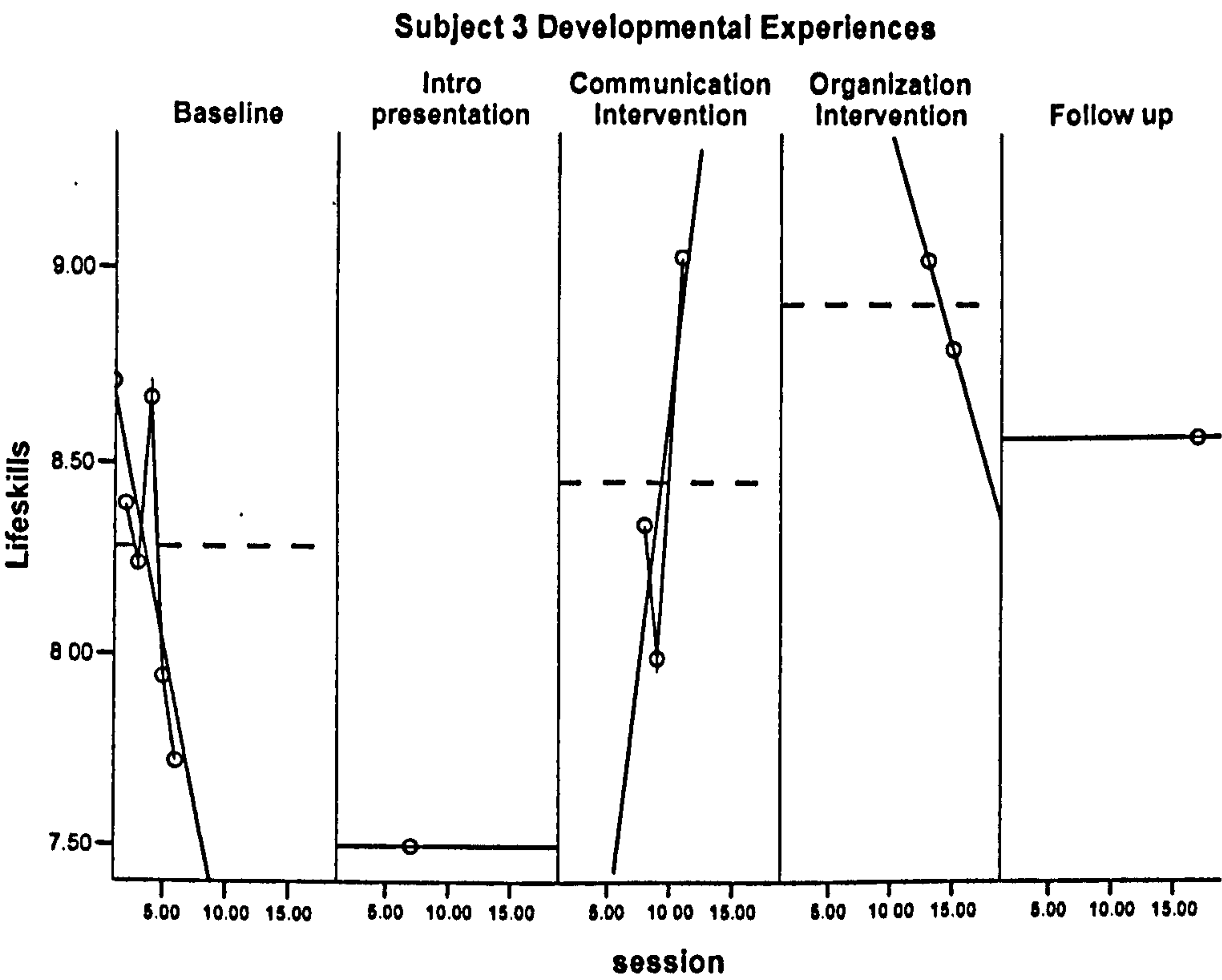




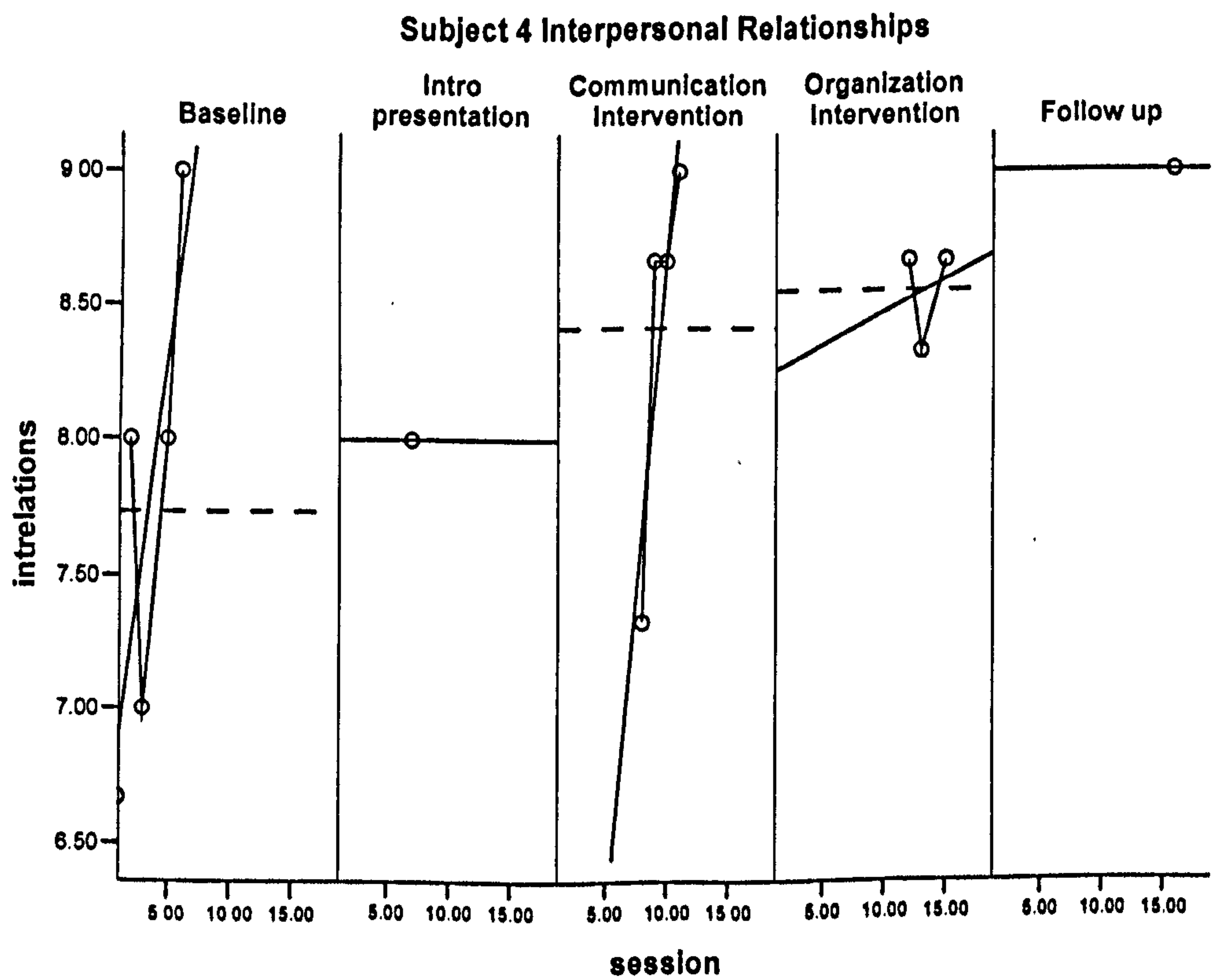
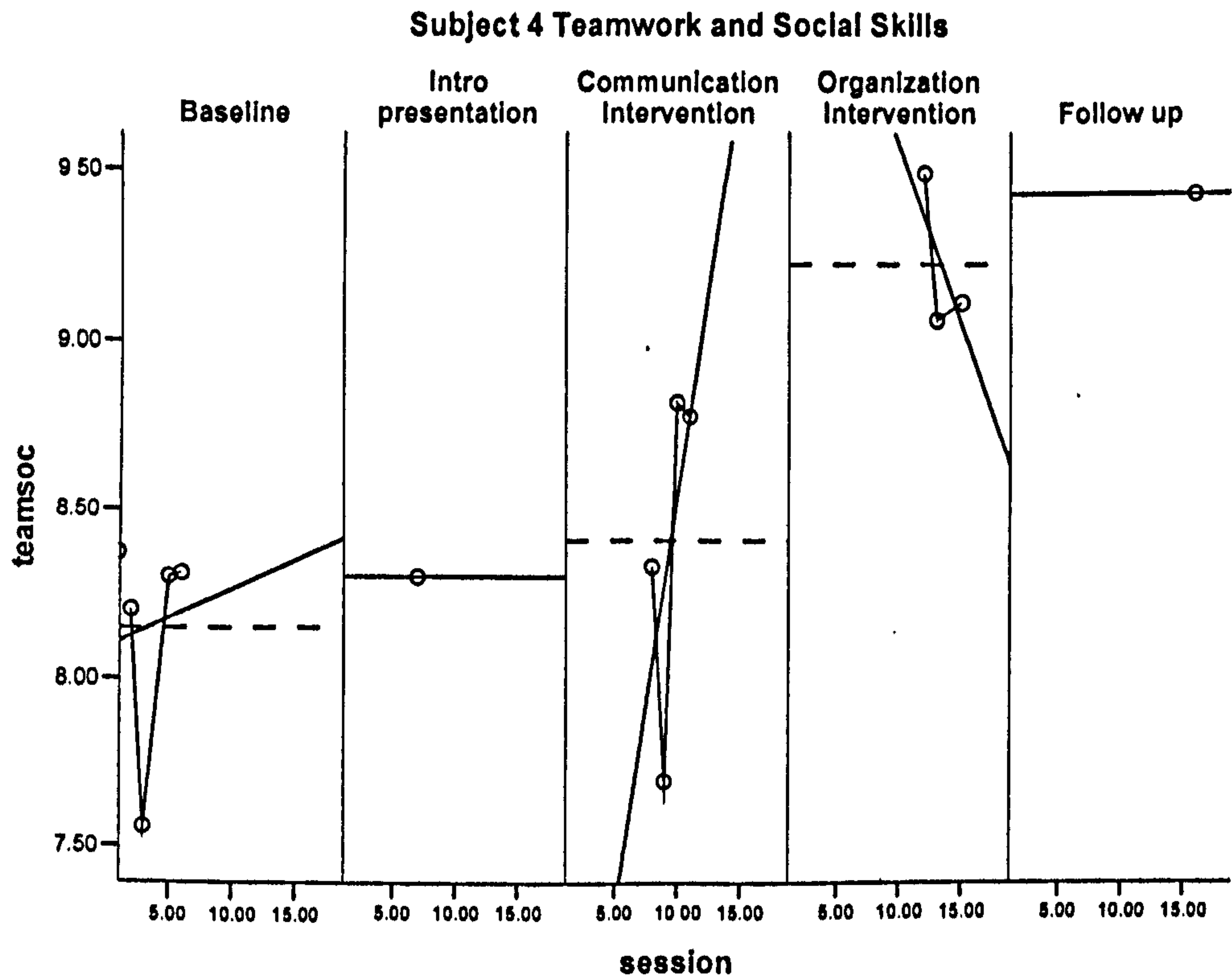






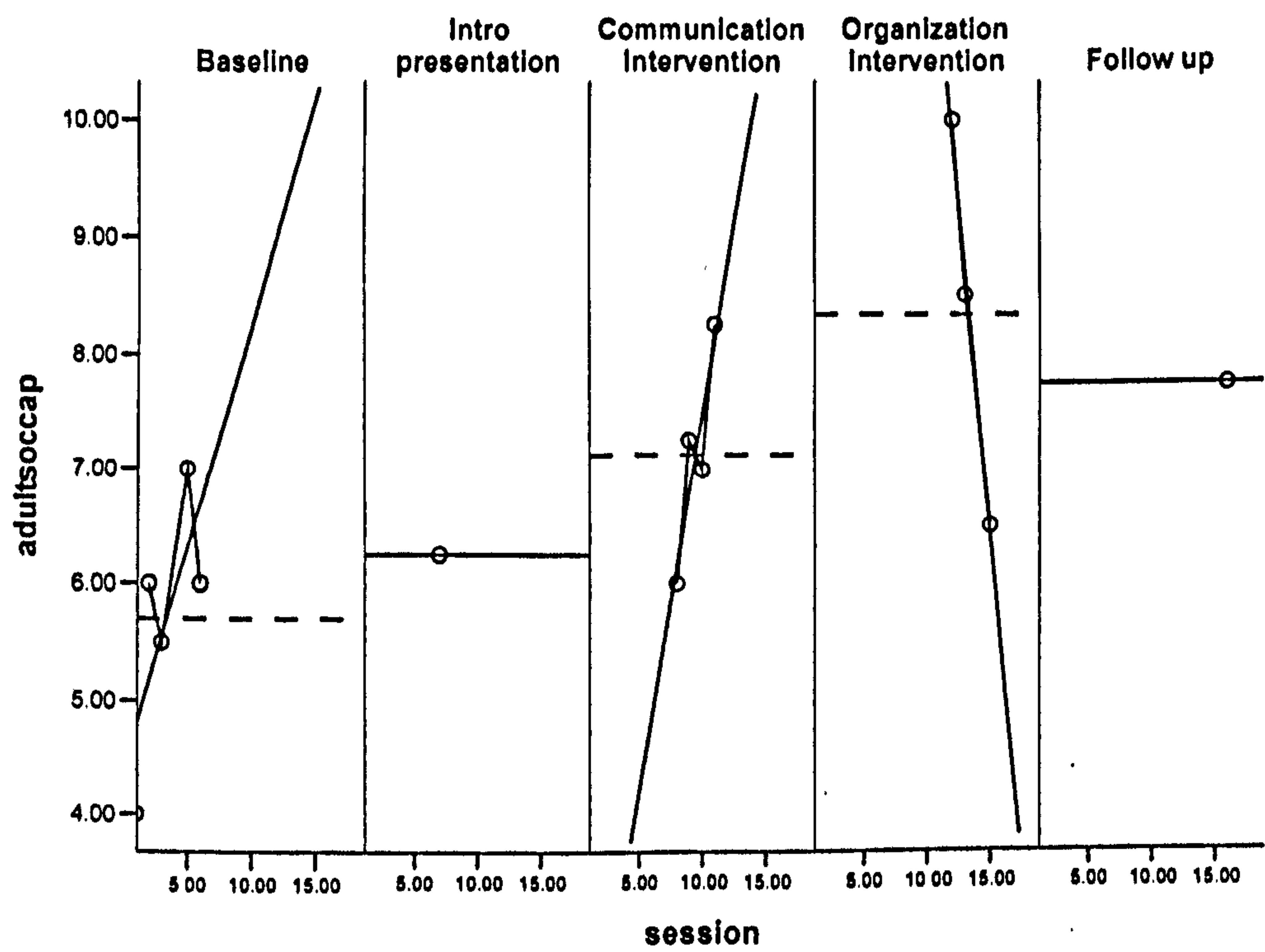




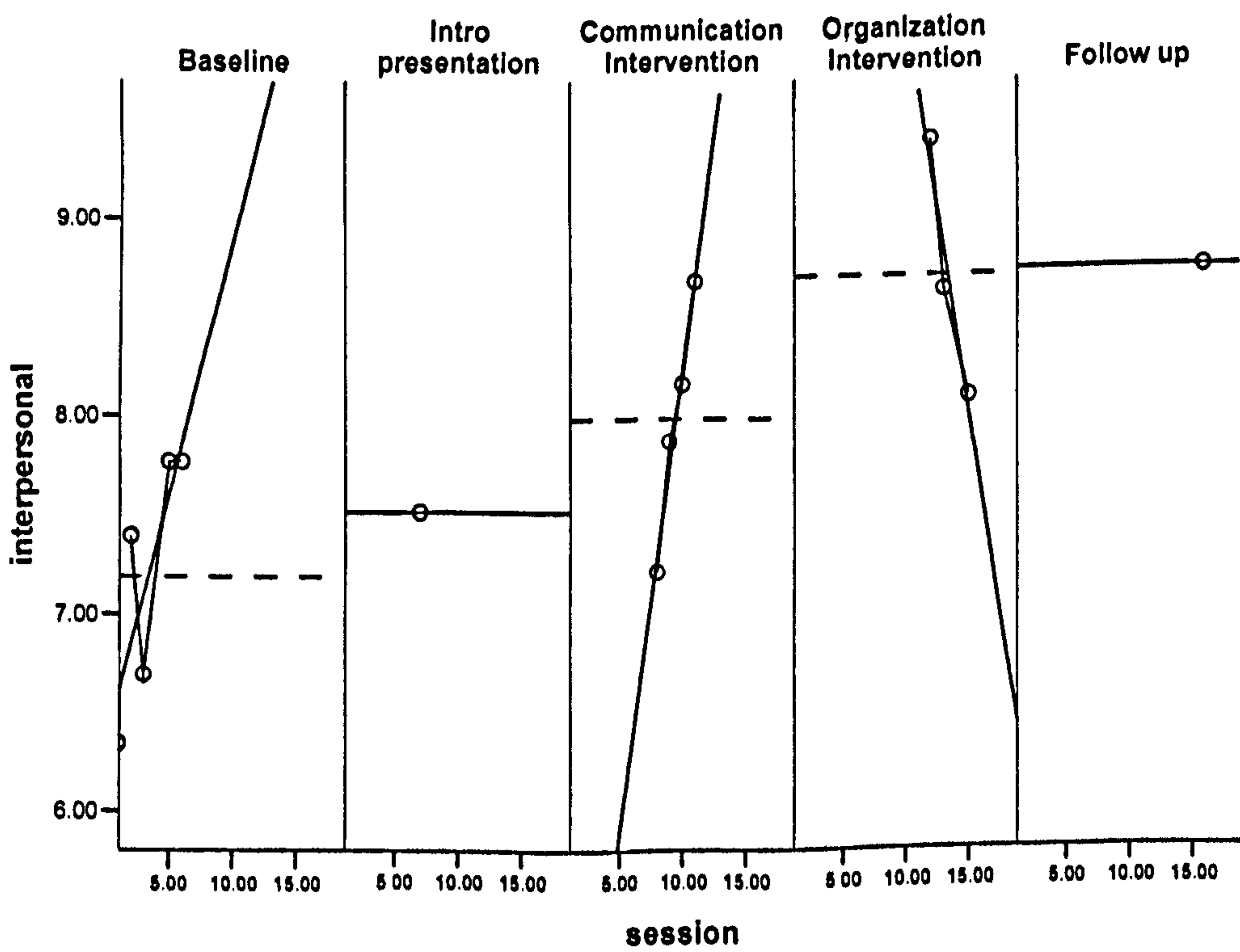




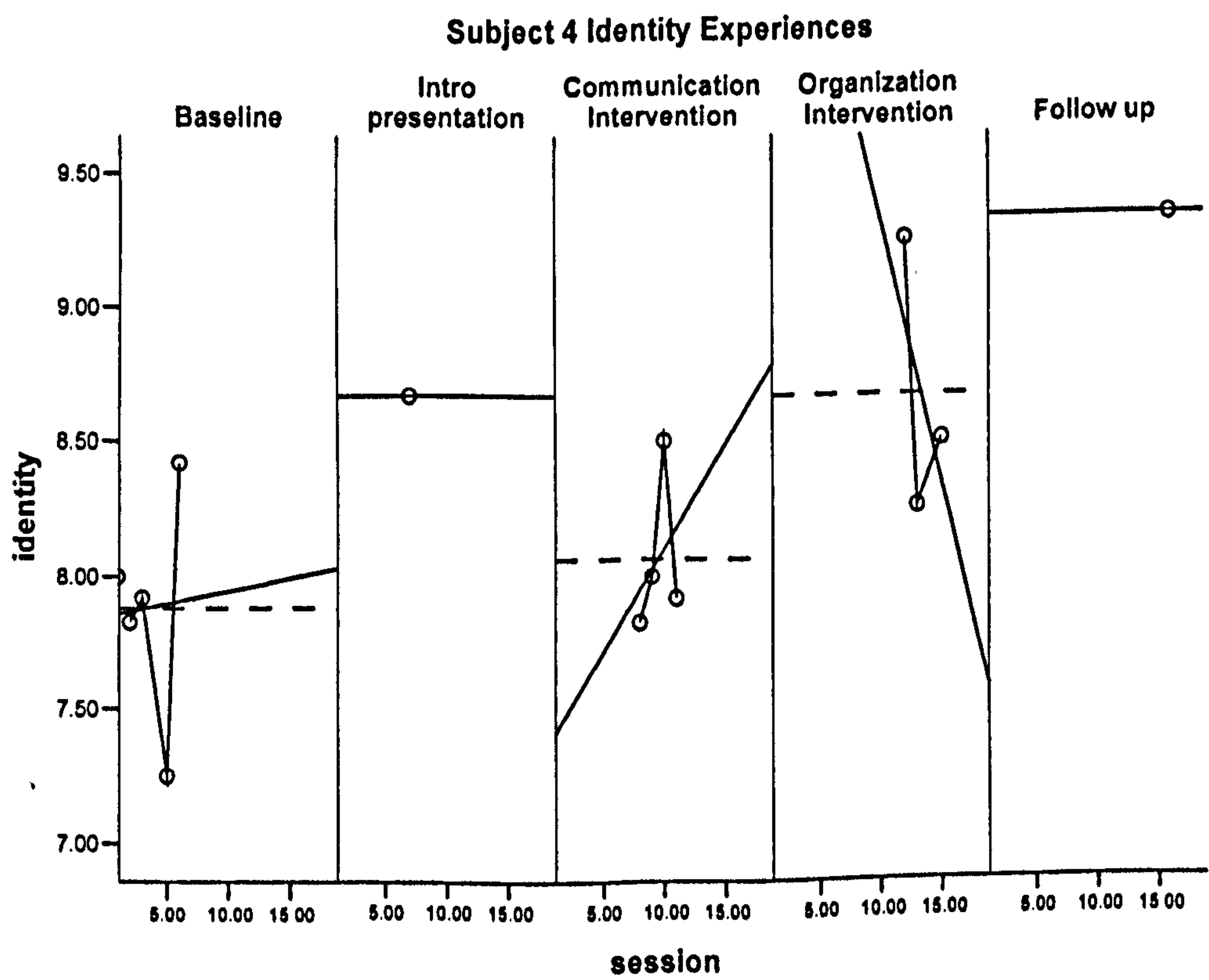
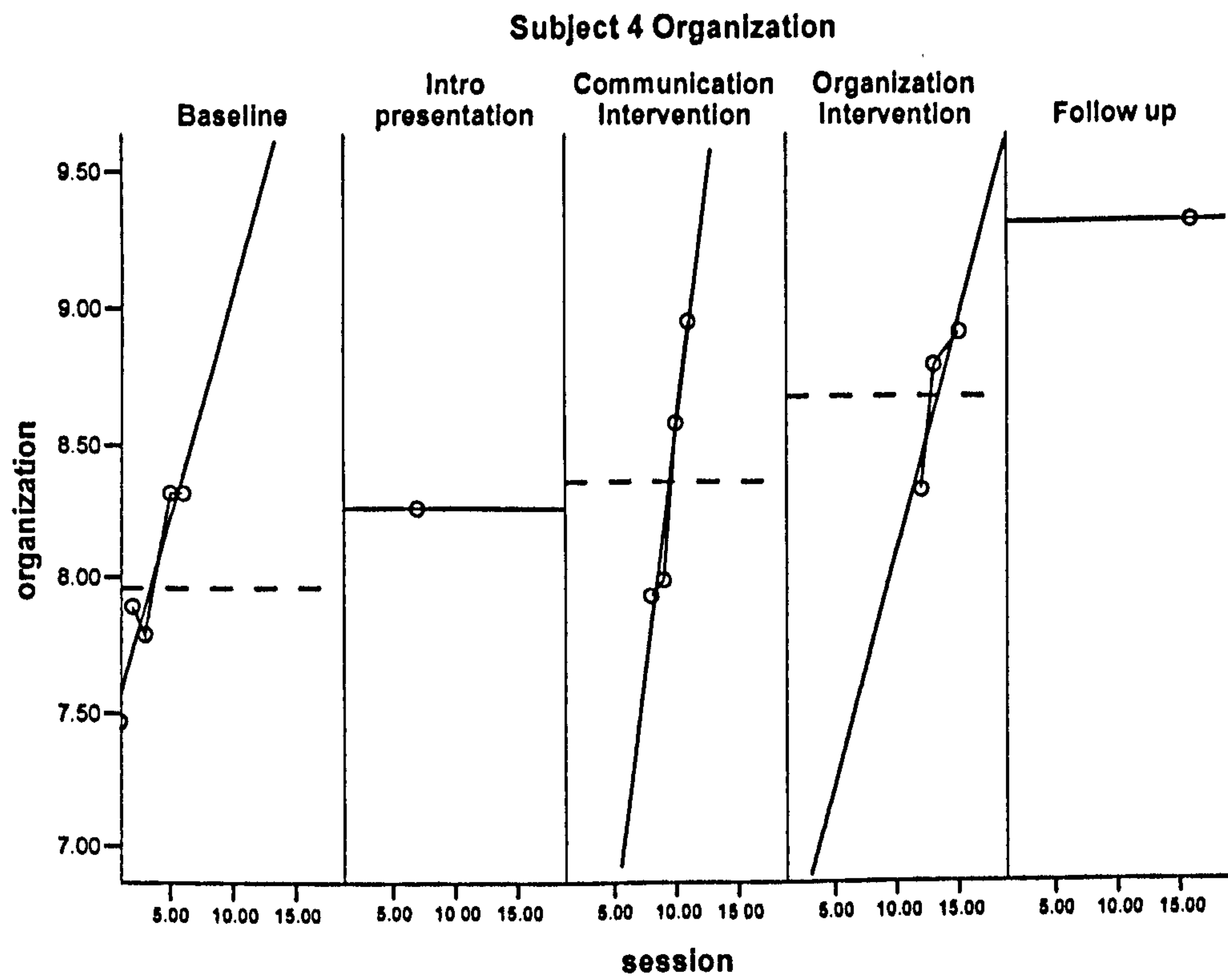
Subject 4 Adult Networks and Social Capital



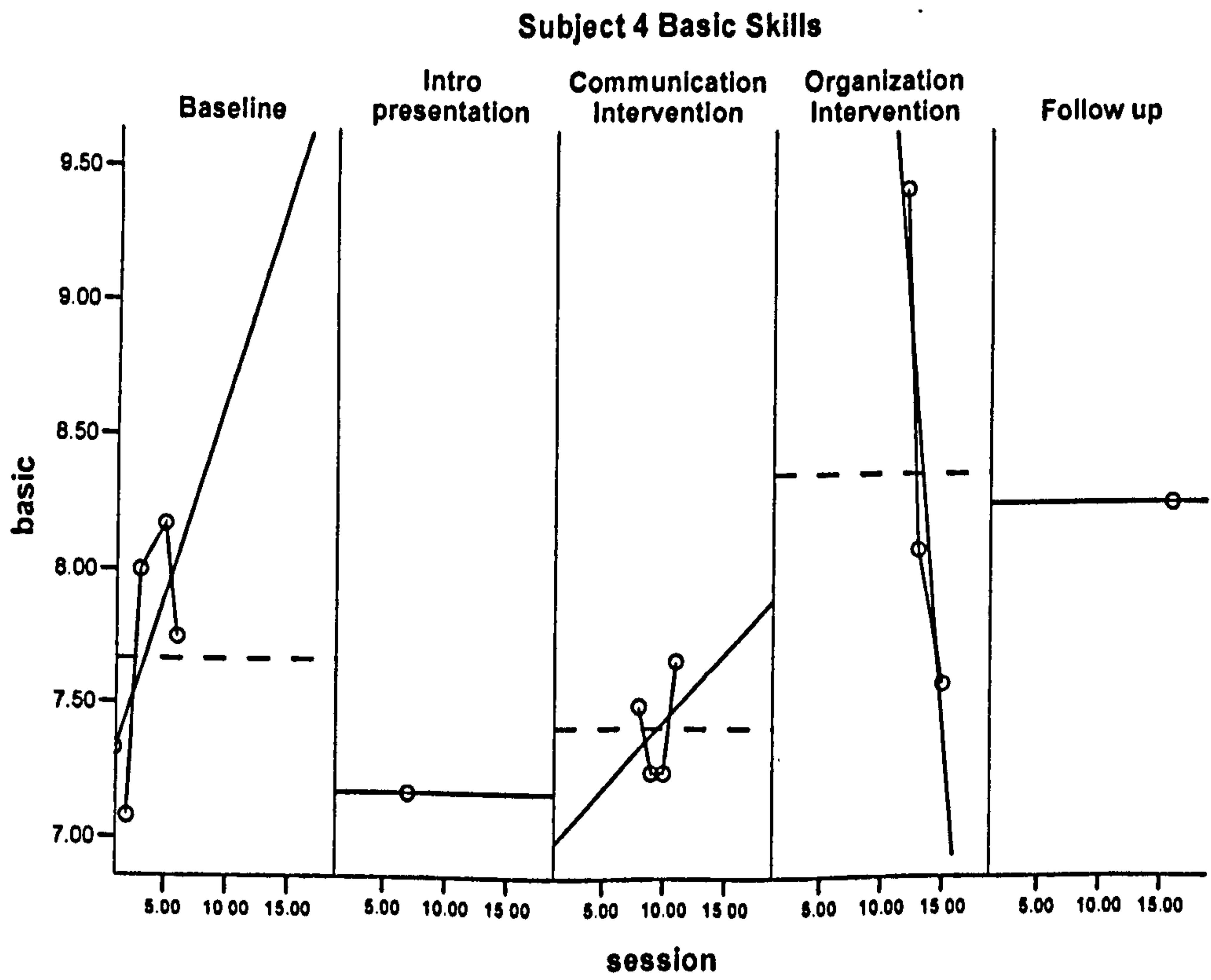
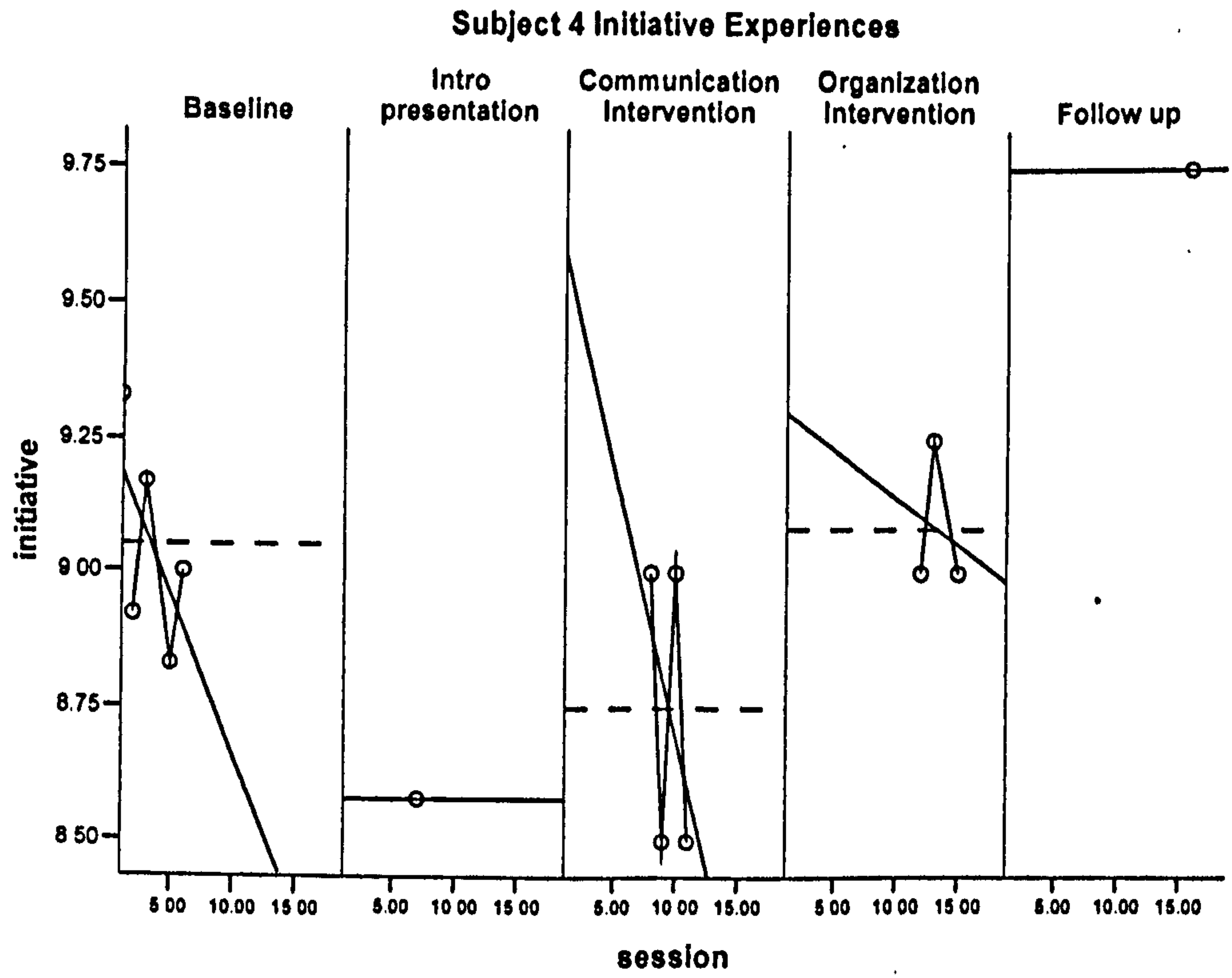
Subject 4 Interpersonal Life Skills



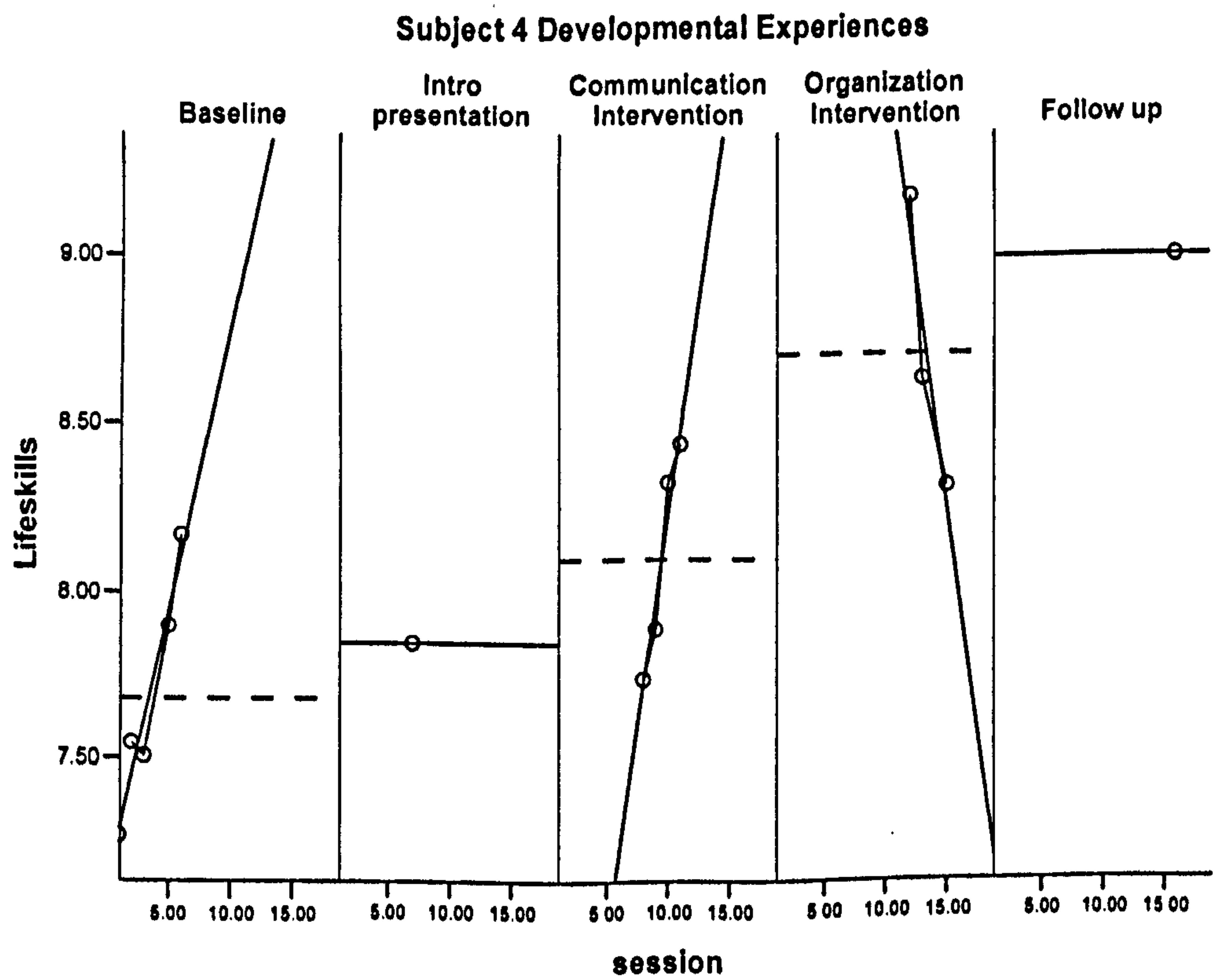
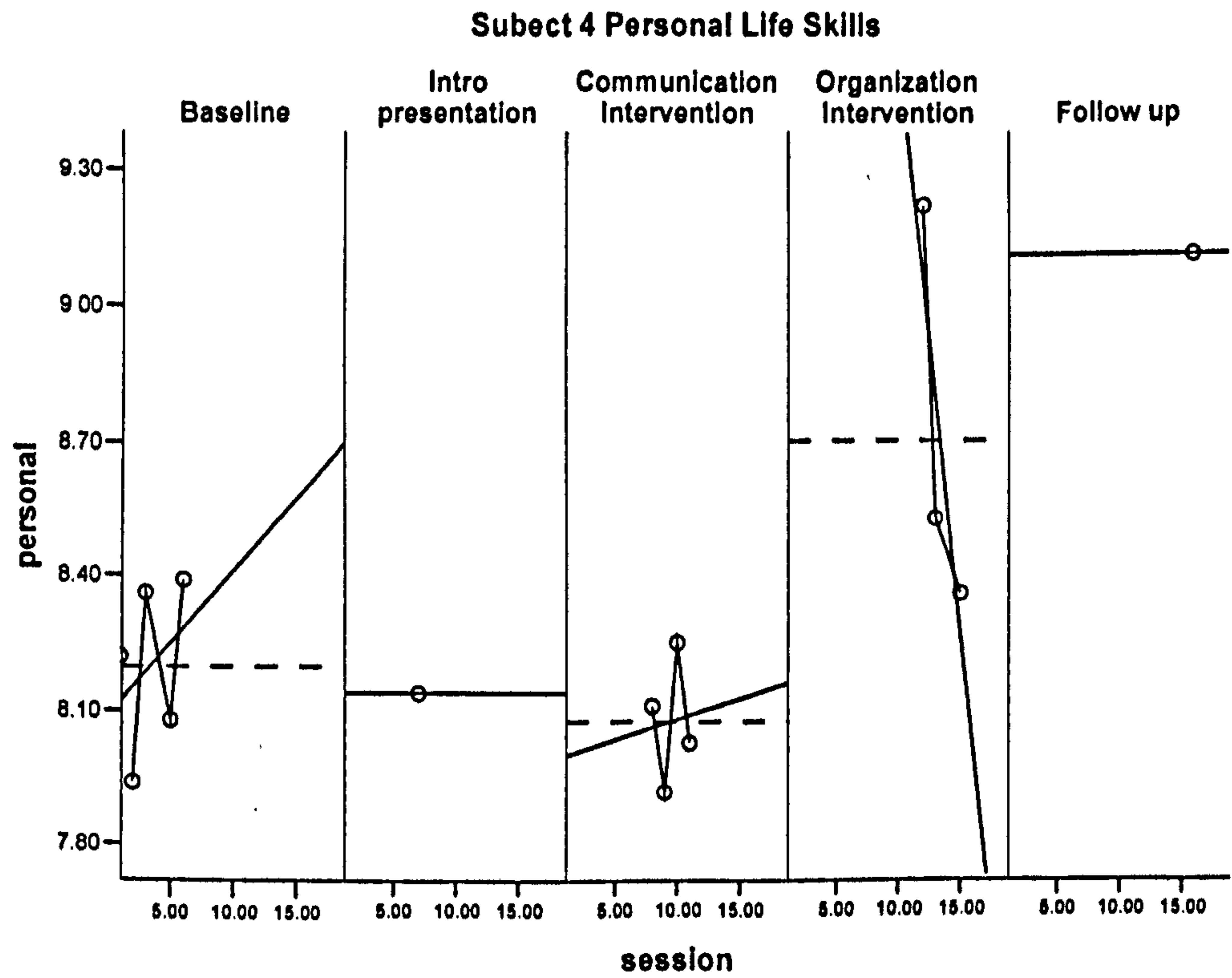




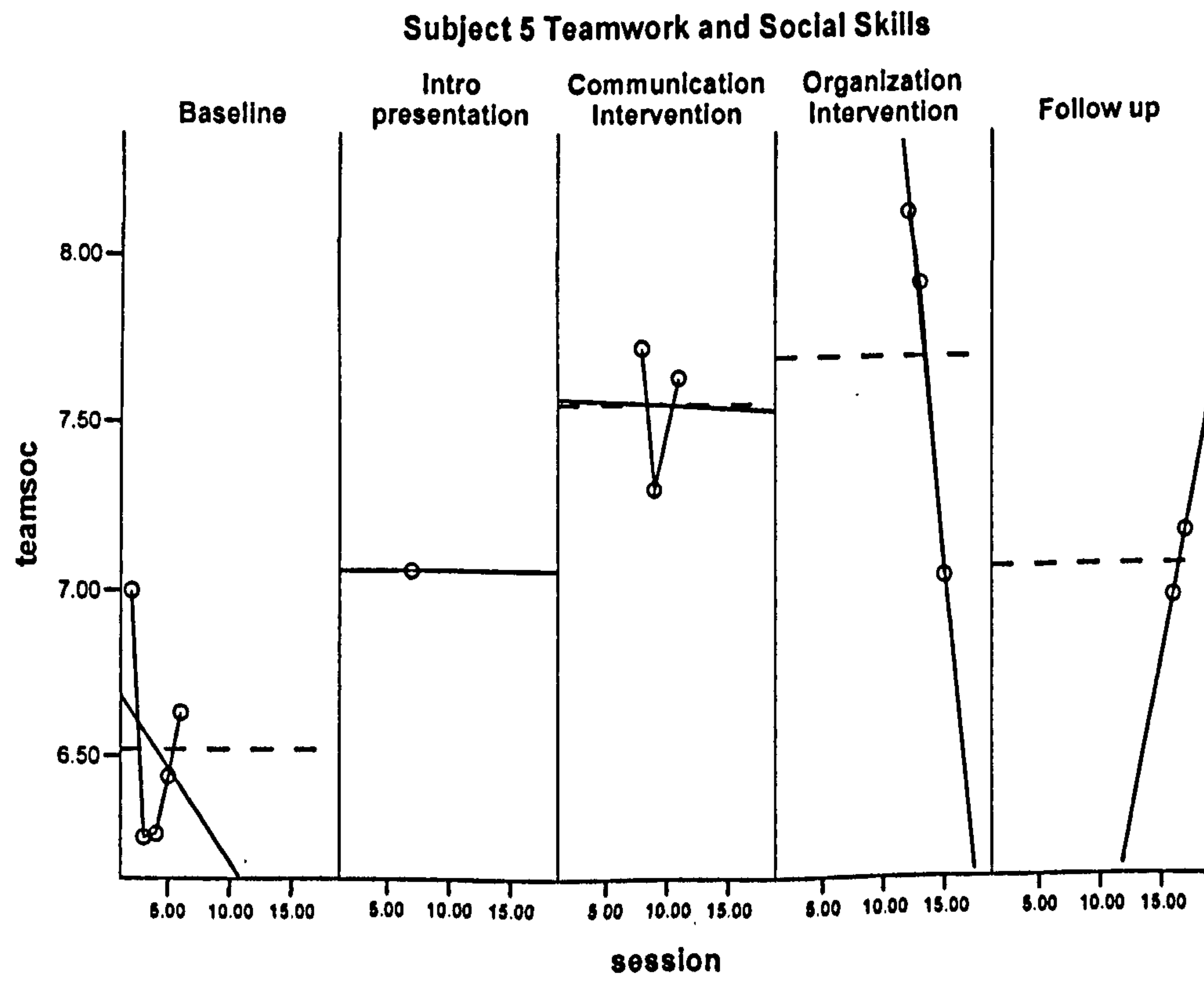
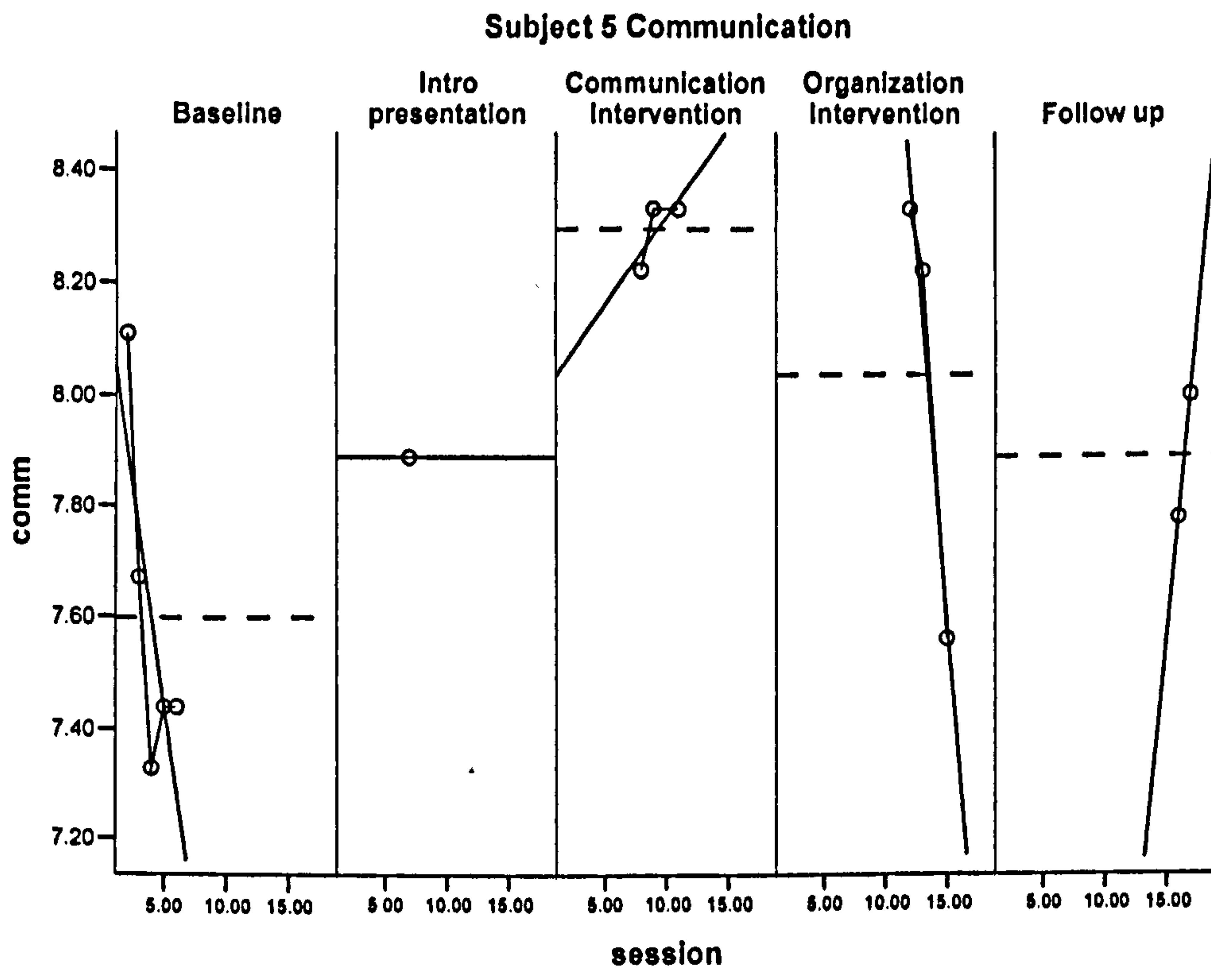




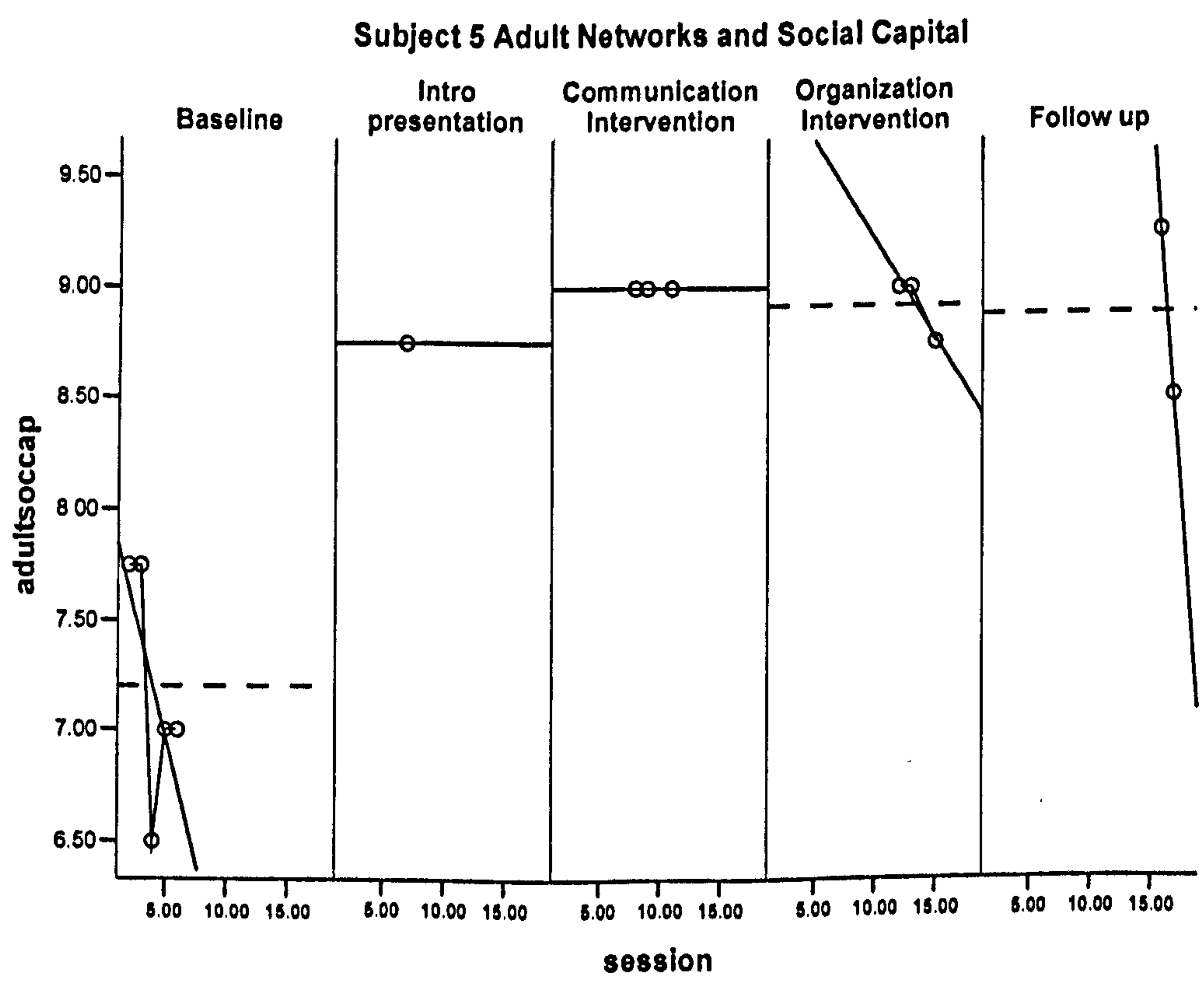
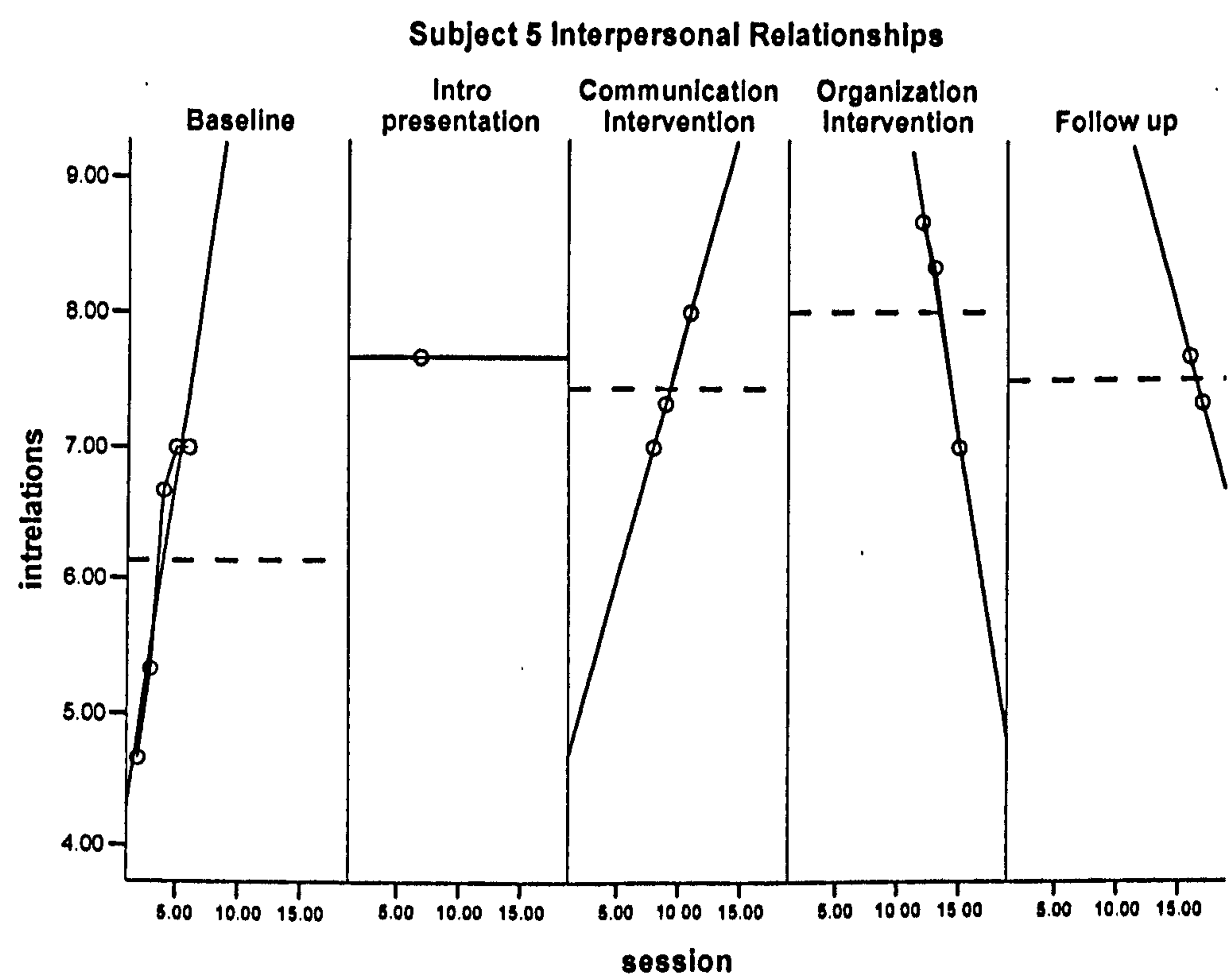




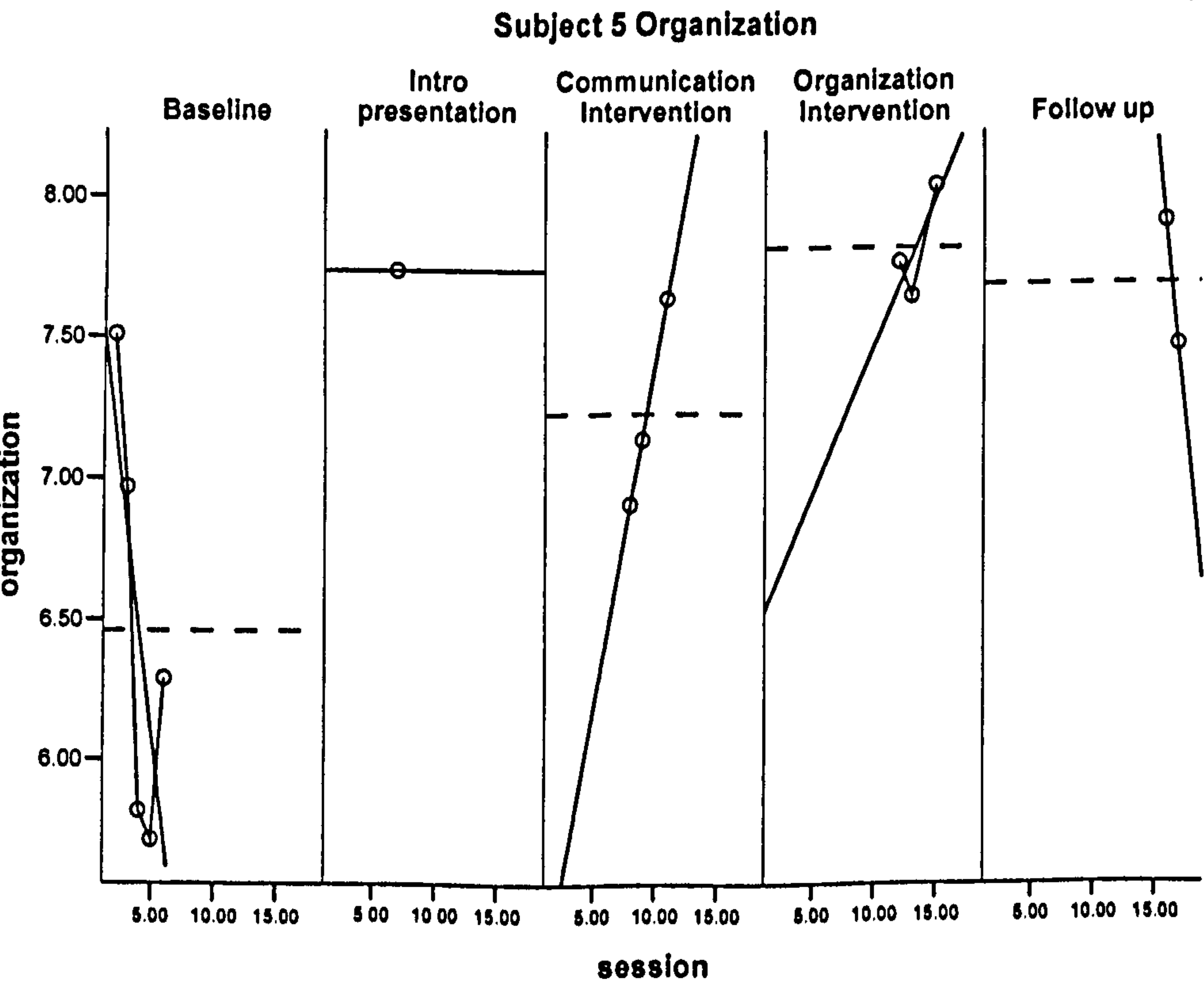
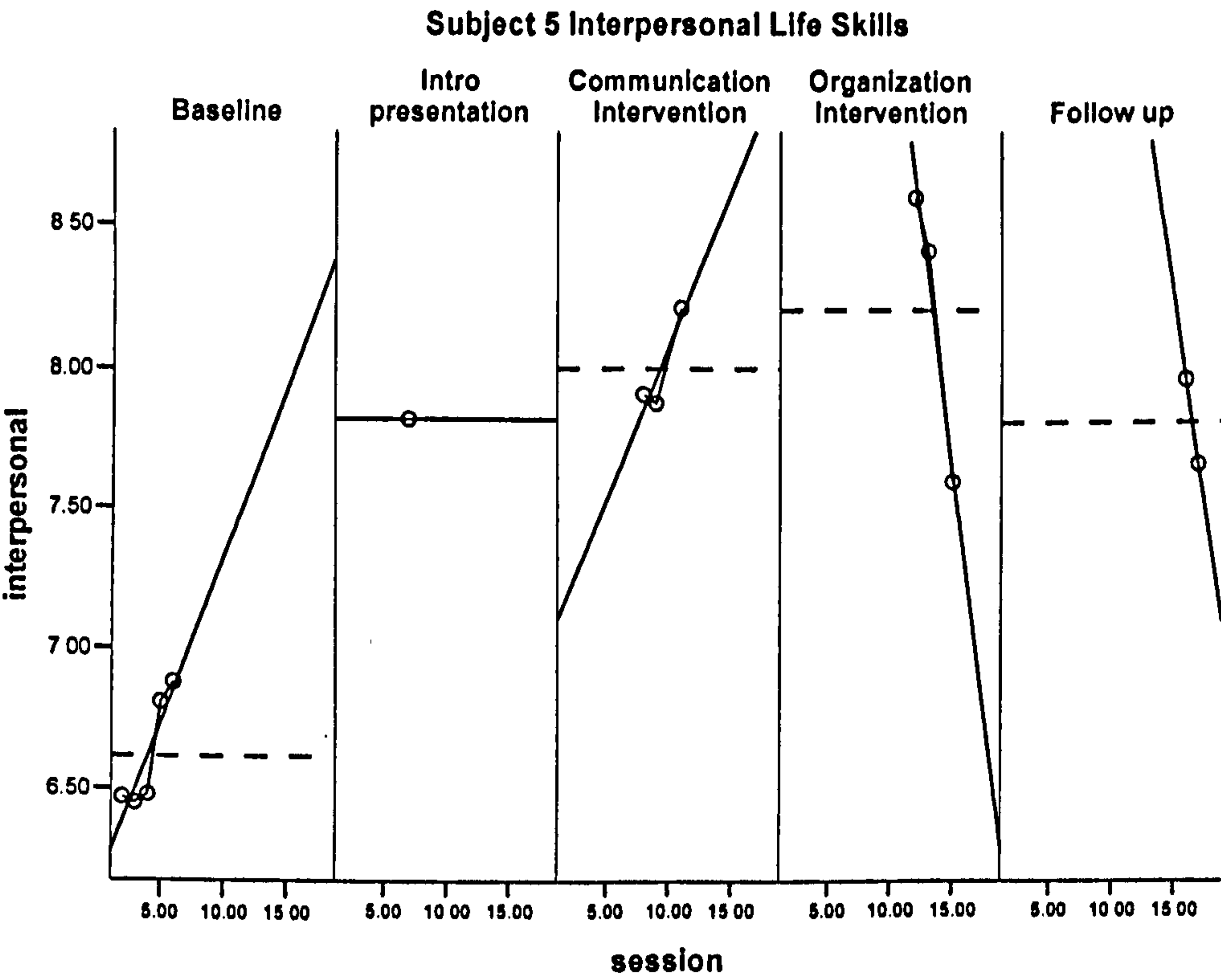




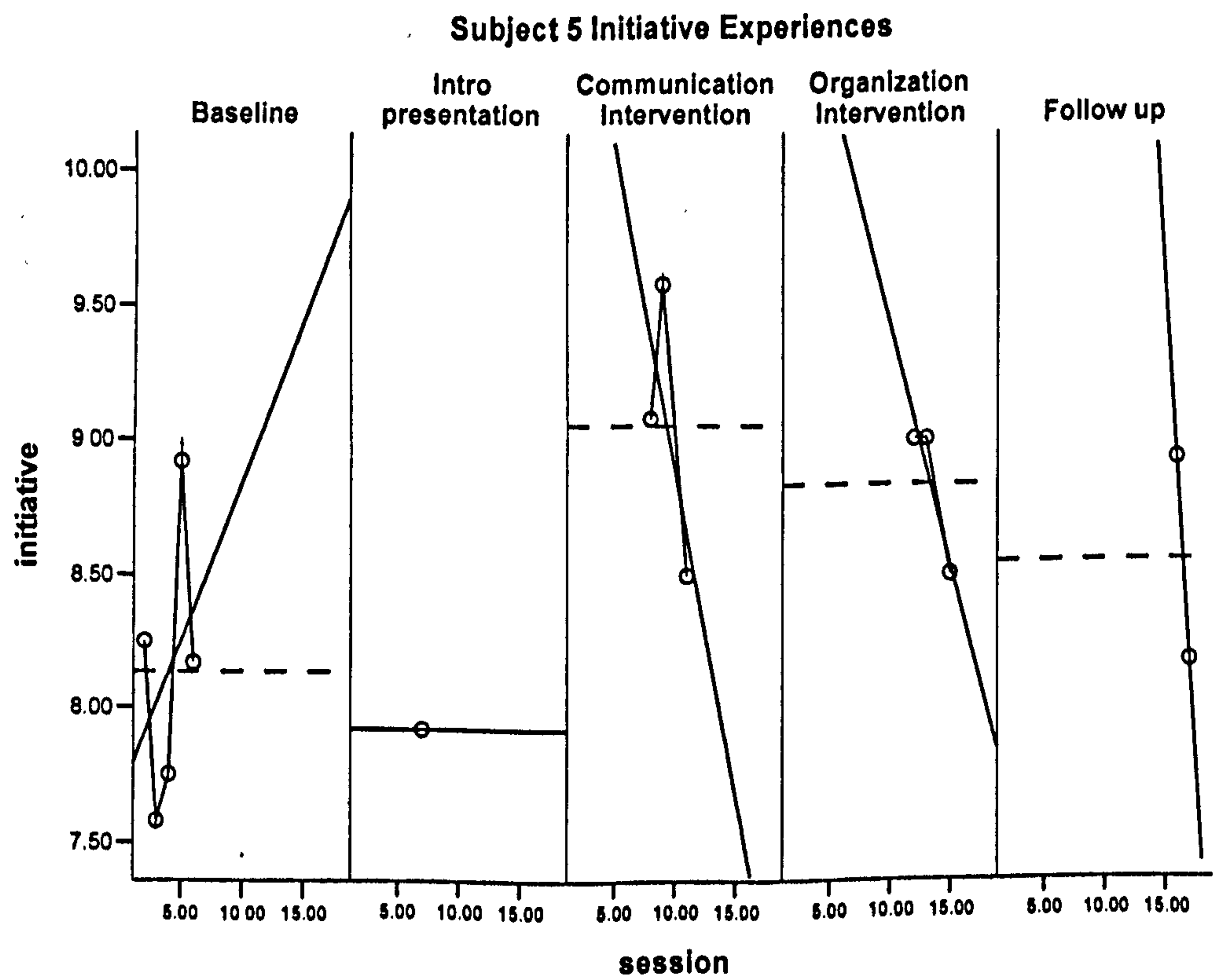
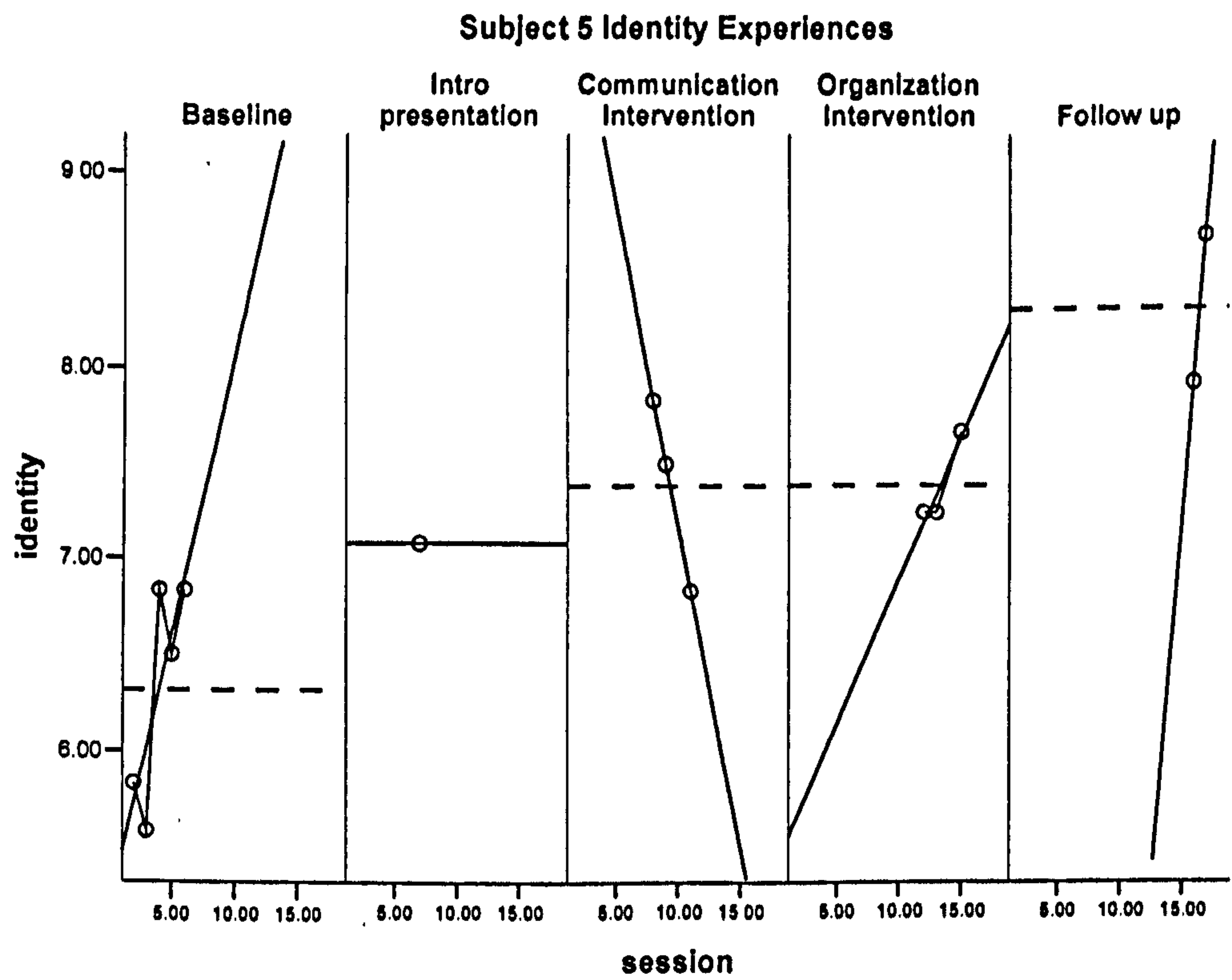




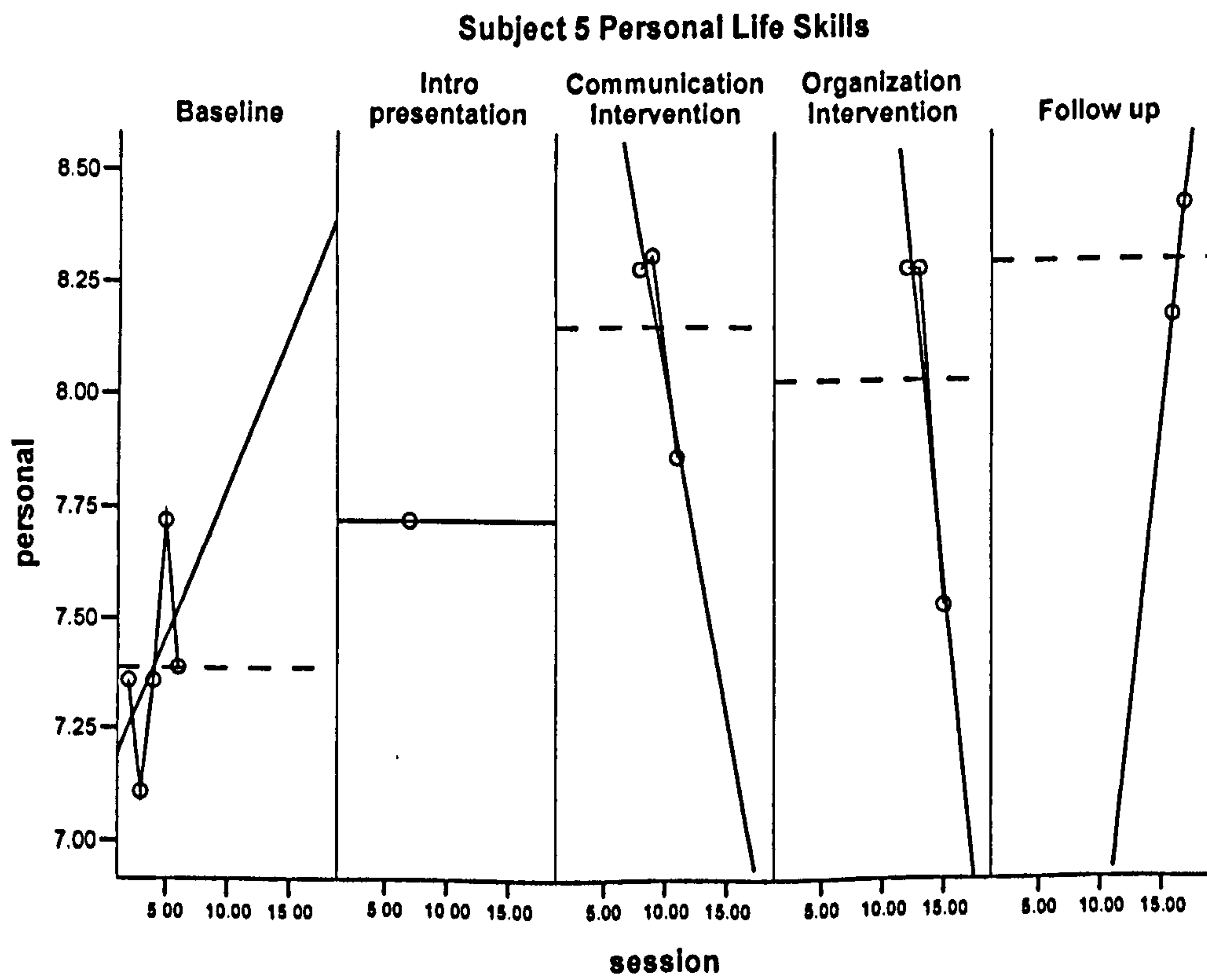
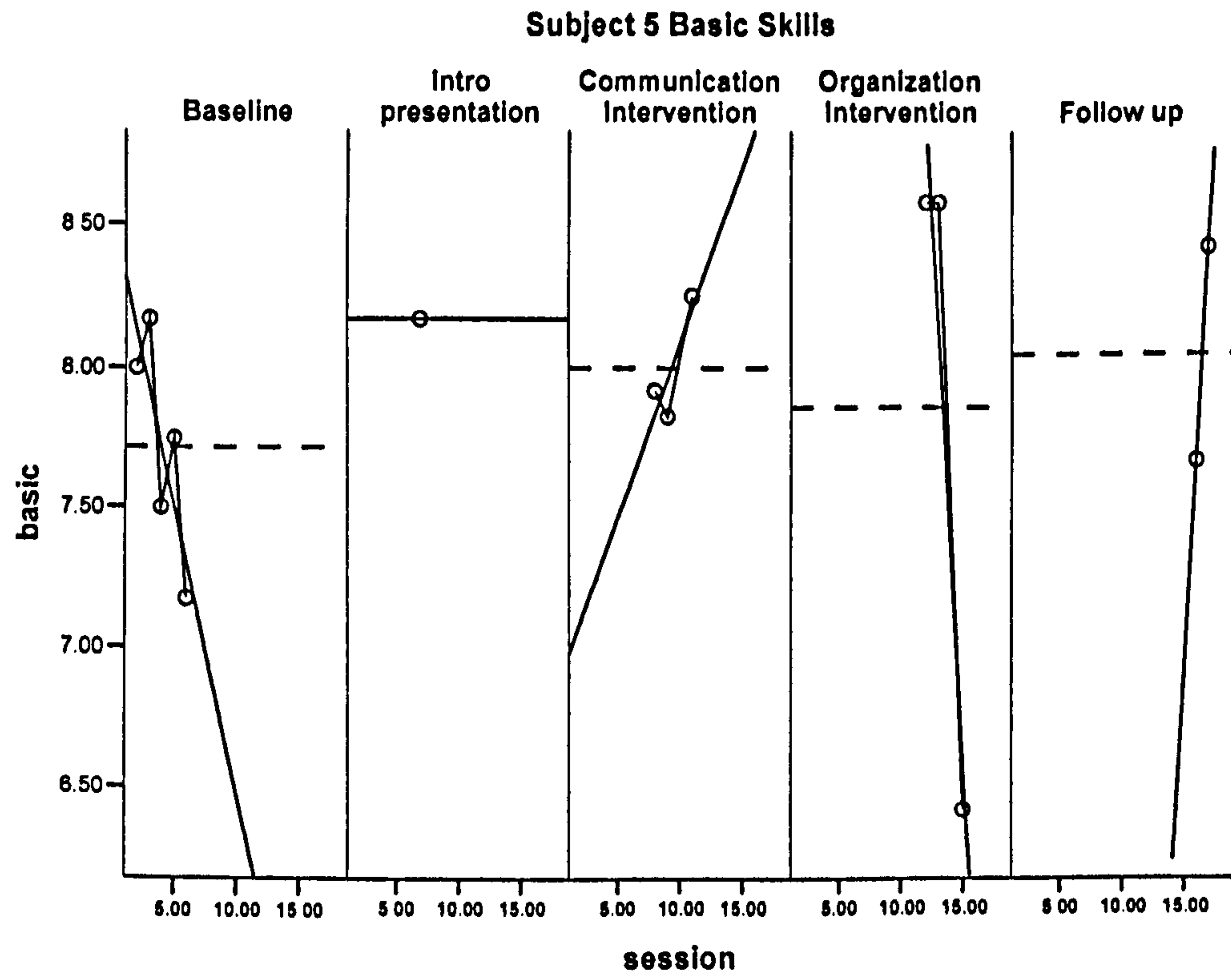






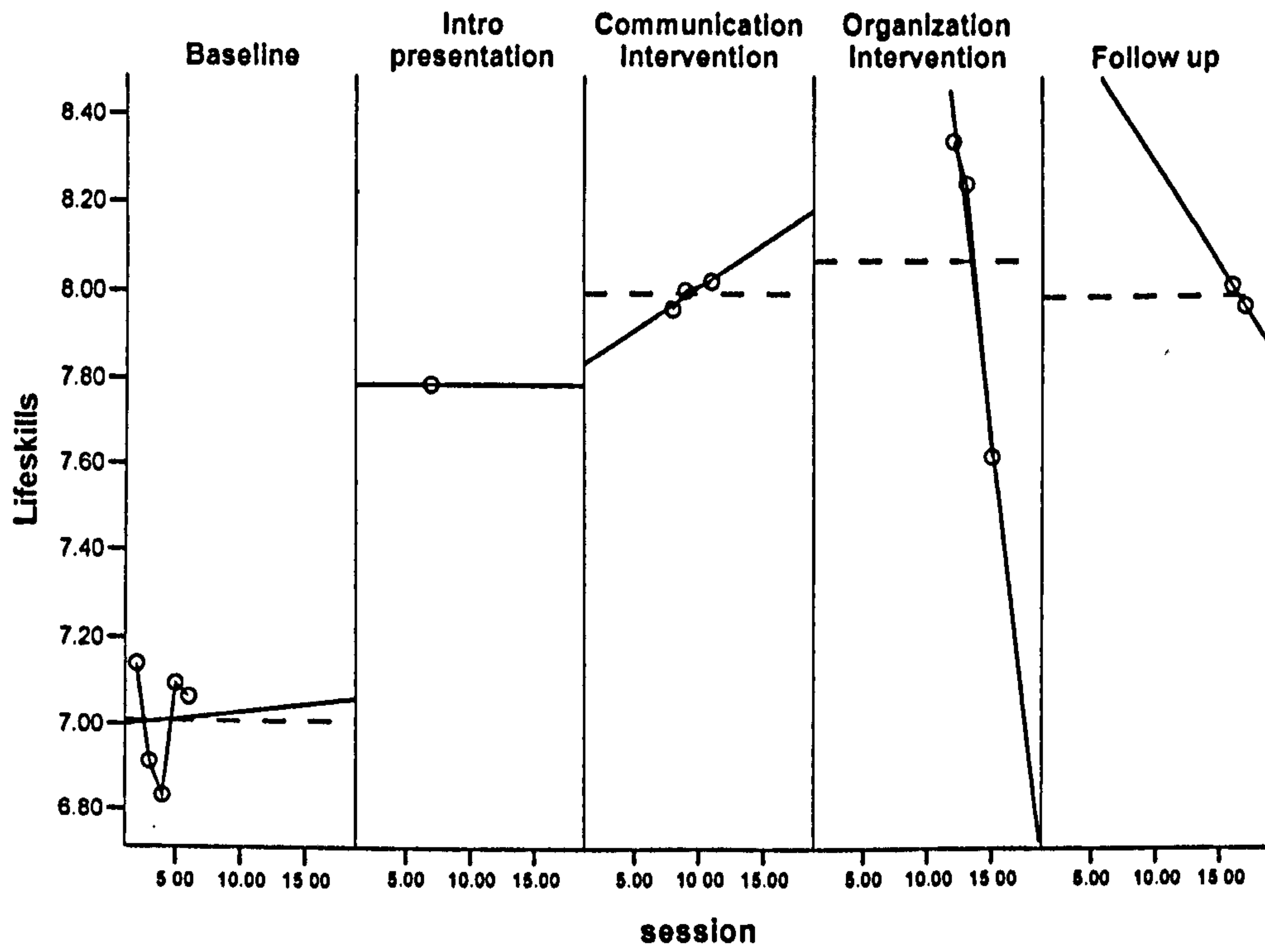




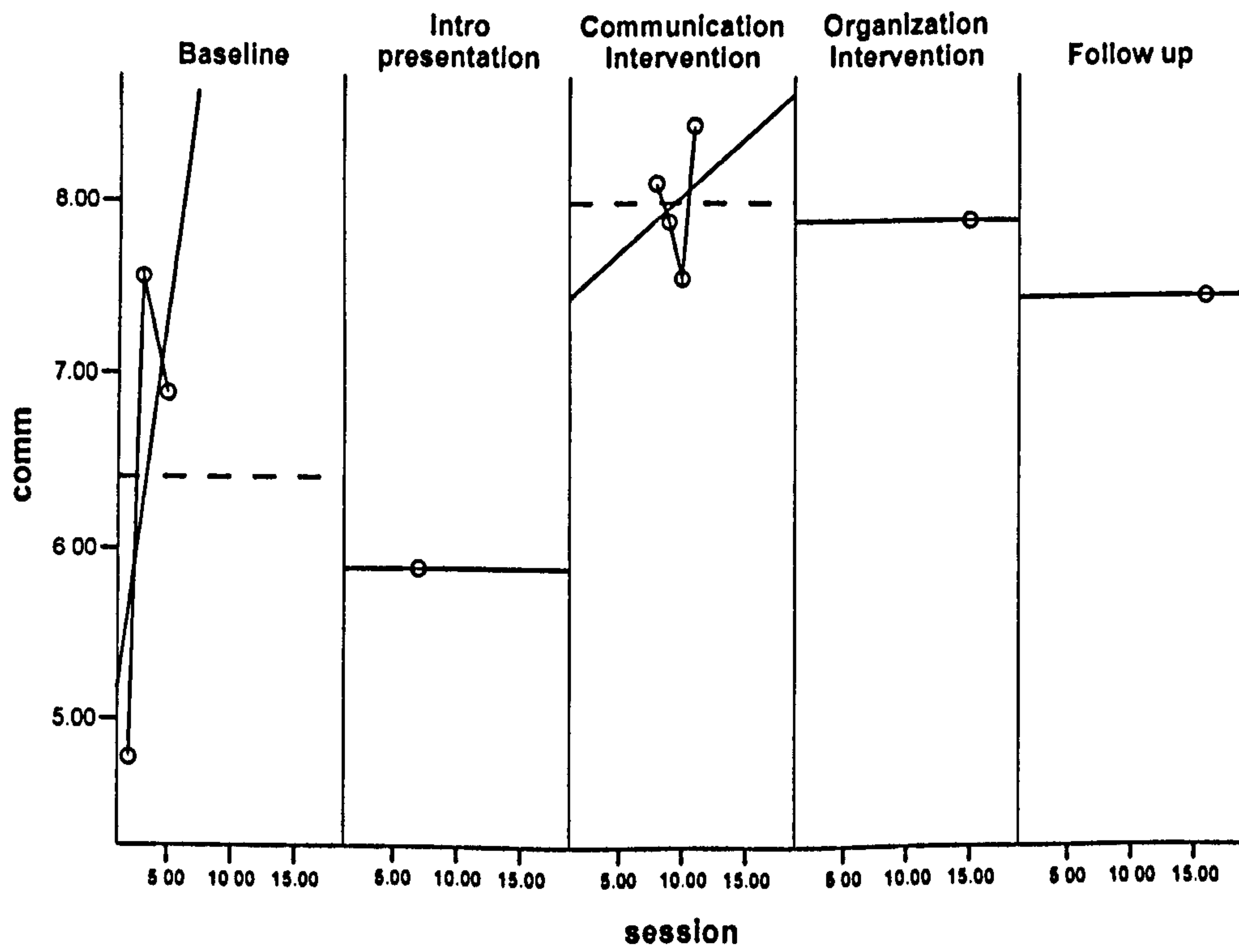




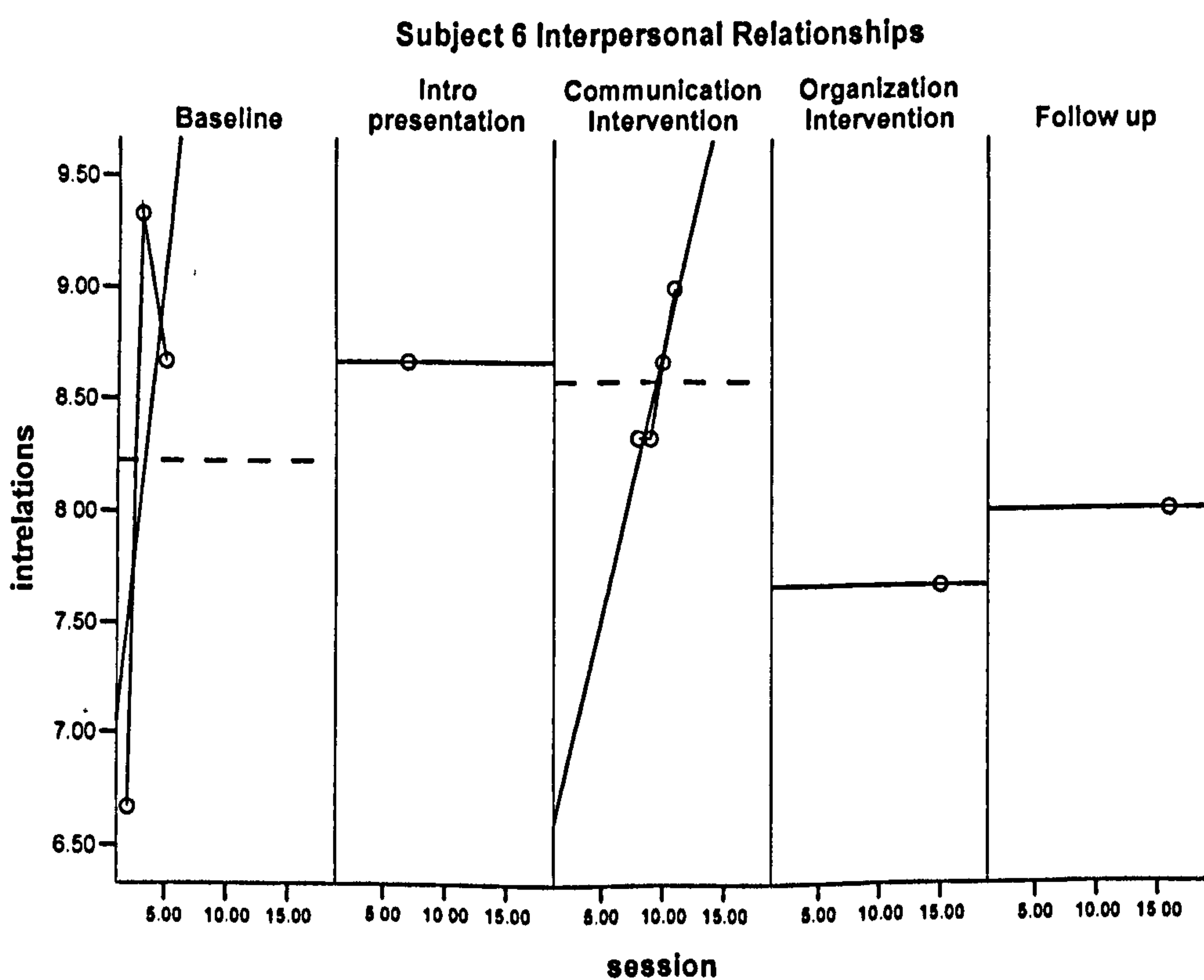
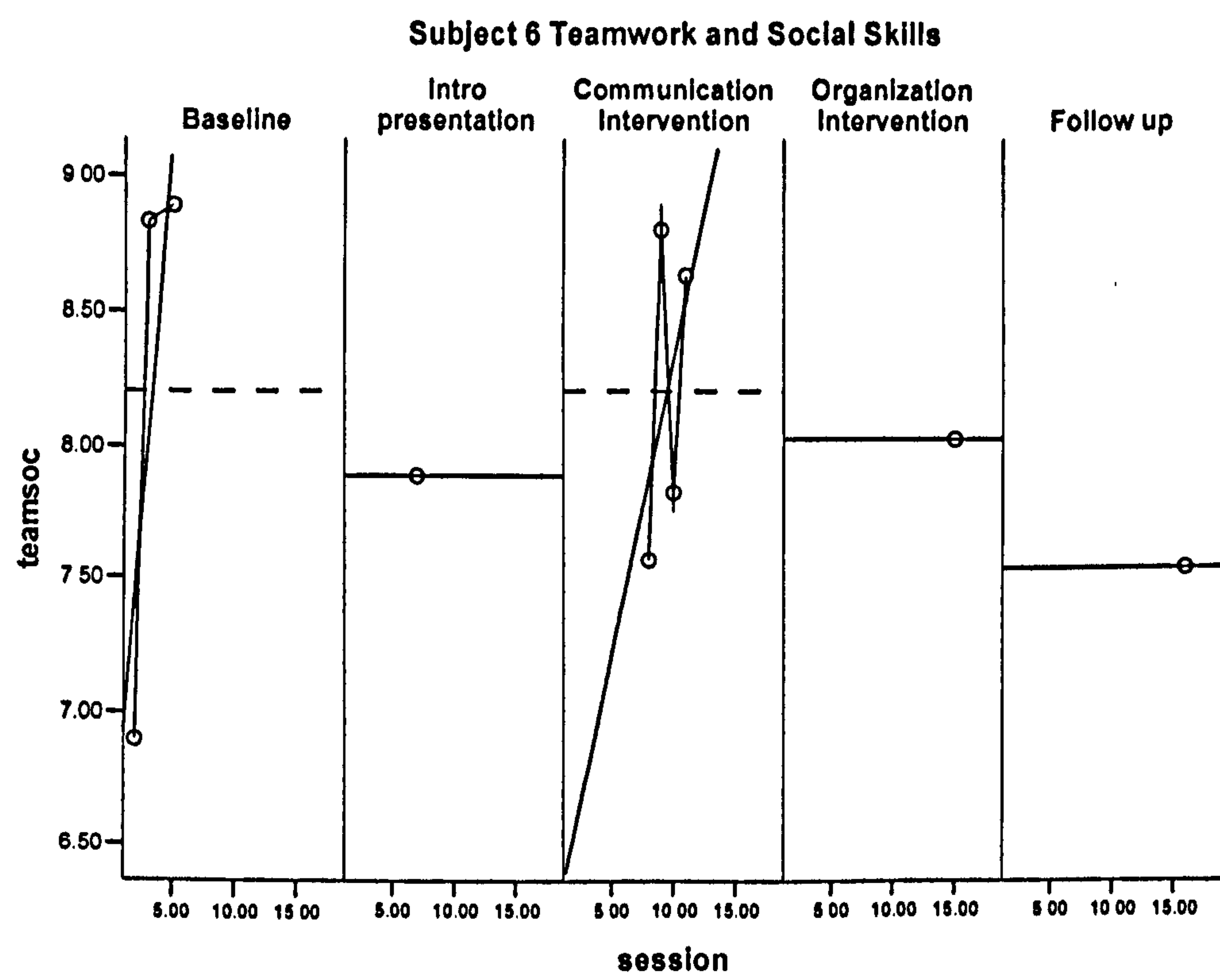
Subject 5 Developmental Experiences



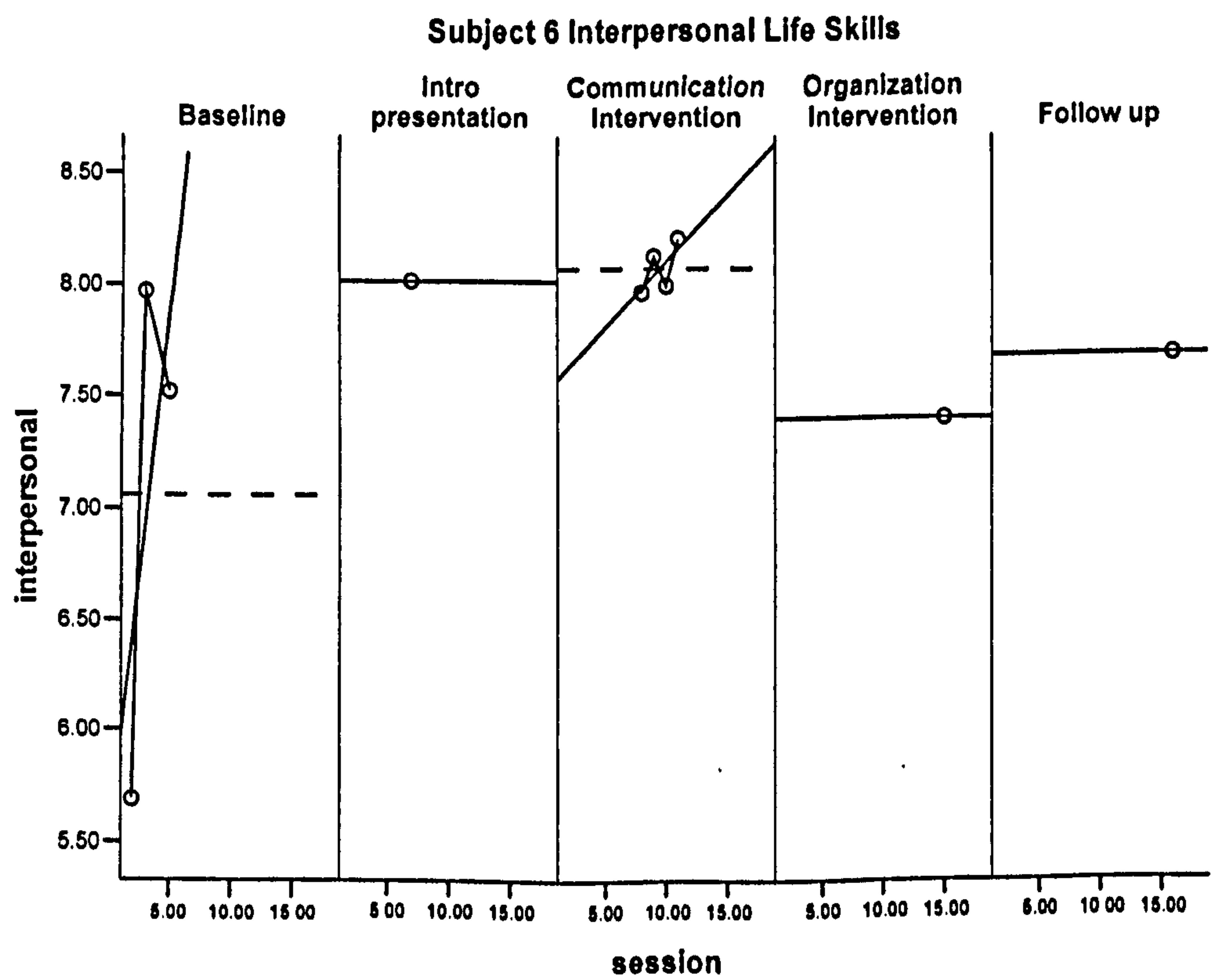
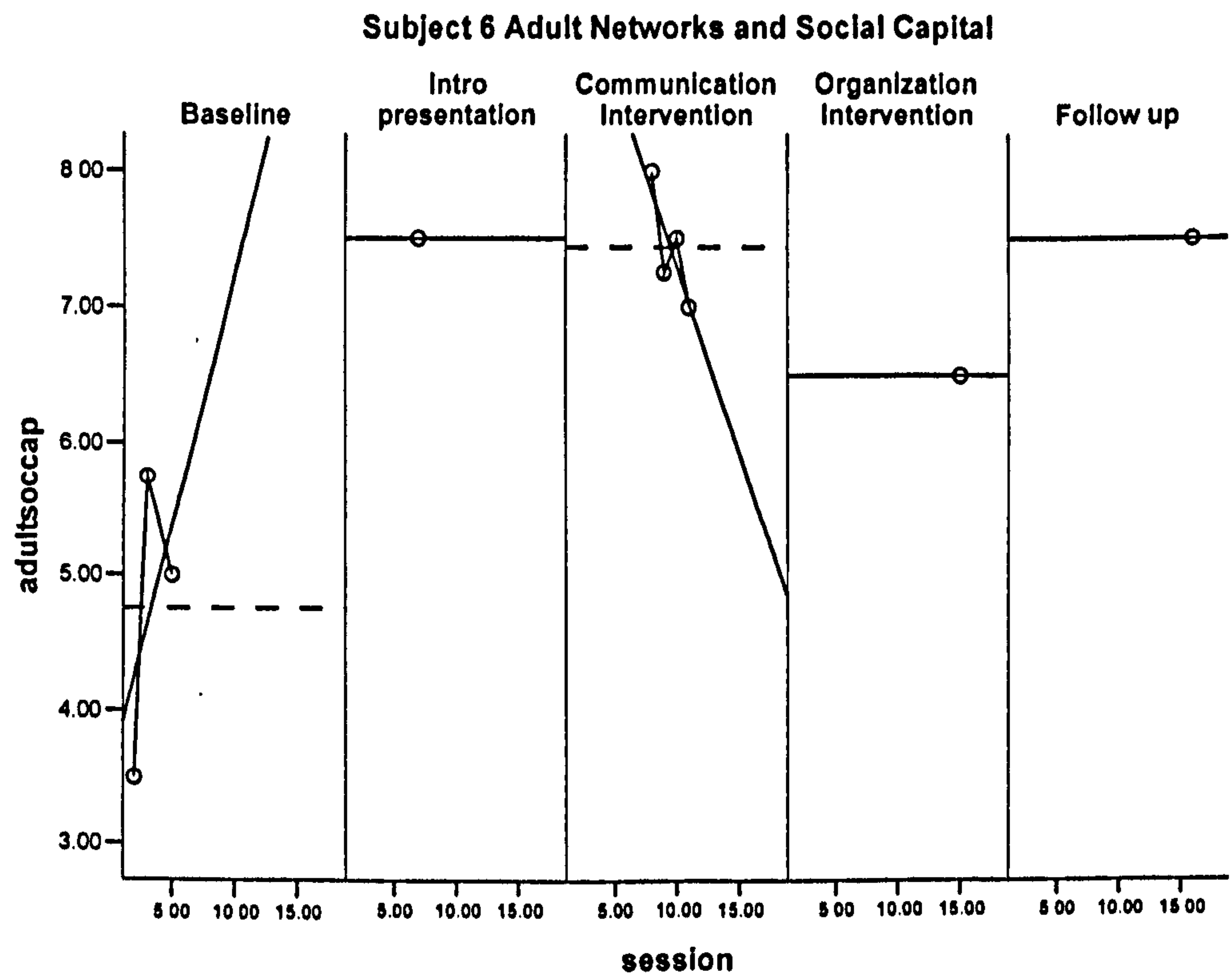
Subject 6 Communication





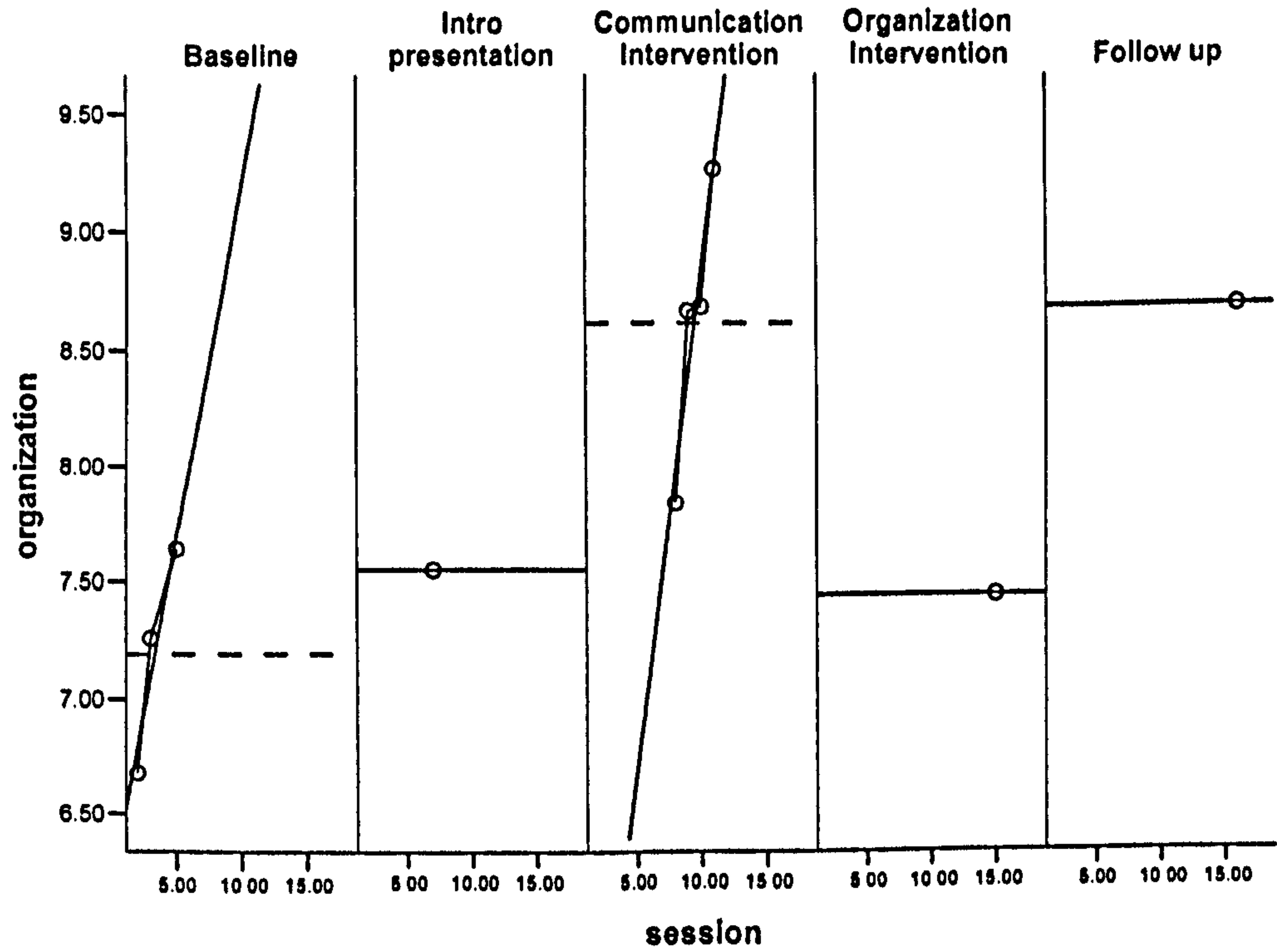




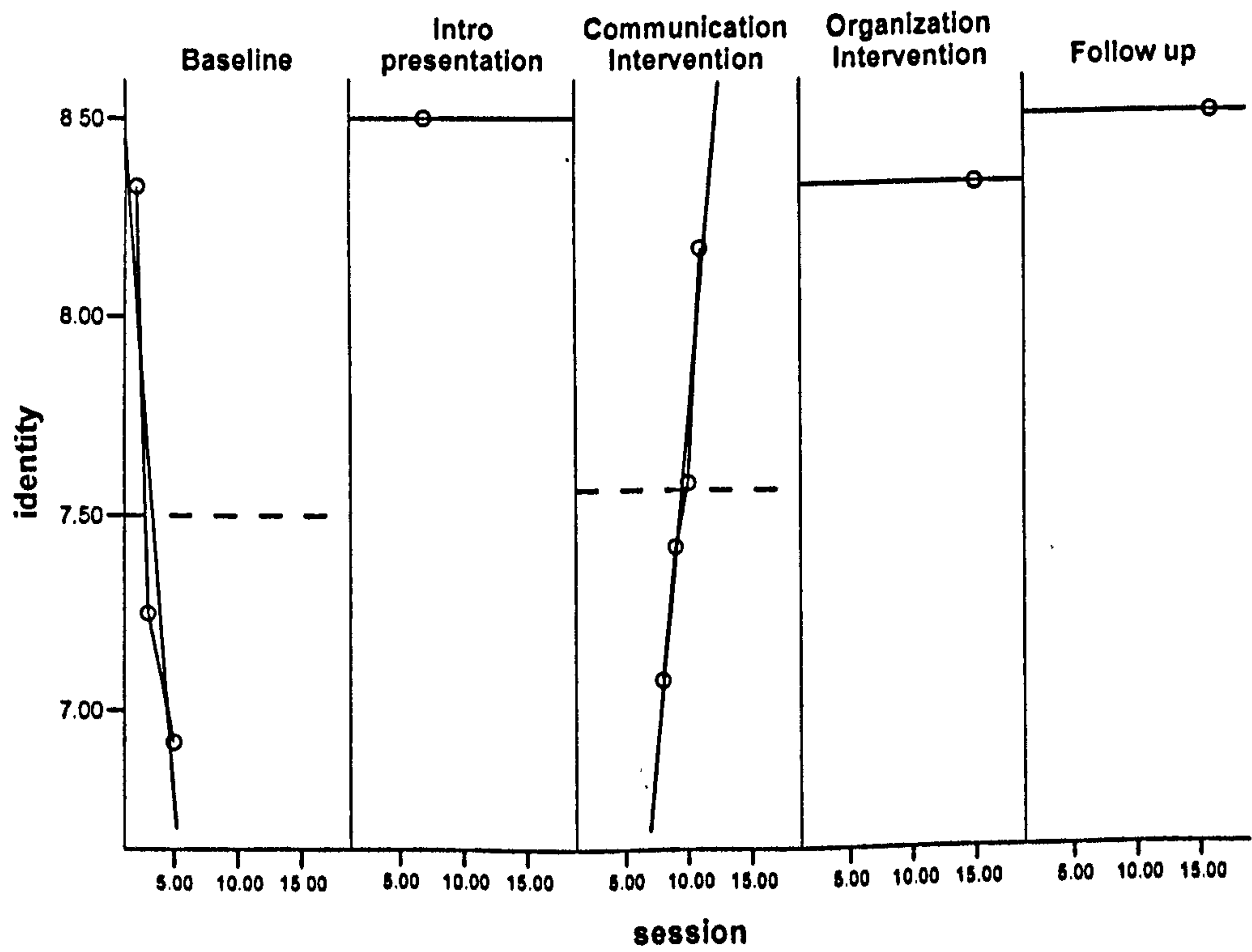




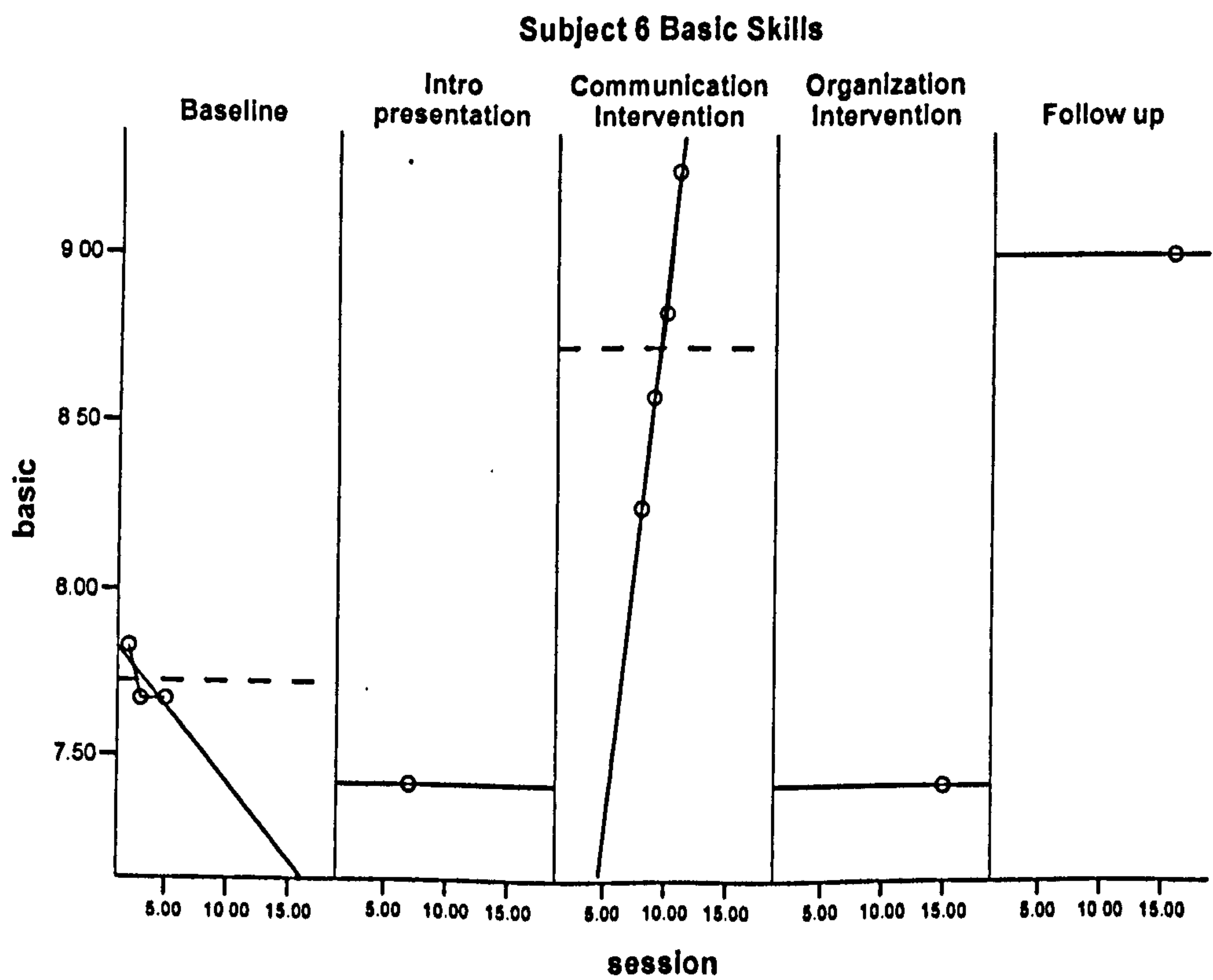
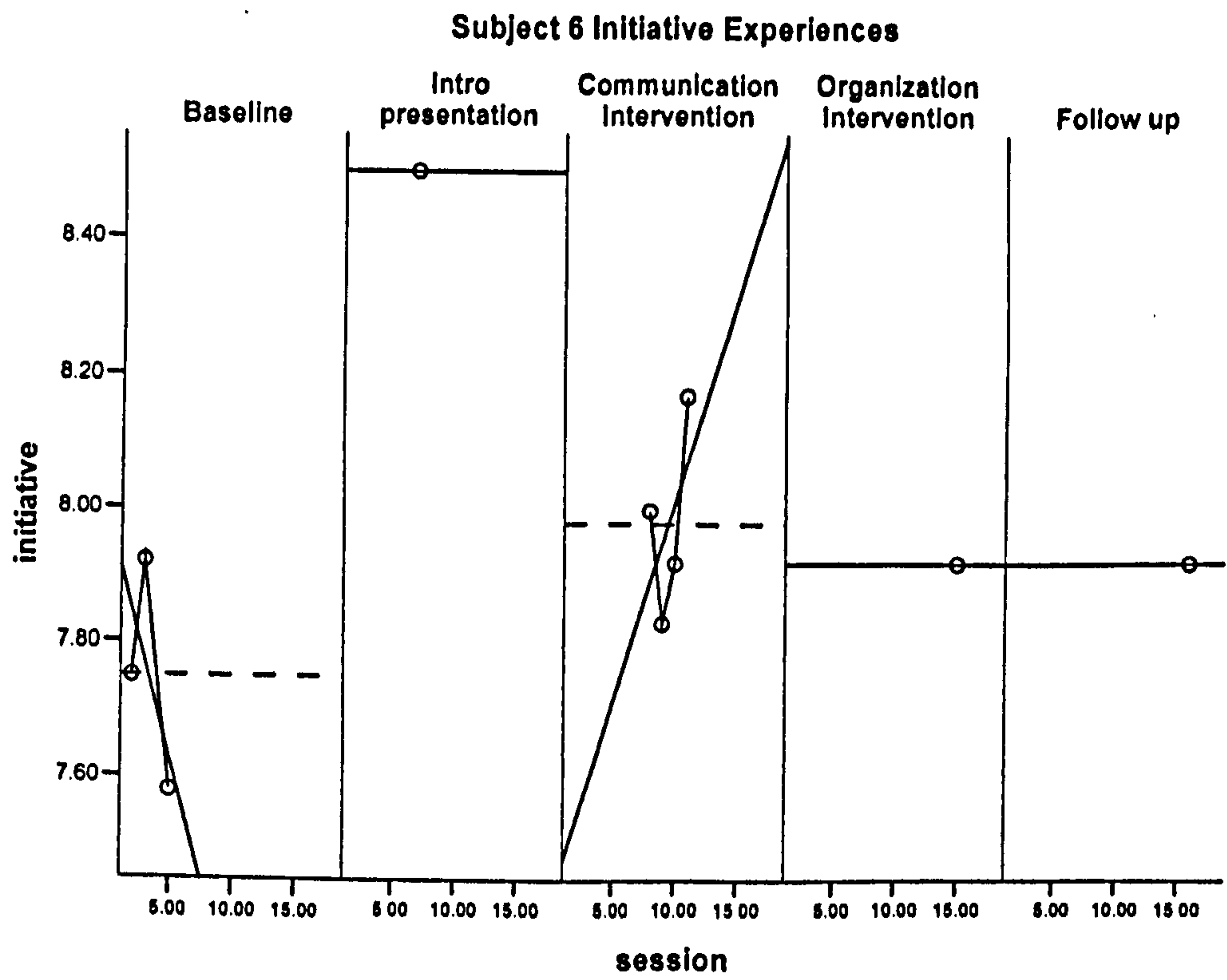
Subject 6 Organization



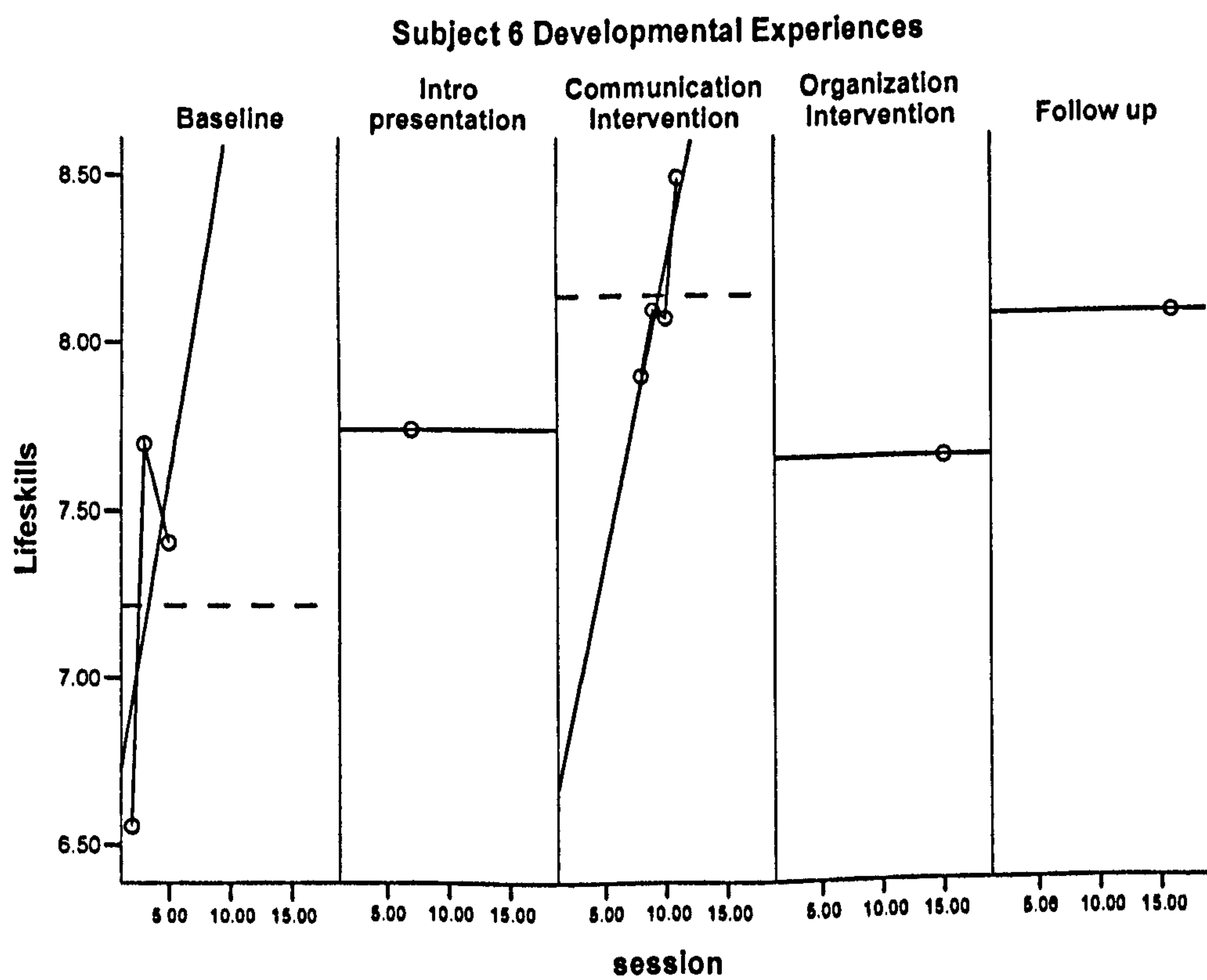
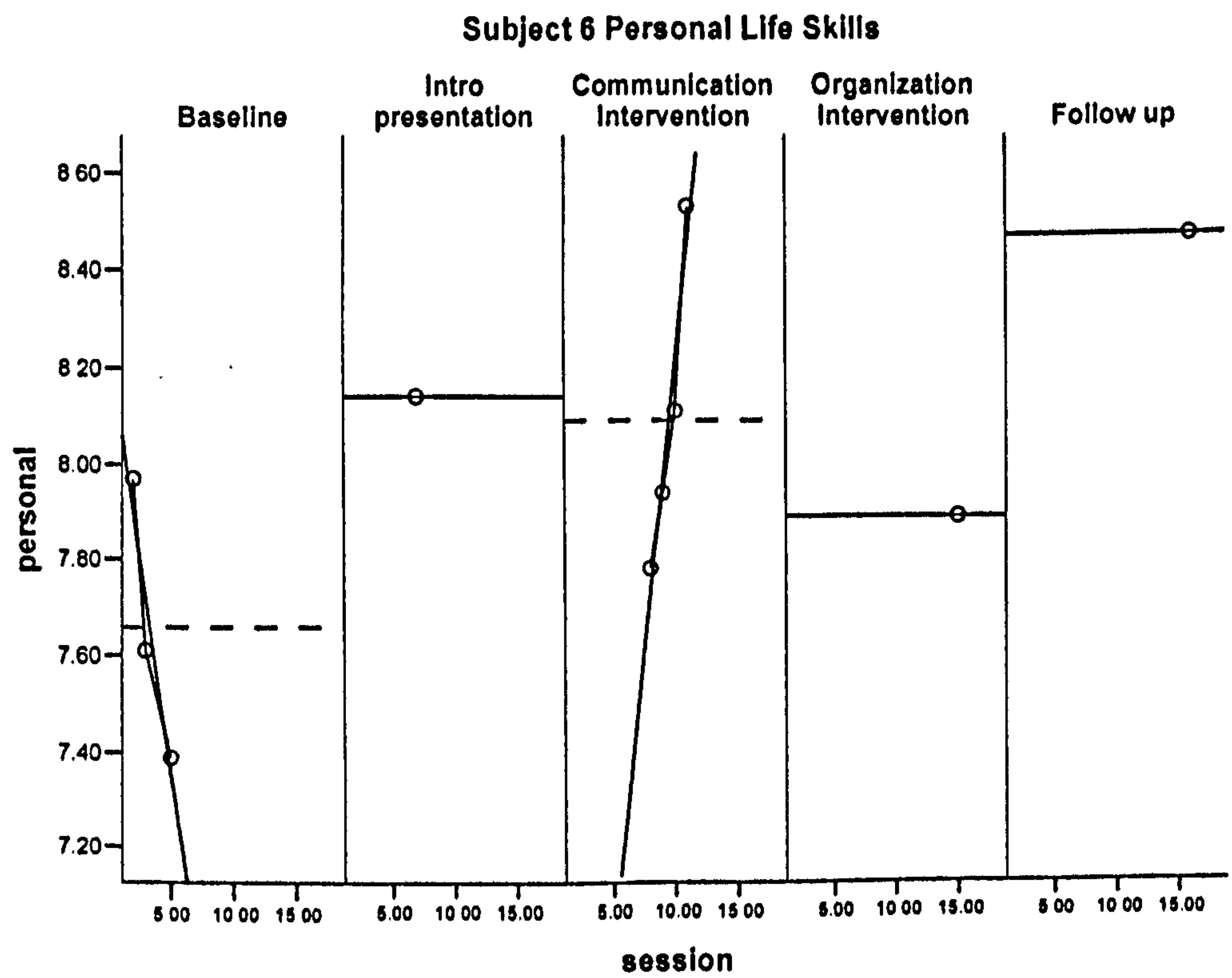
Subject 6 Identity Experiences



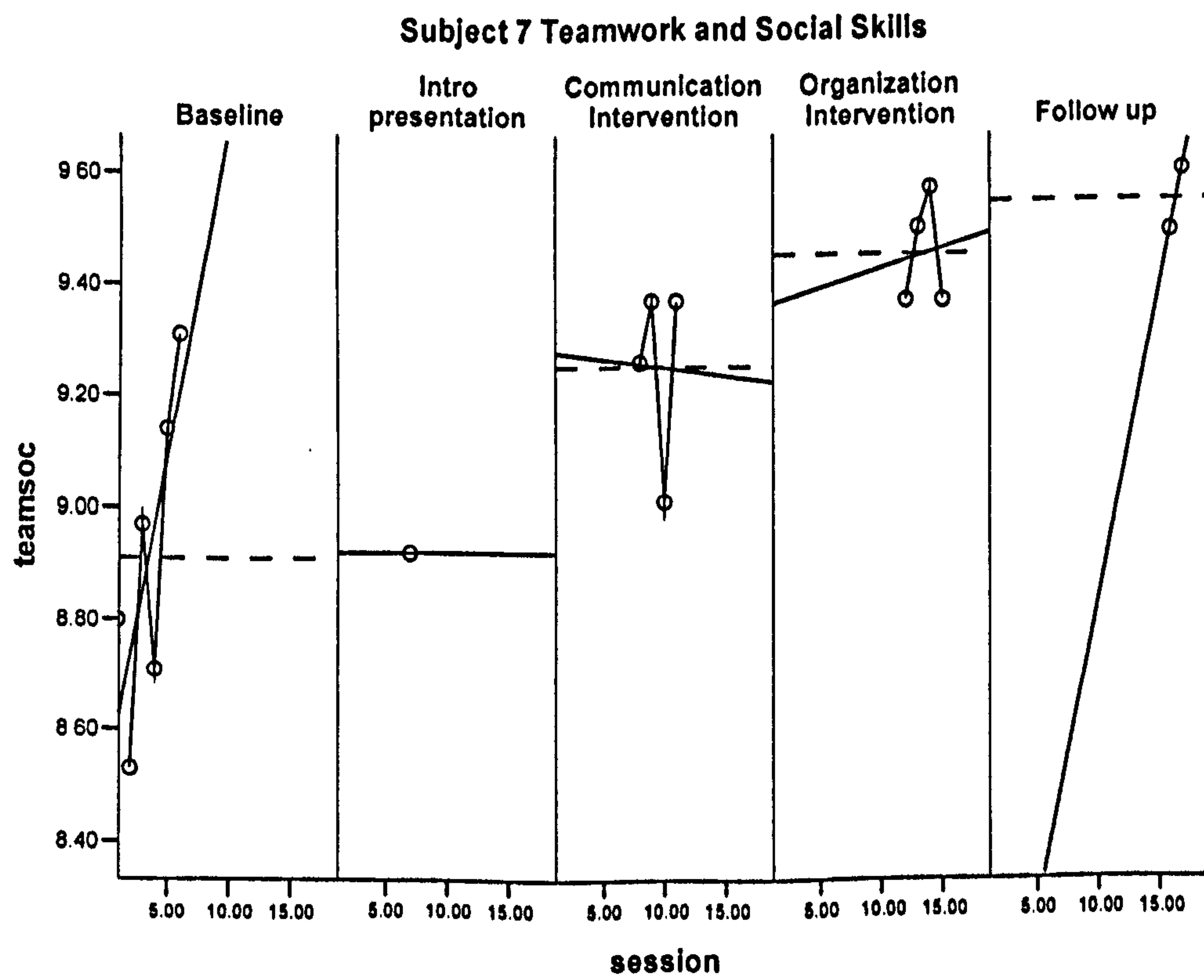
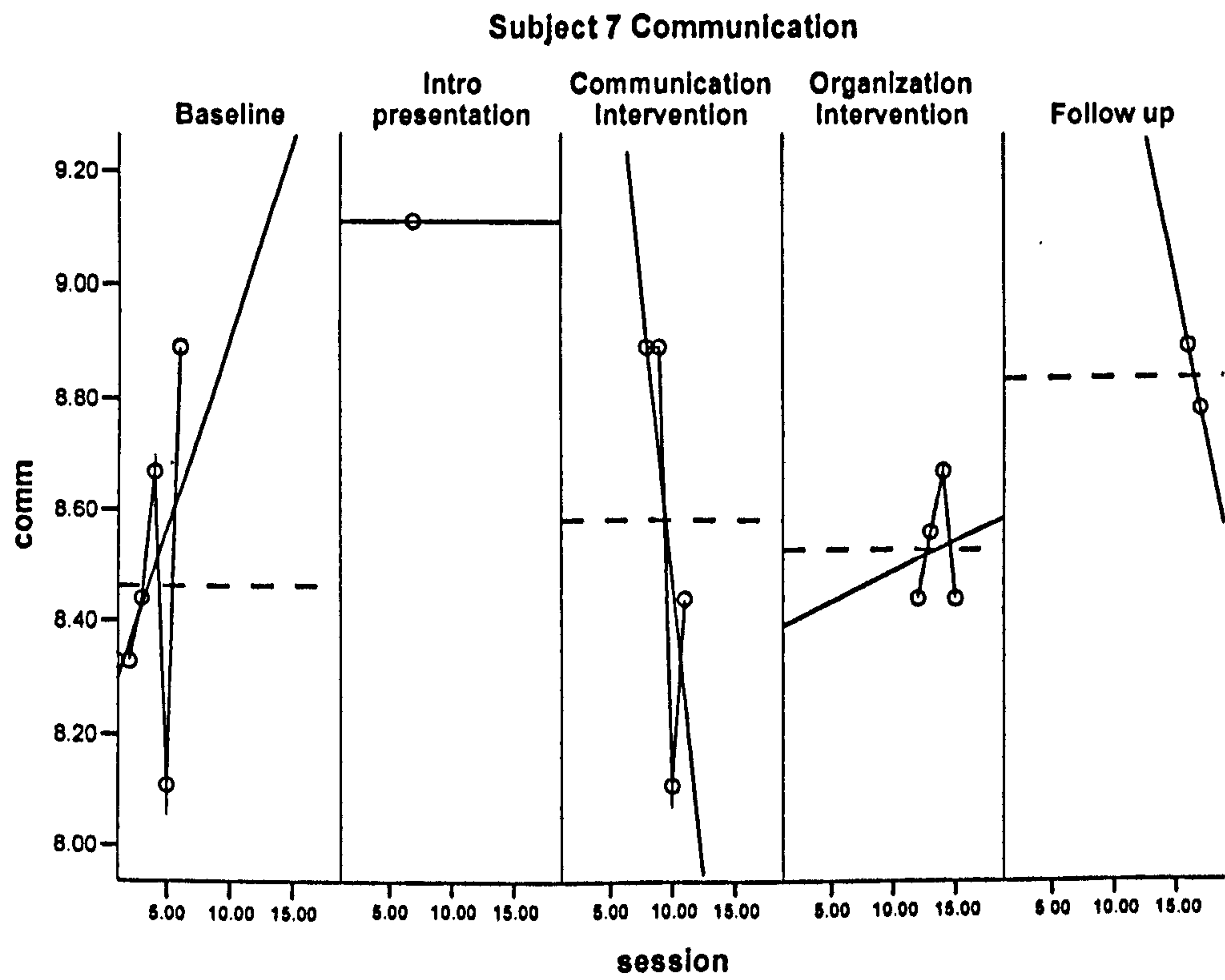




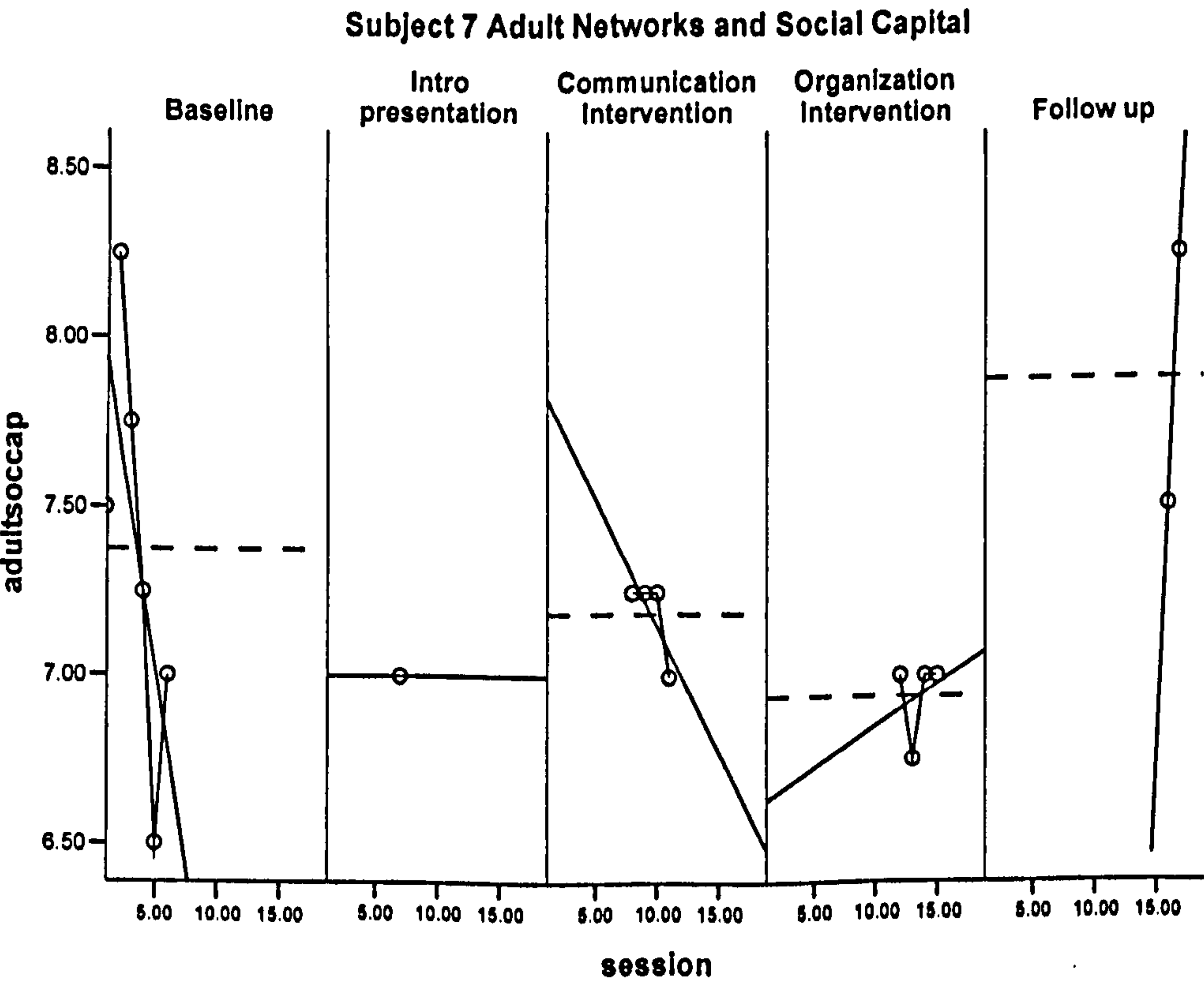
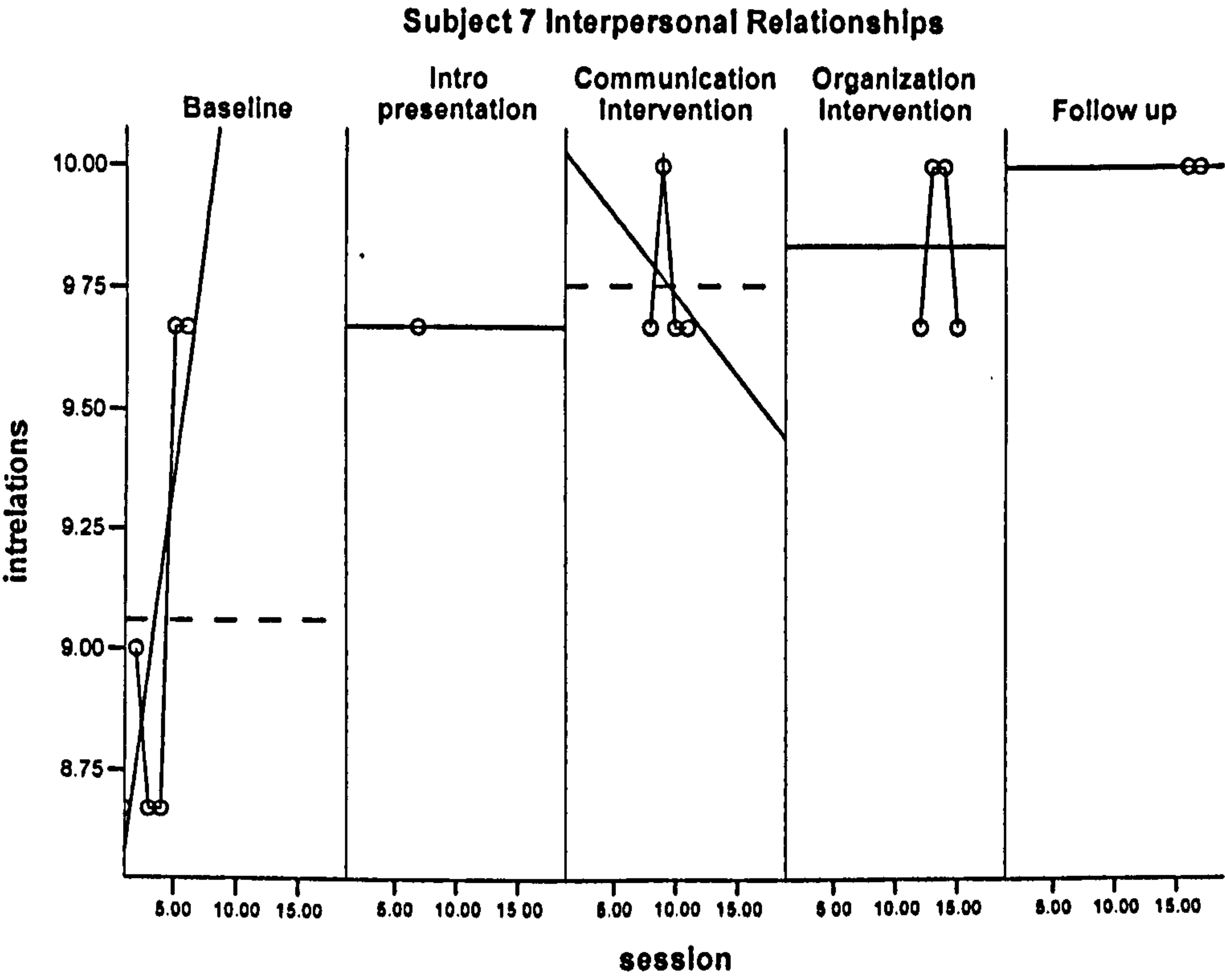




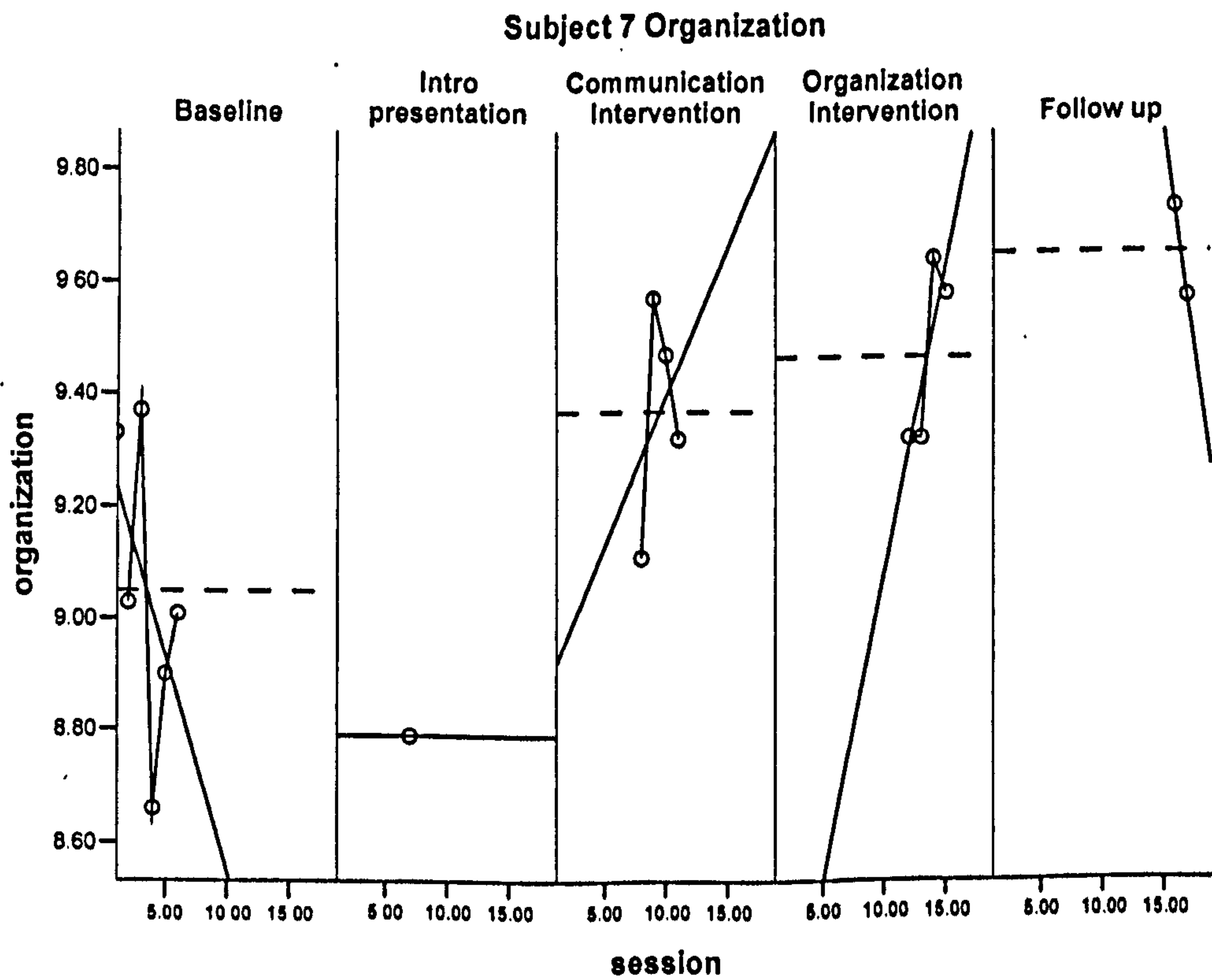
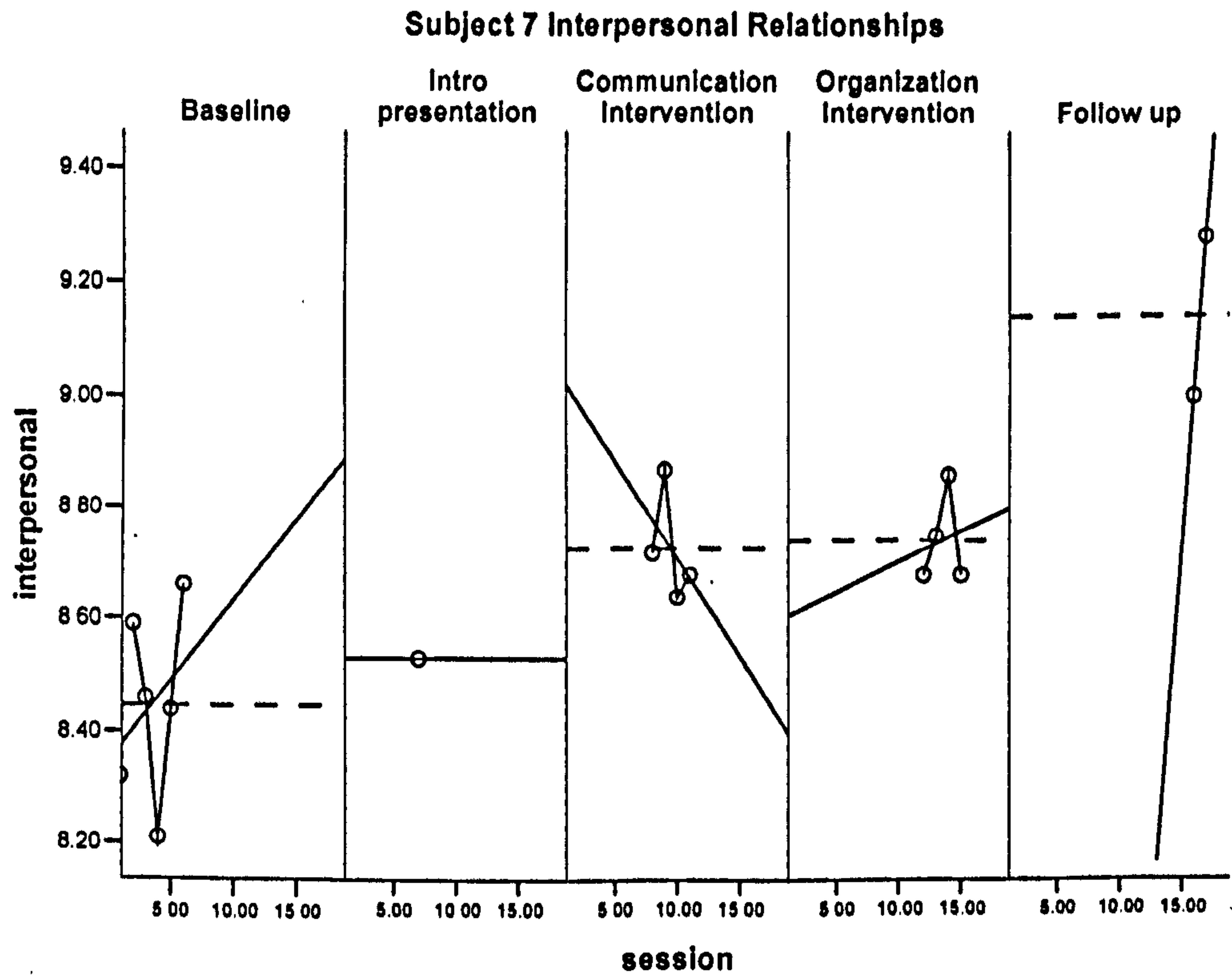






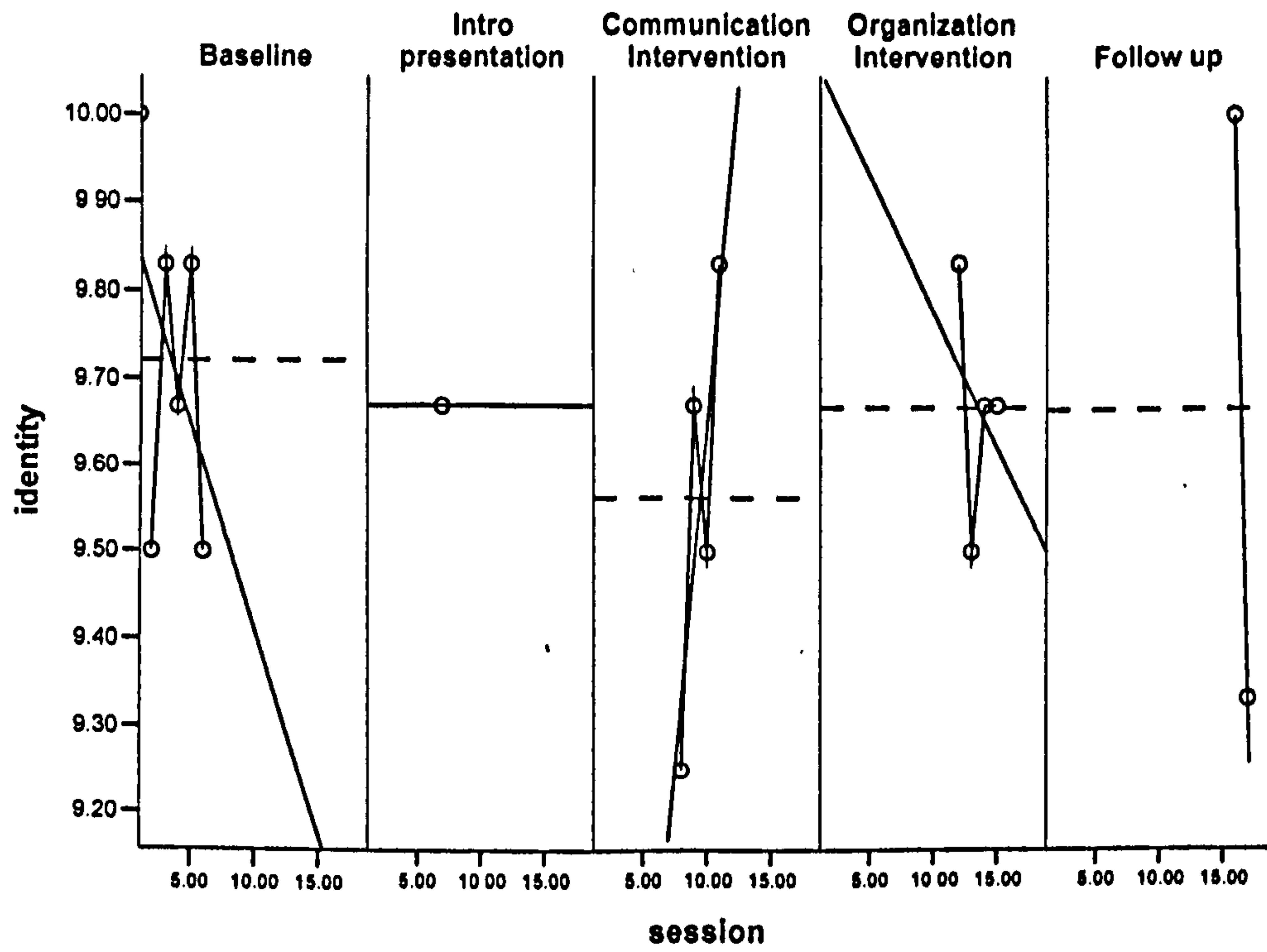




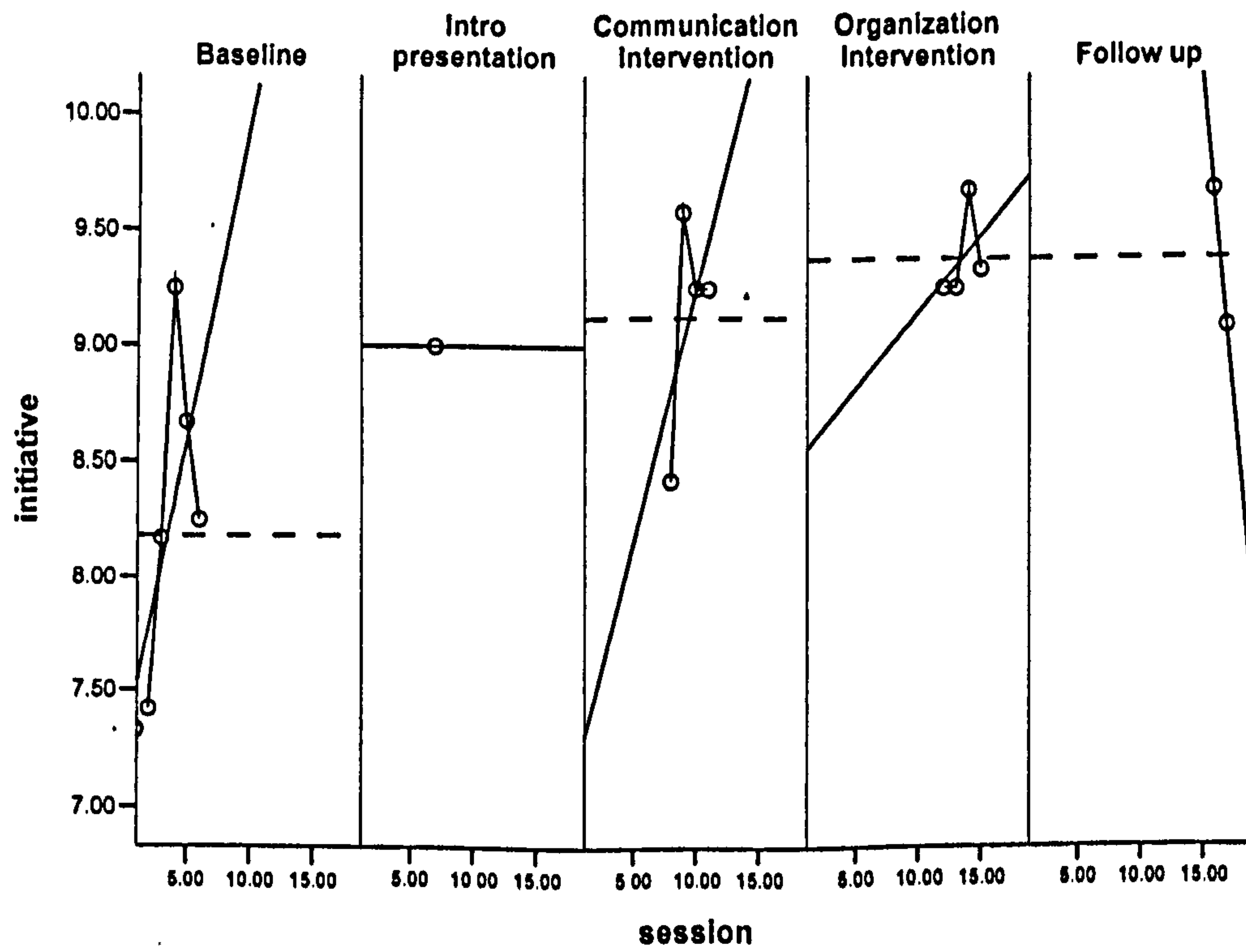




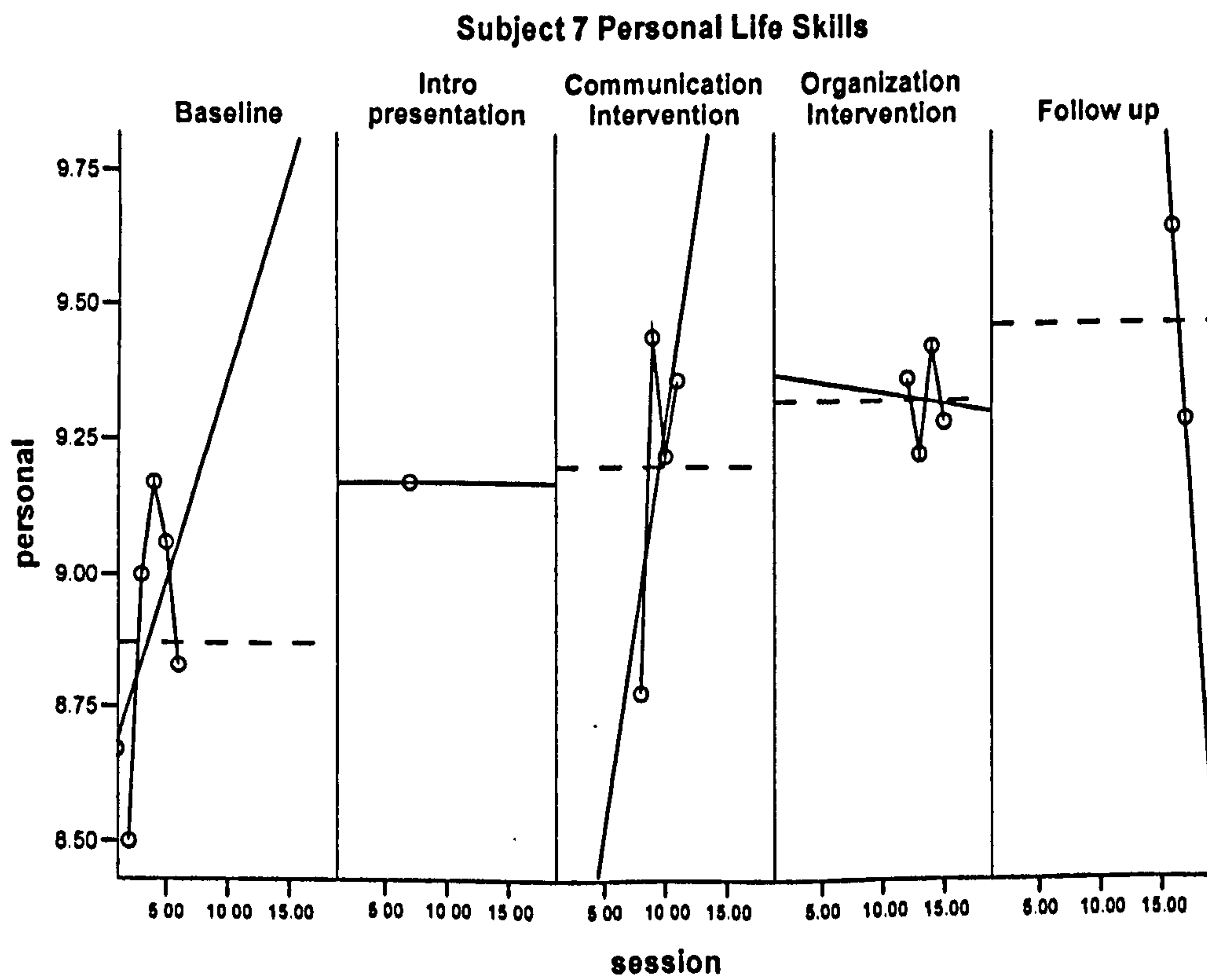
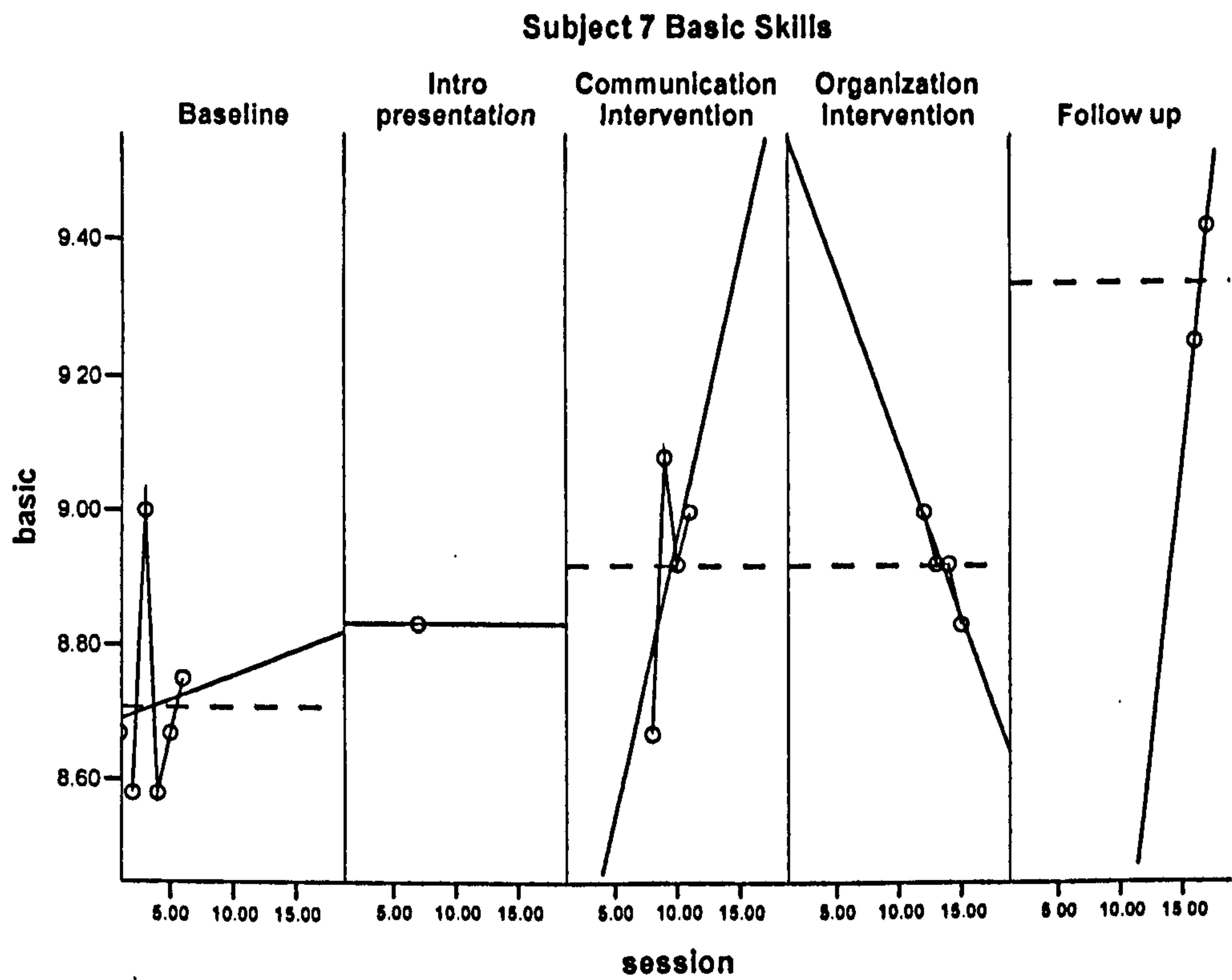
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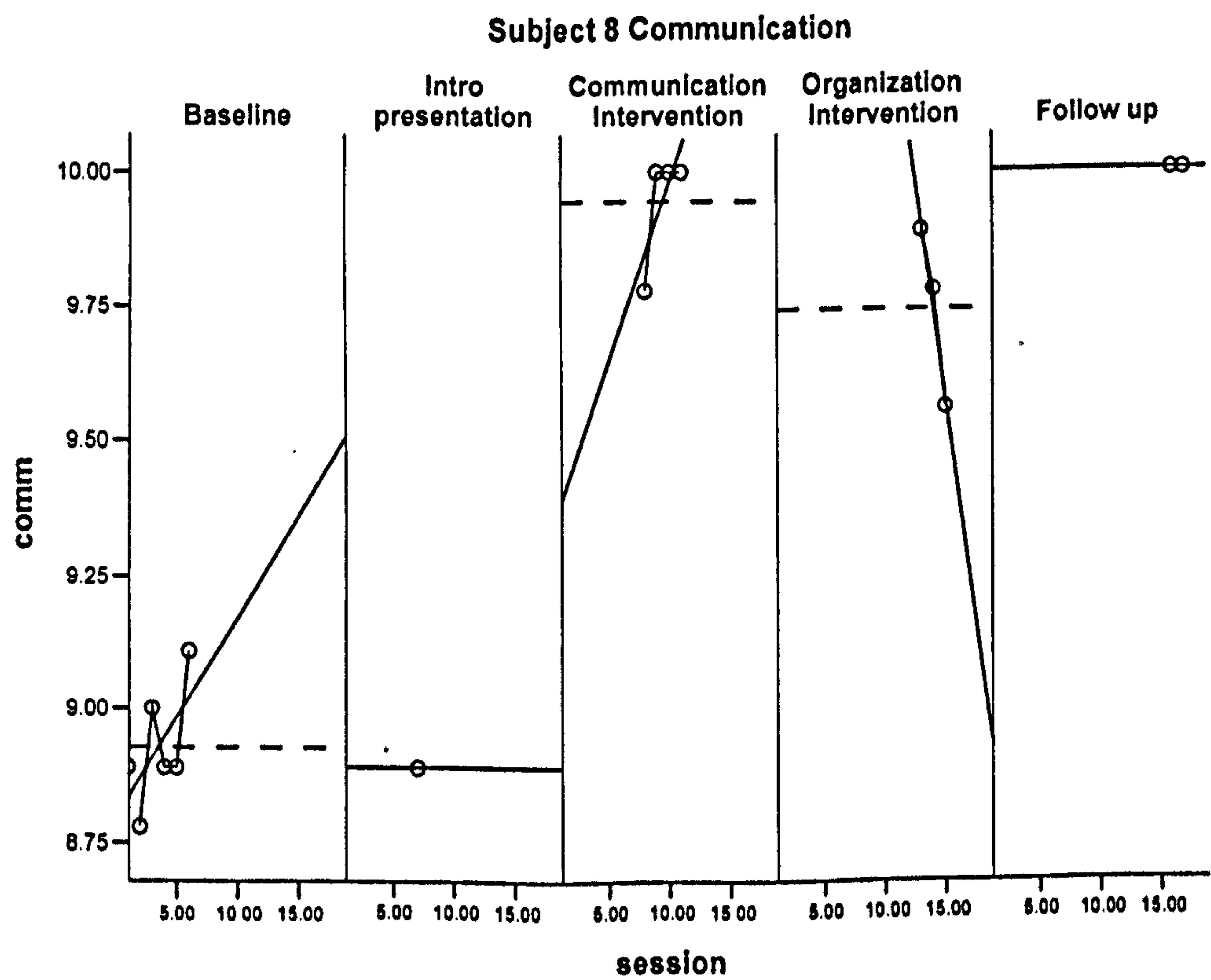
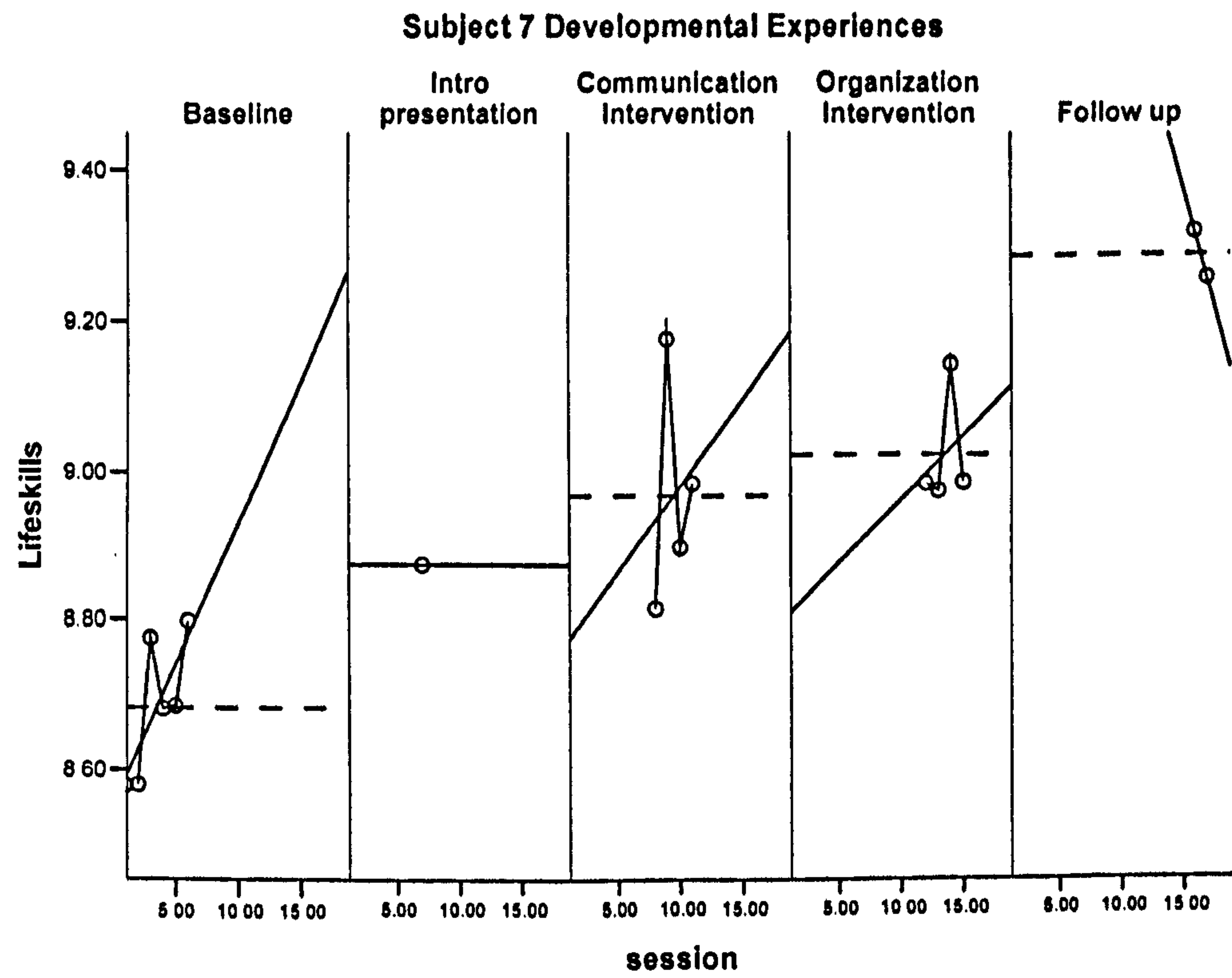
### Subject 7 Initiative Experiences



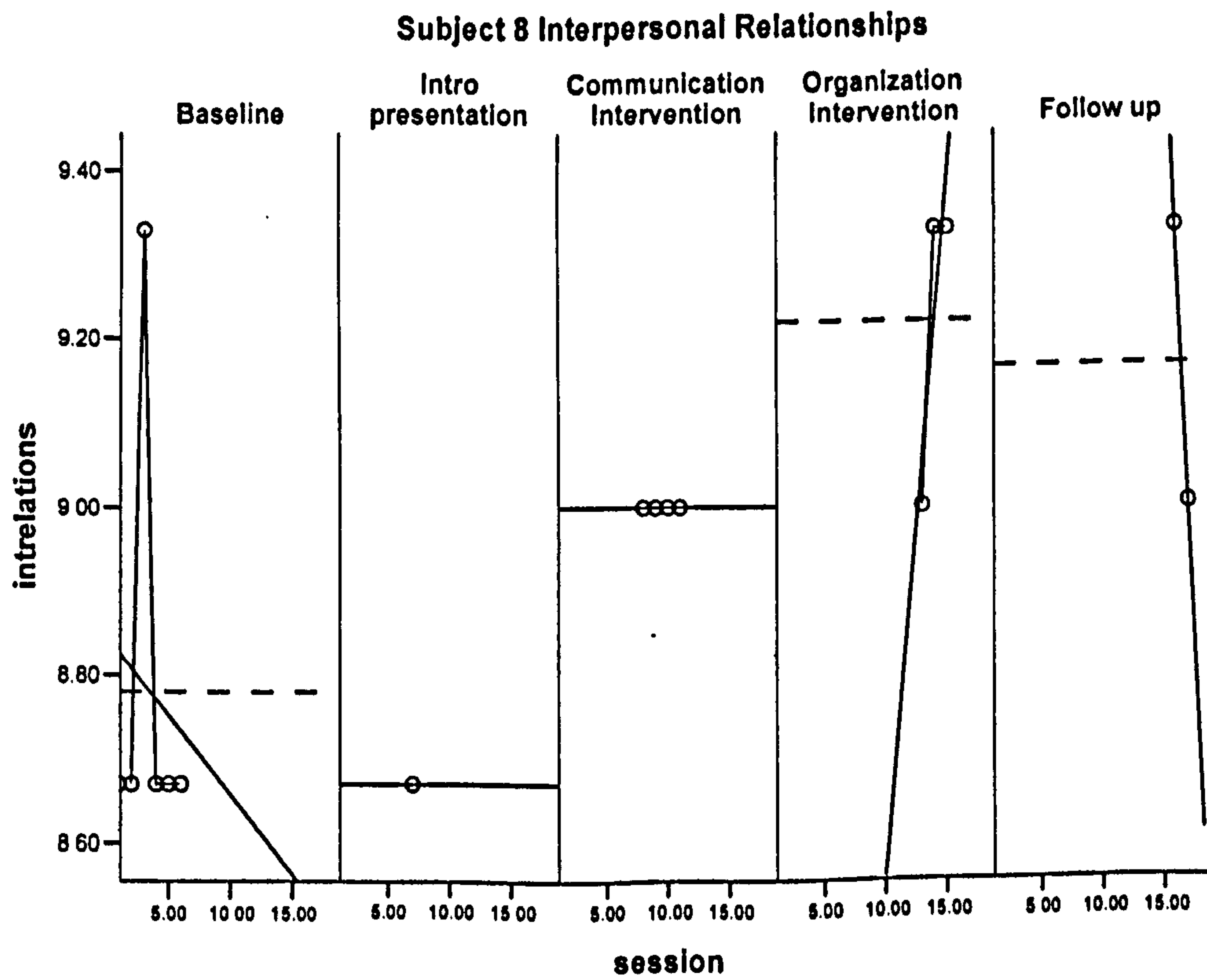
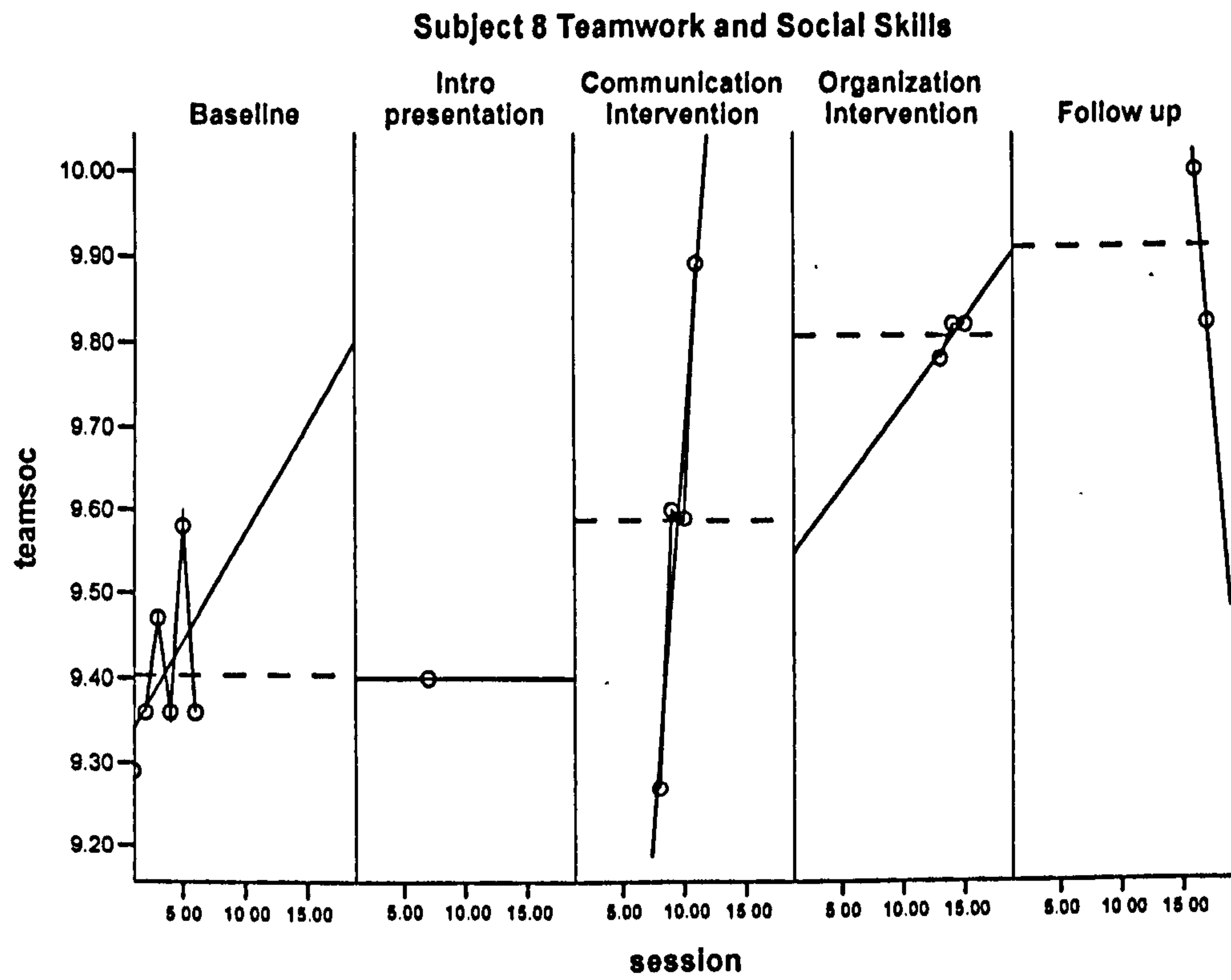






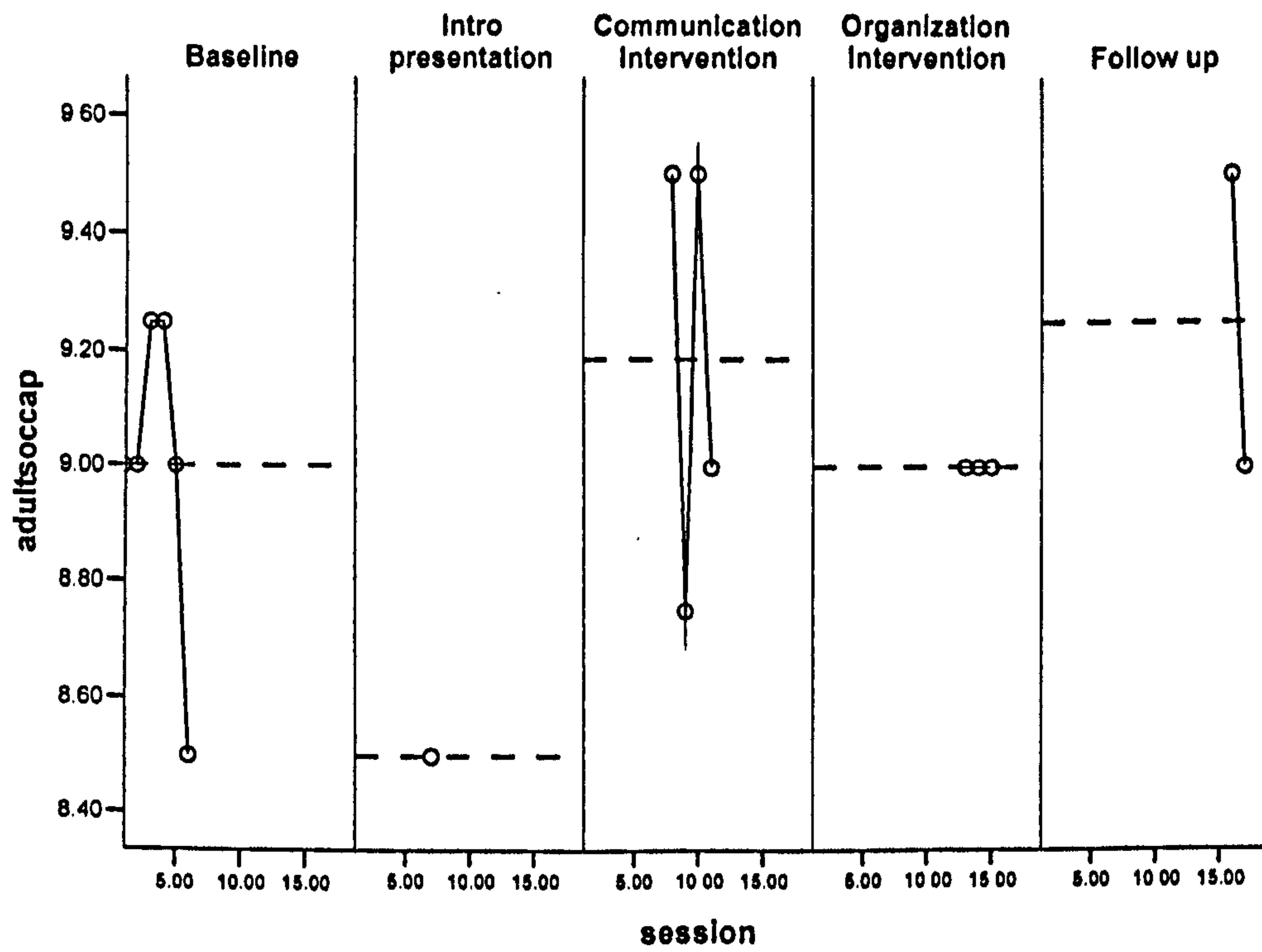




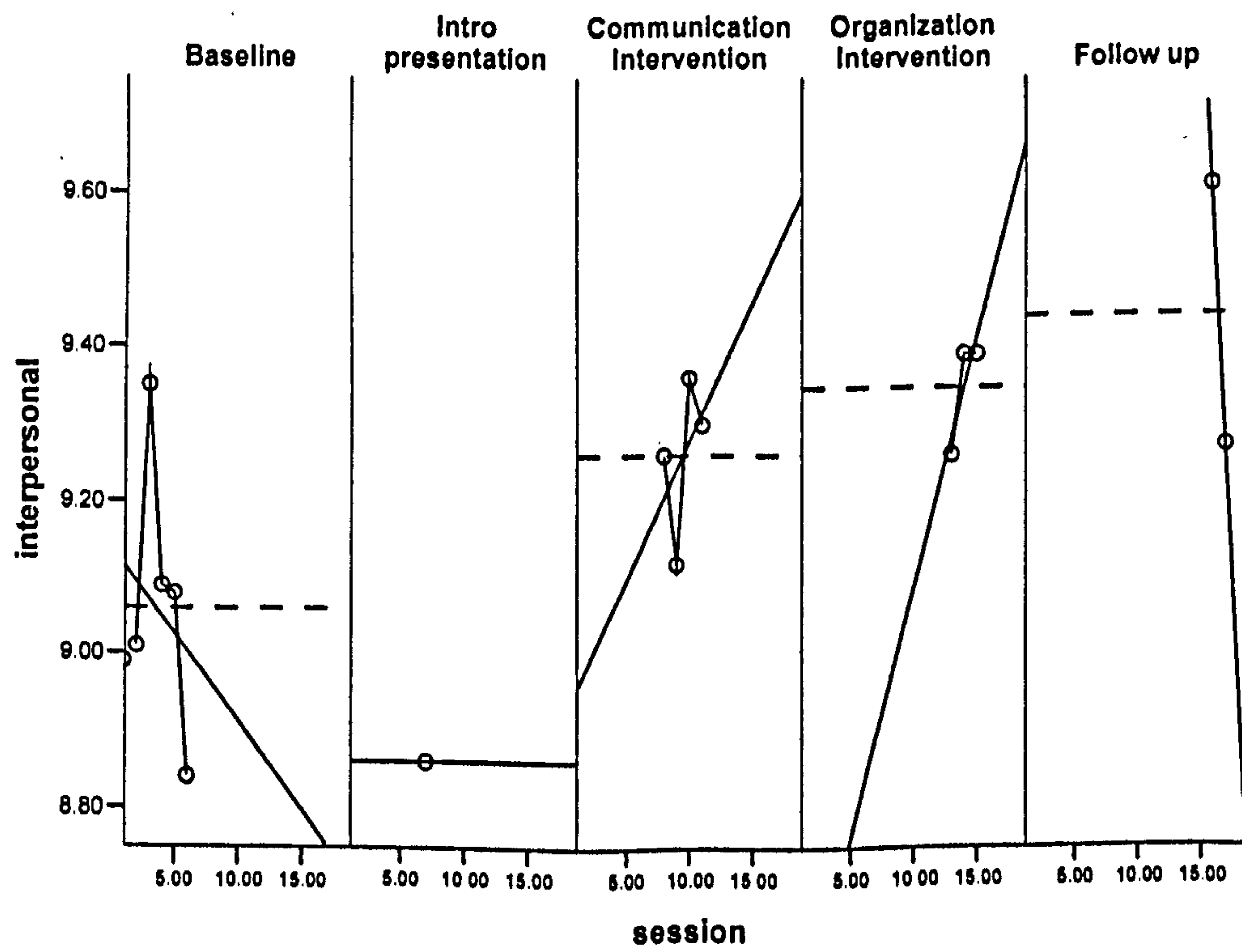




### Subject 8 Adult Networks and Social Capital

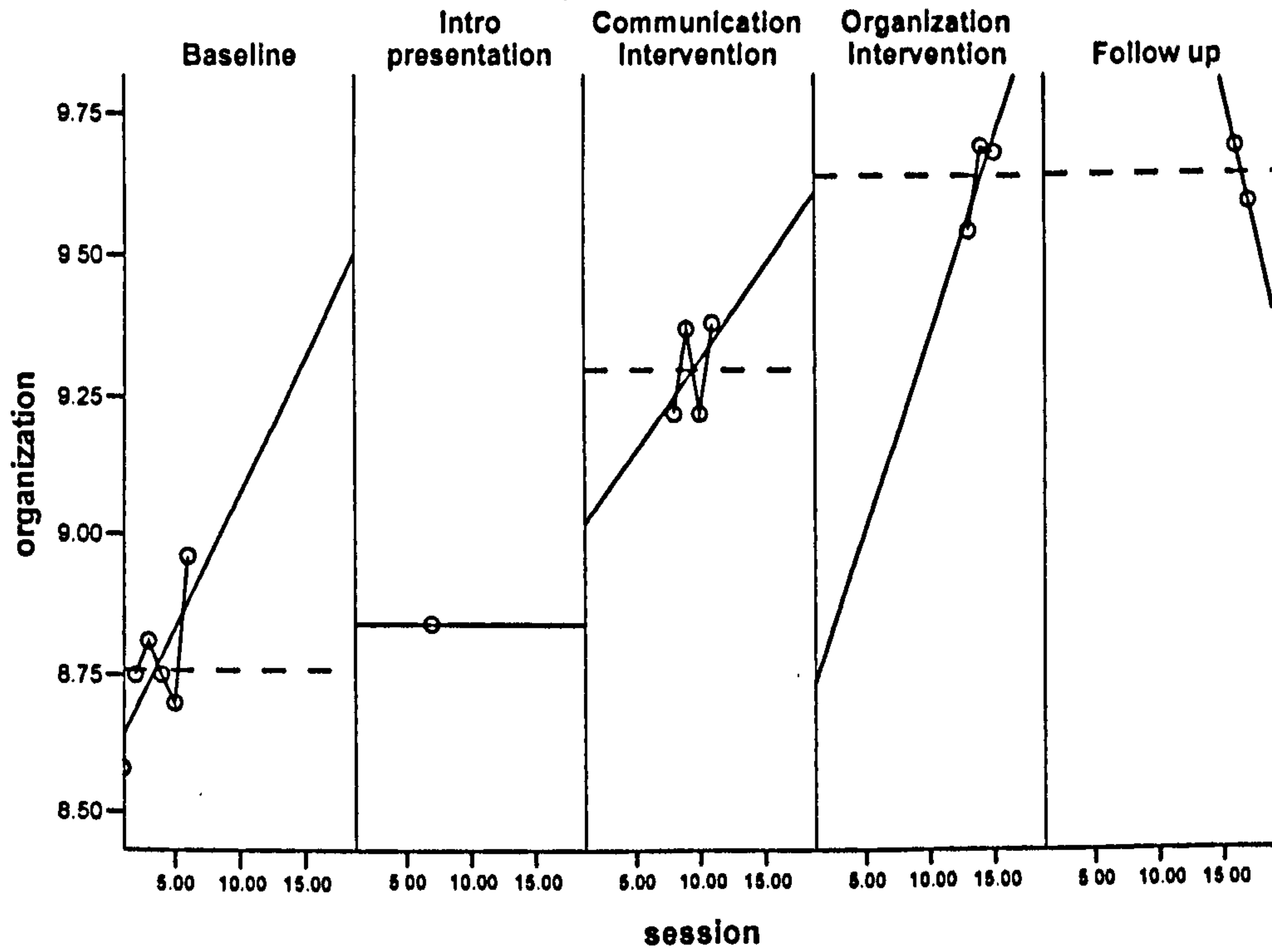


### Subject 8 Interpersonal Life Skills

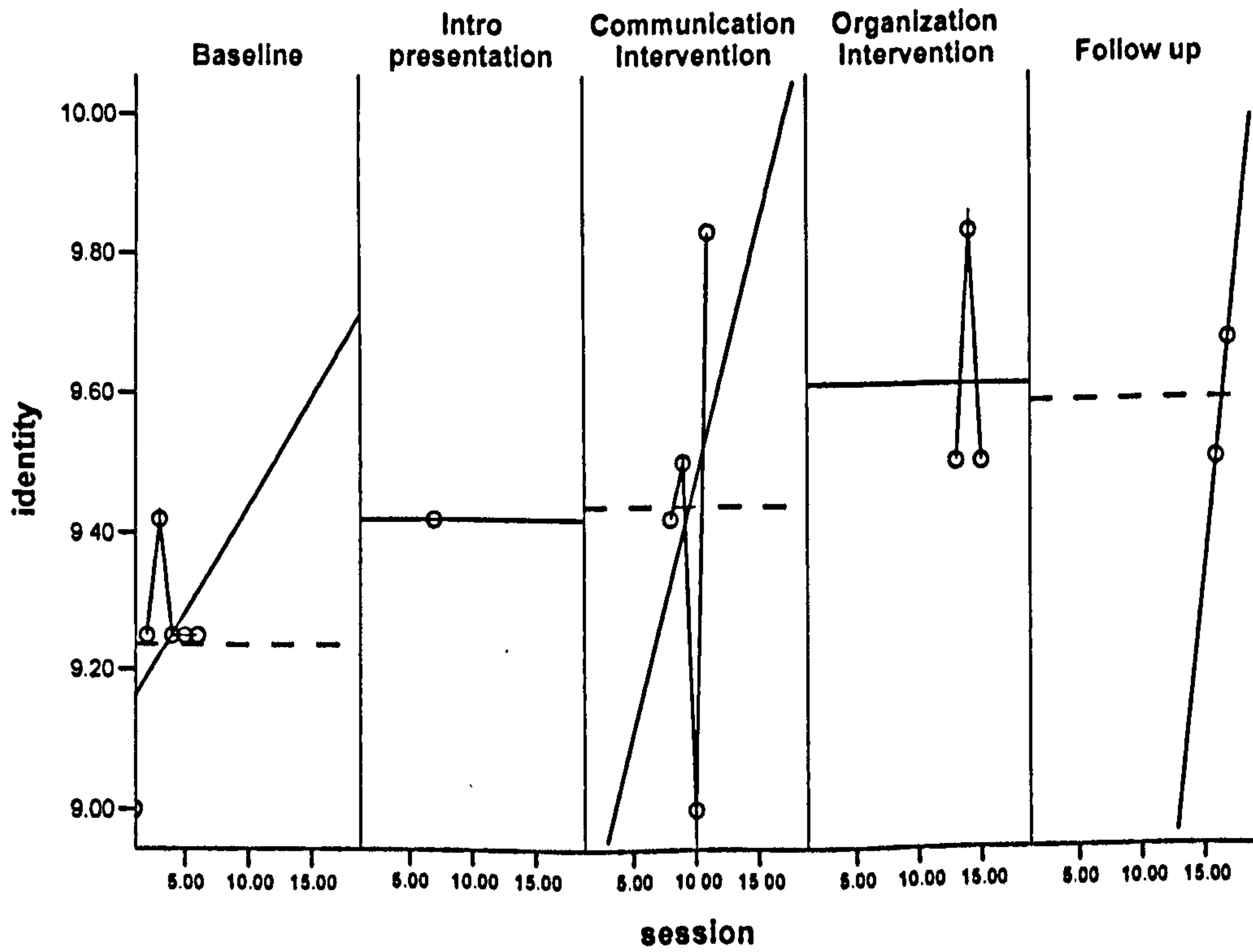




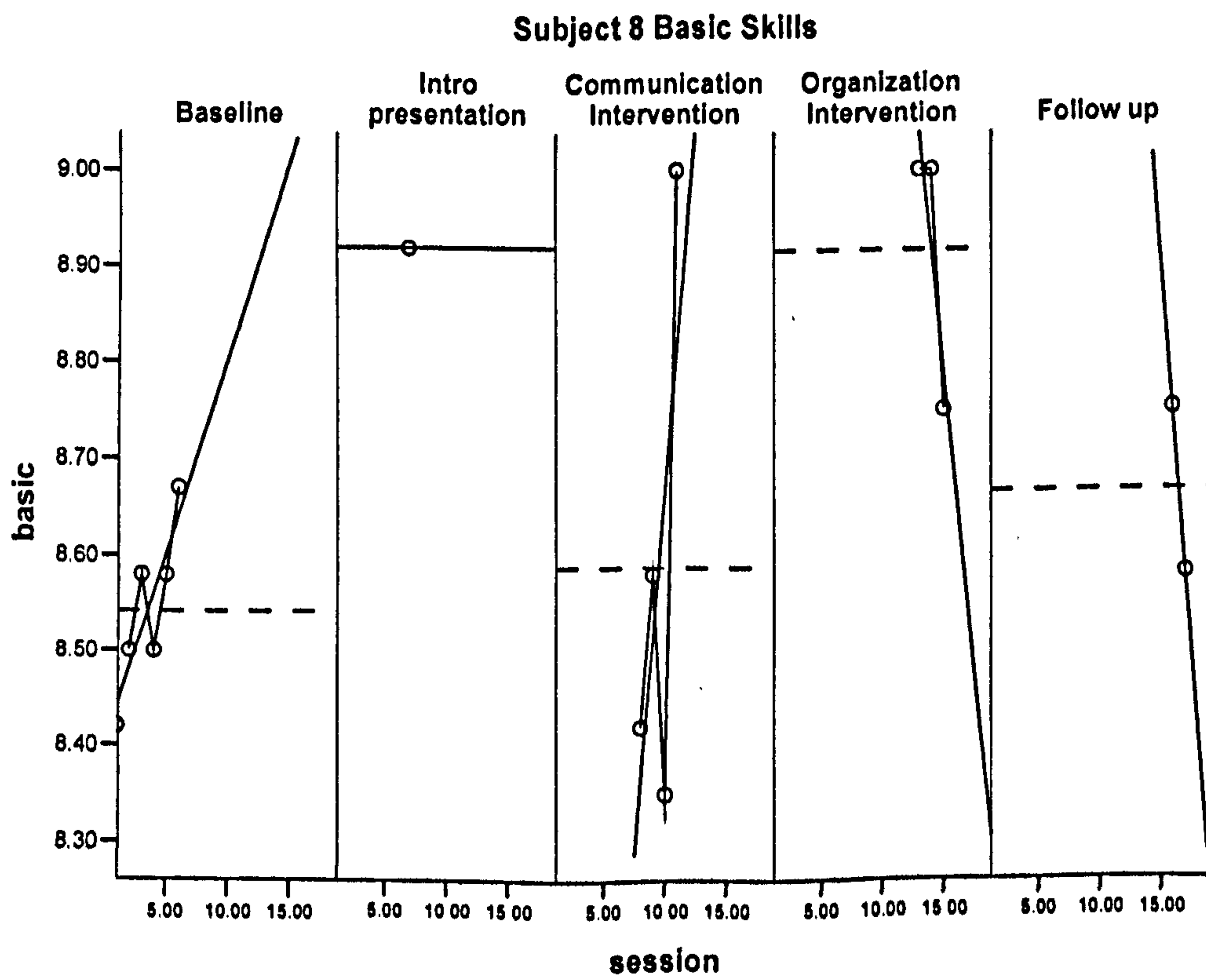
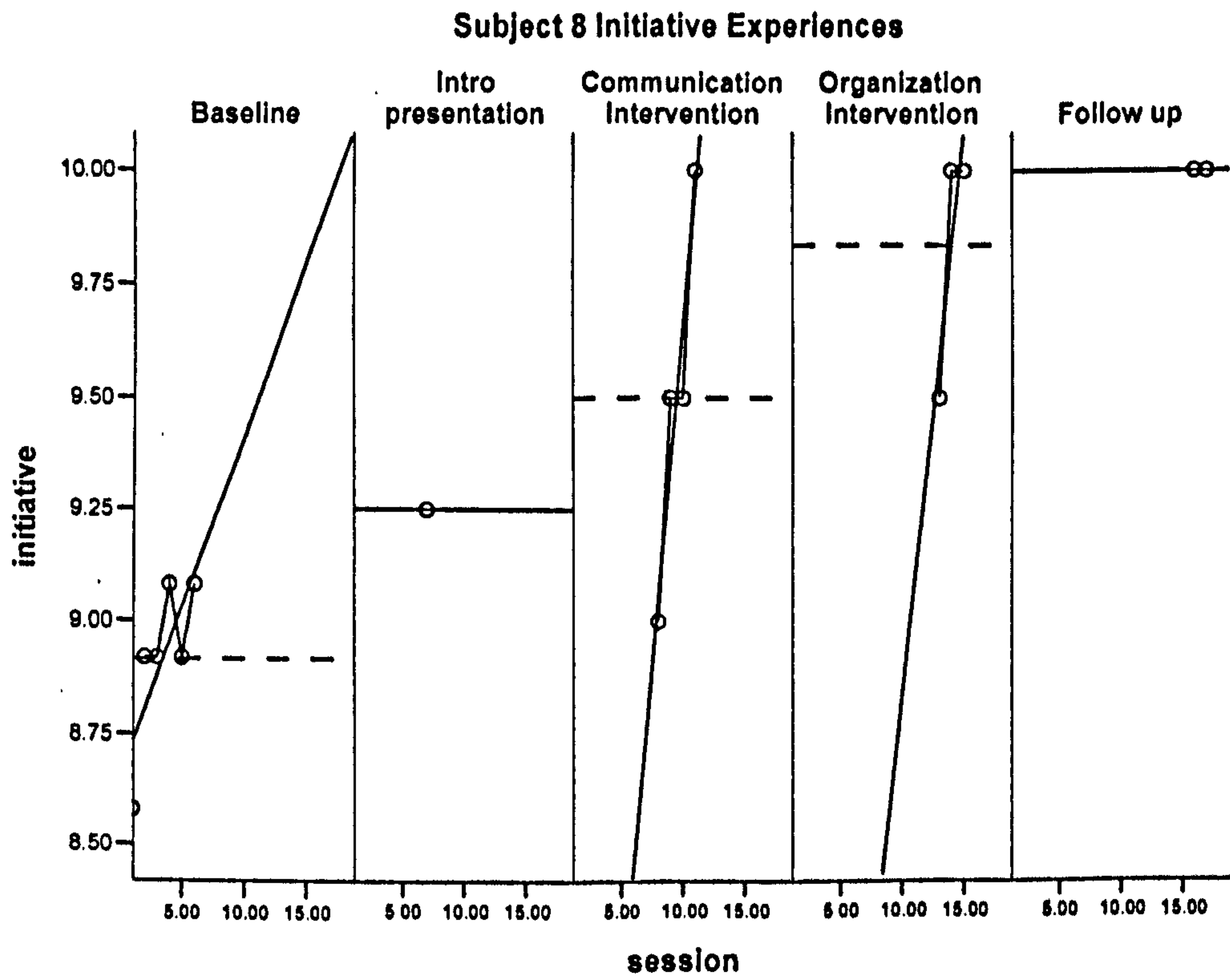
### Subject 8 Organization



### Subject 8 Identity Experiences

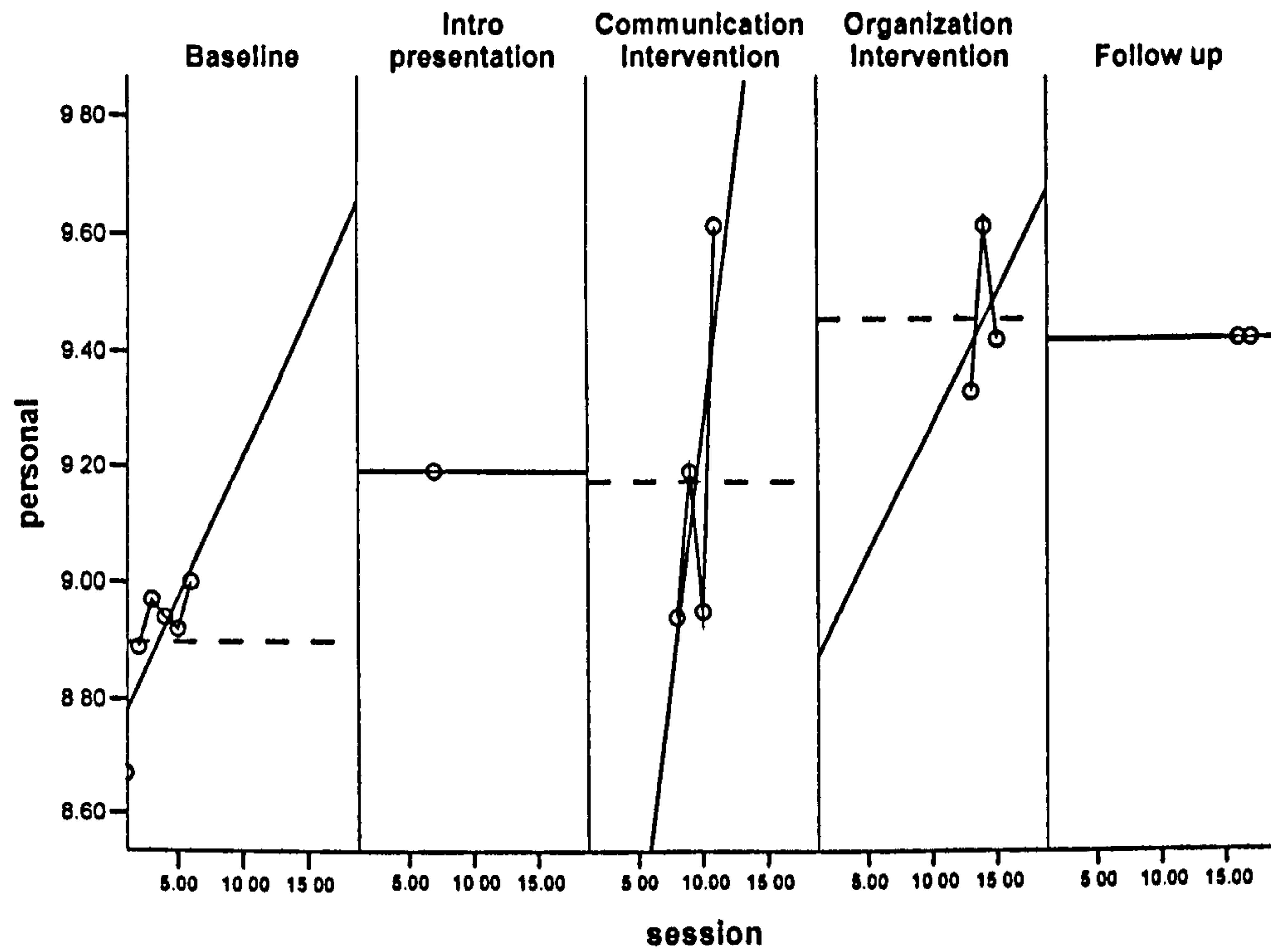




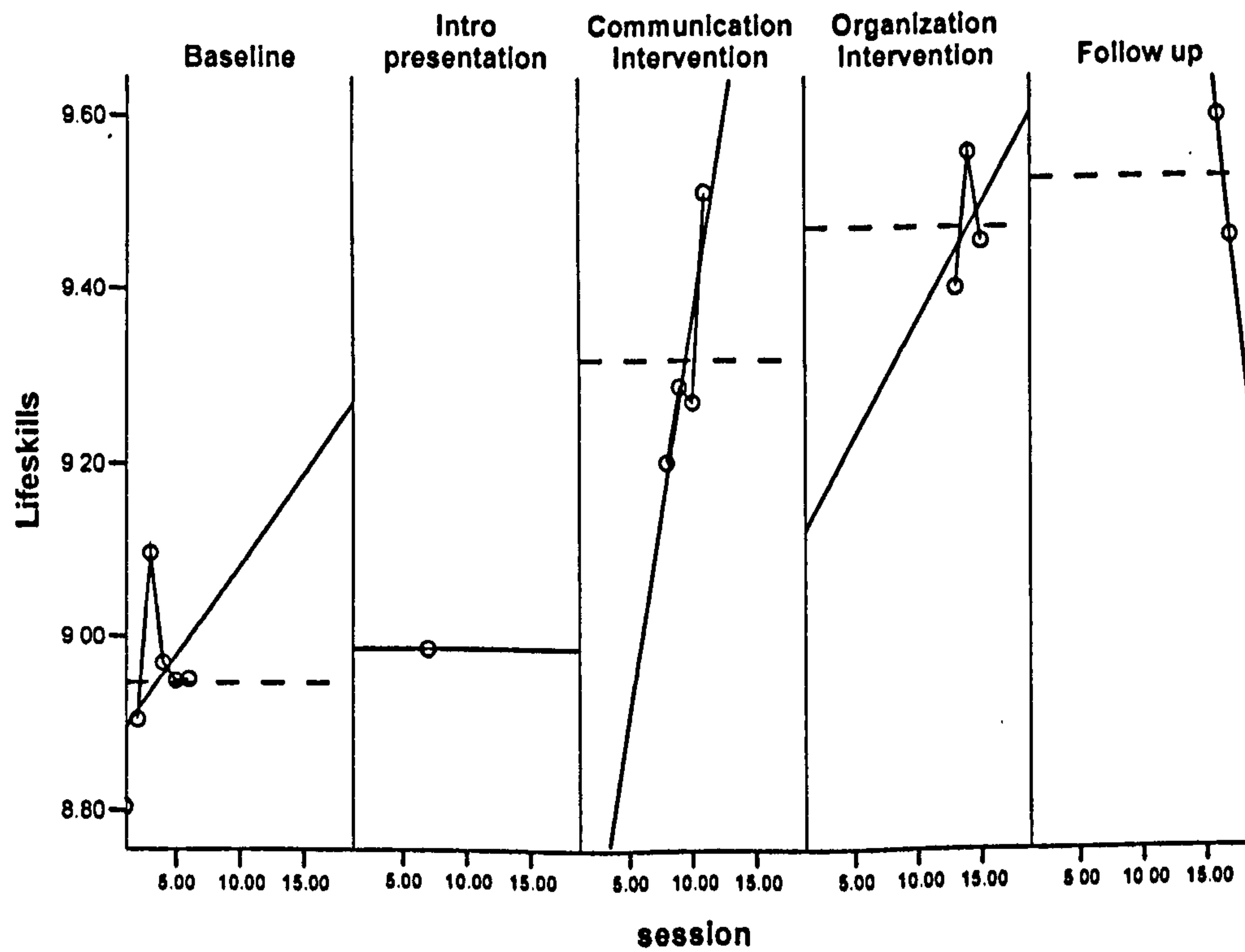




### Subject 8 Personal Life Skills

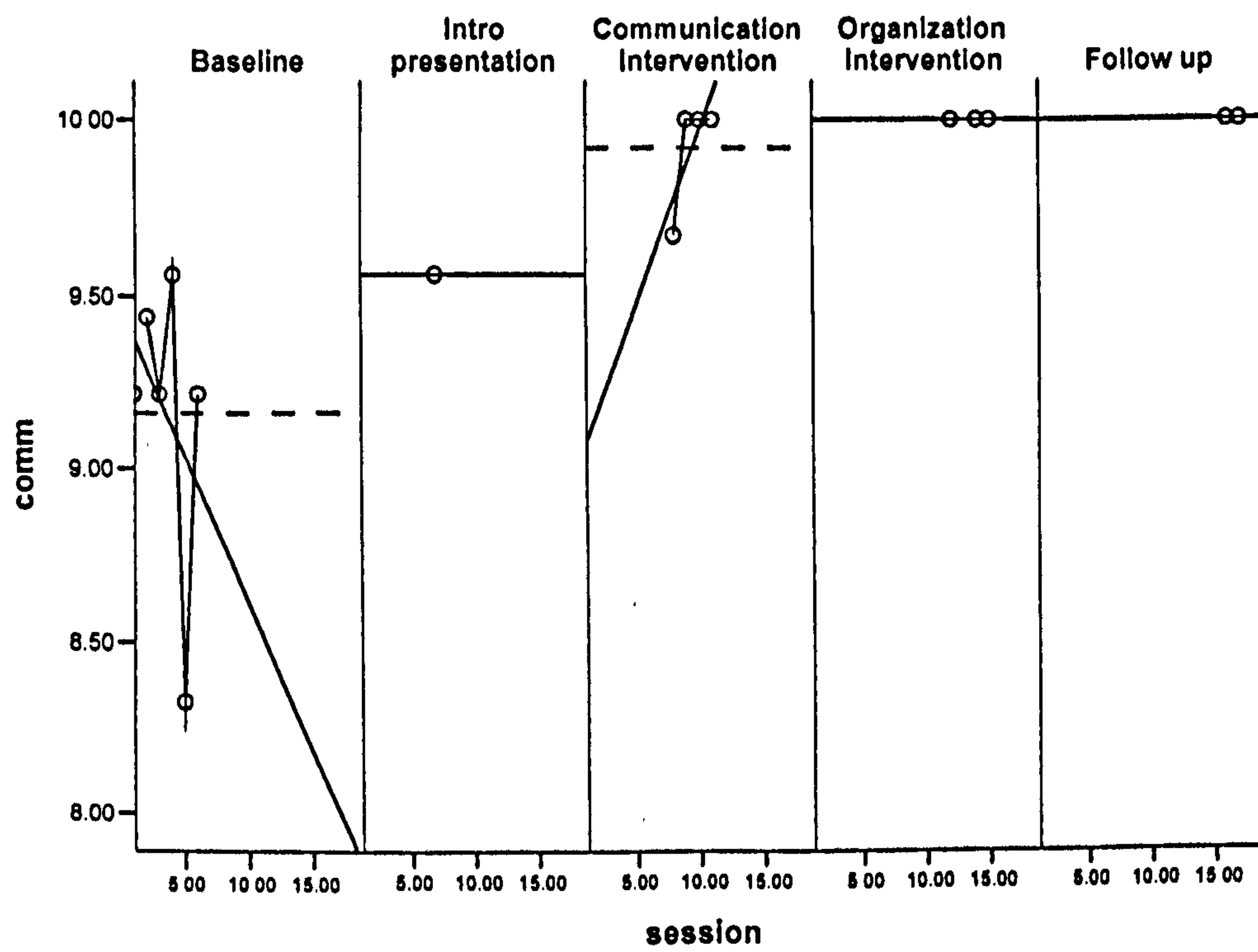


### Subject 8 Developmental Experiences

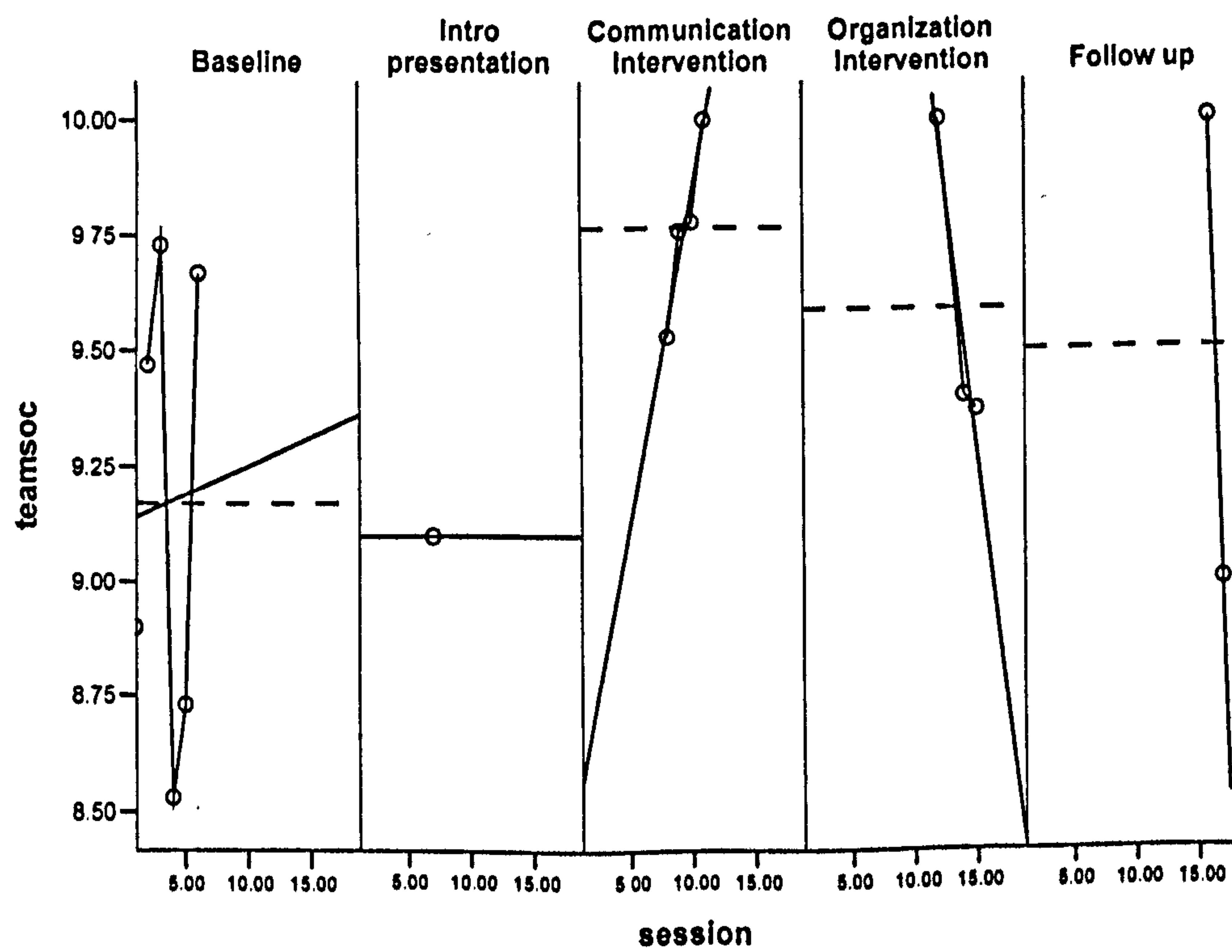




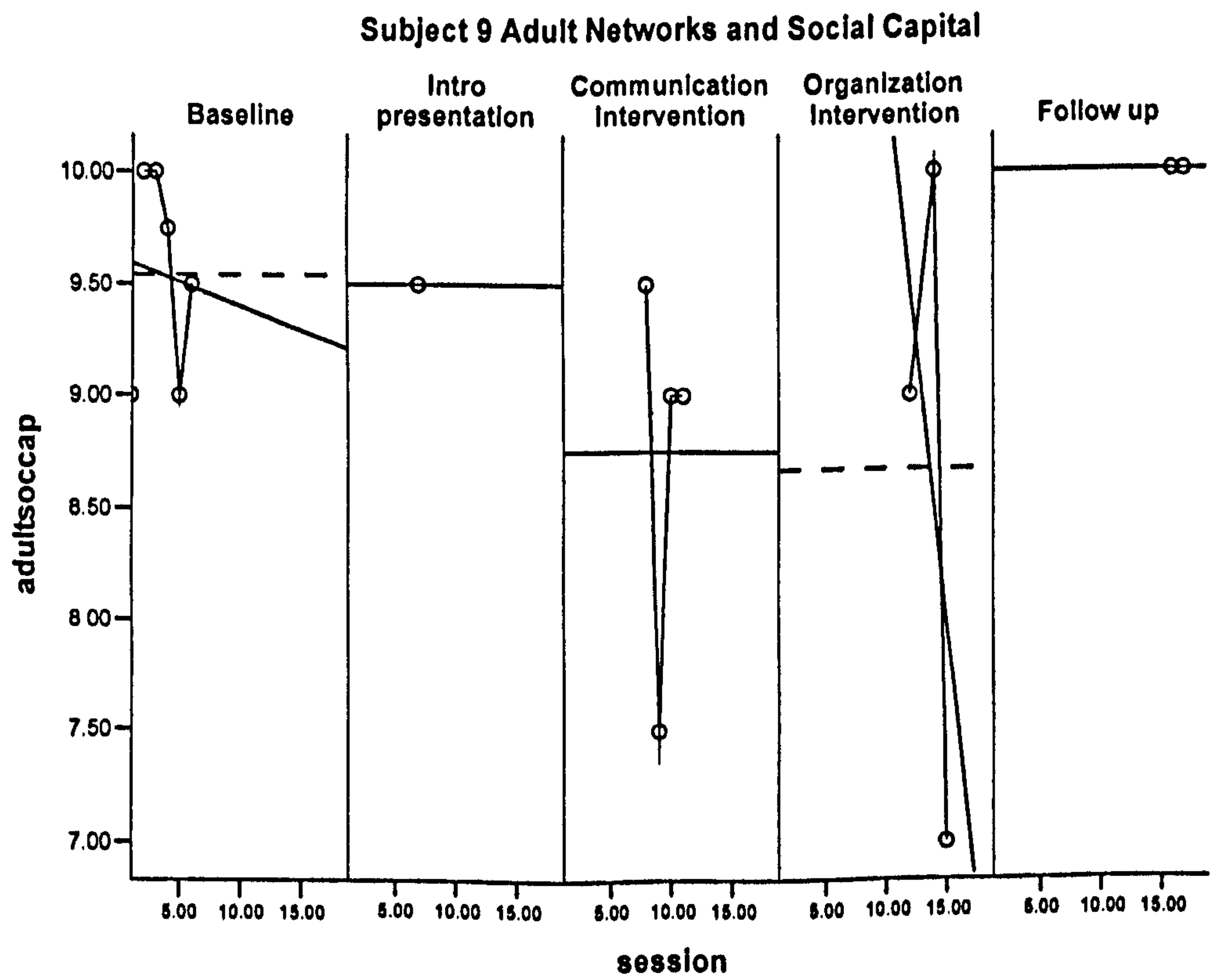
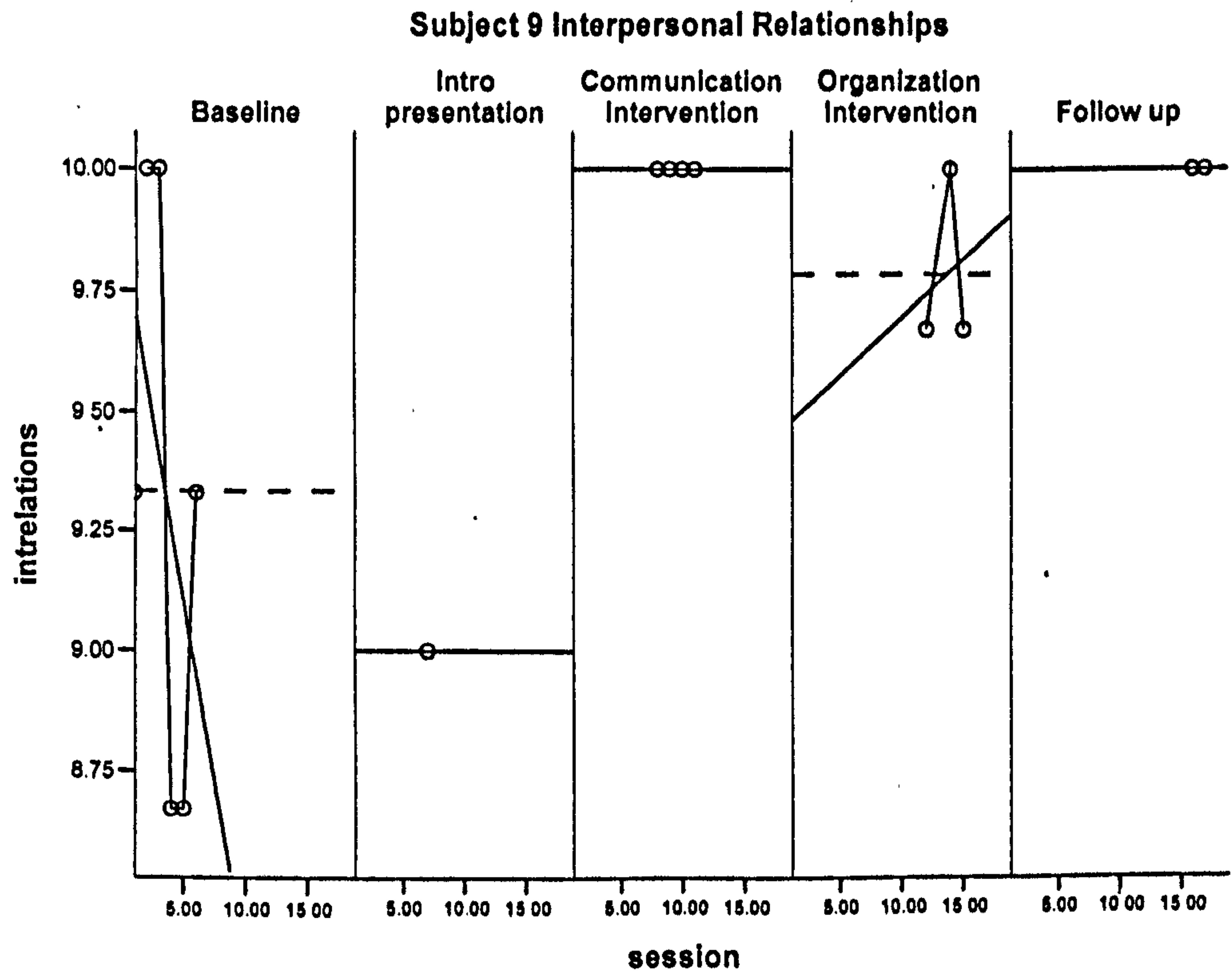
### Subject 9 Communication



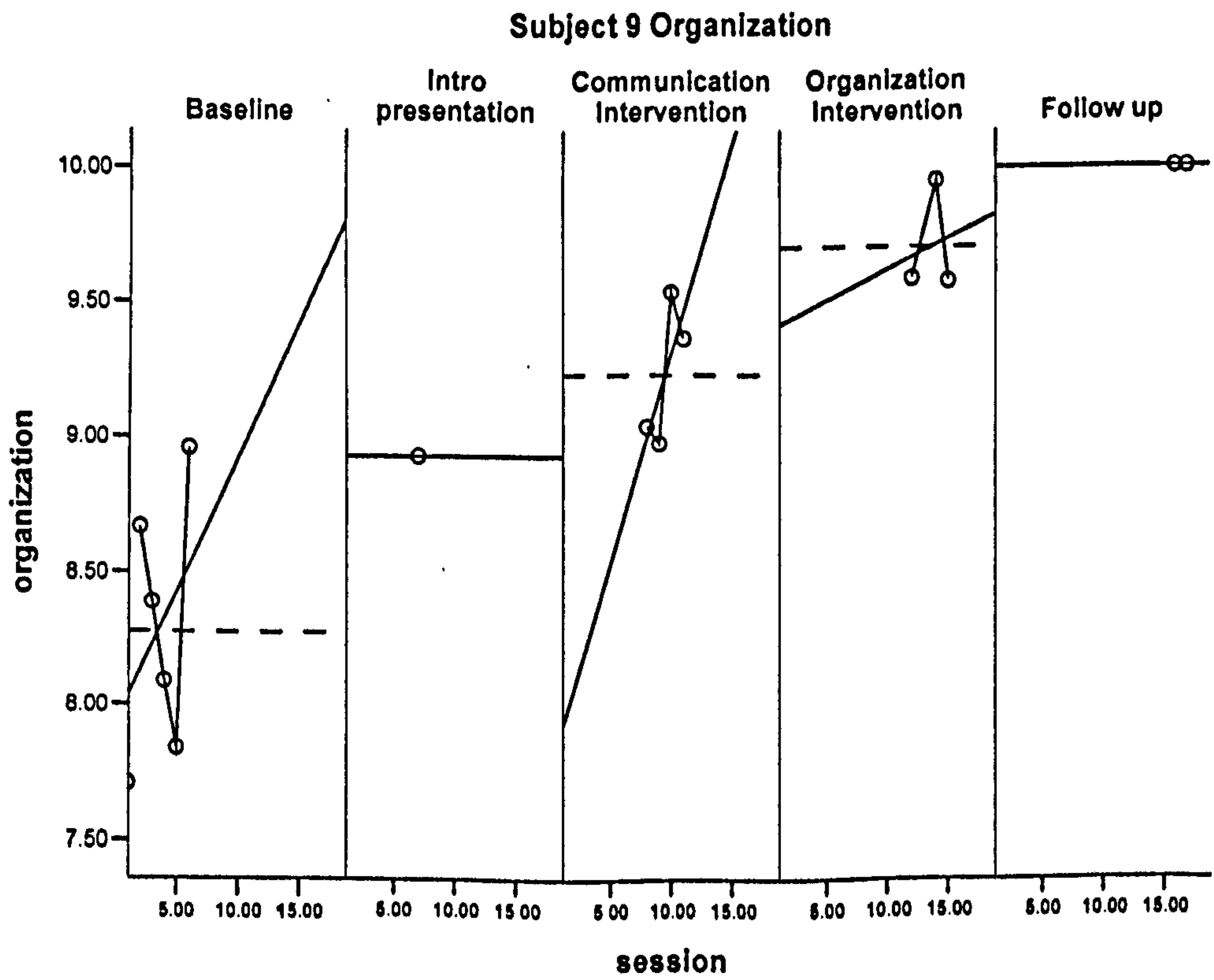
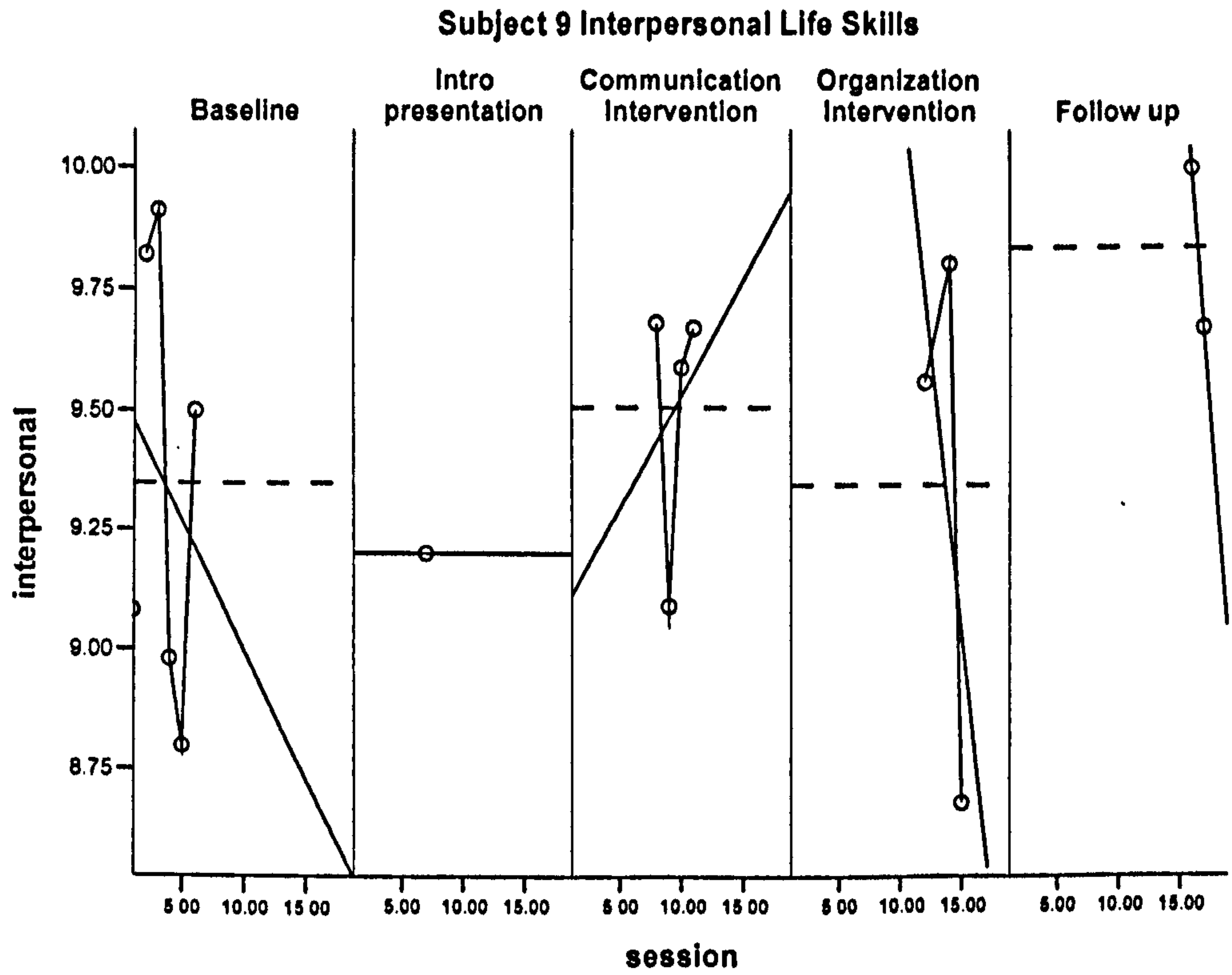
### Subject 9 Teamwork and Social Skills





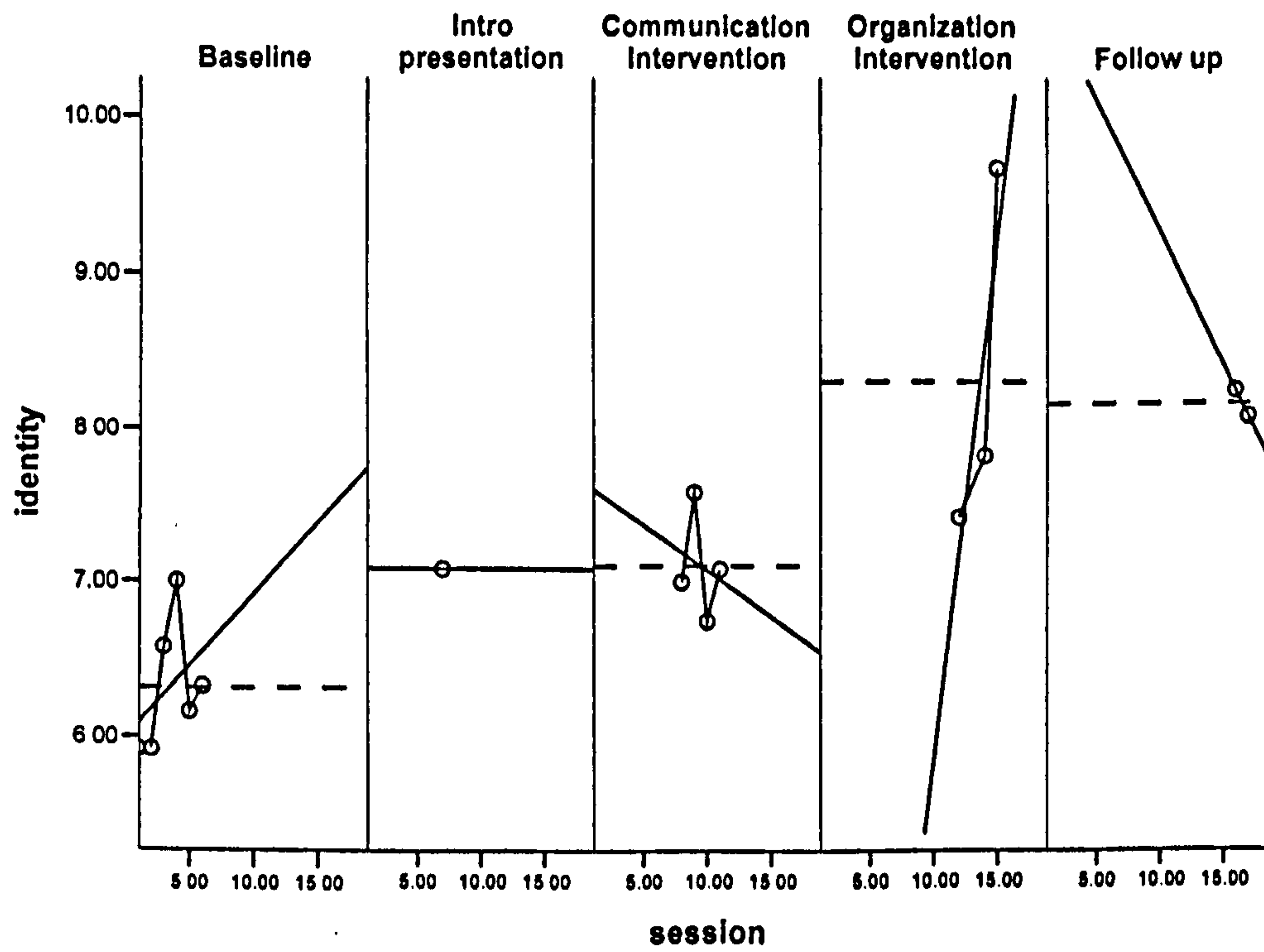




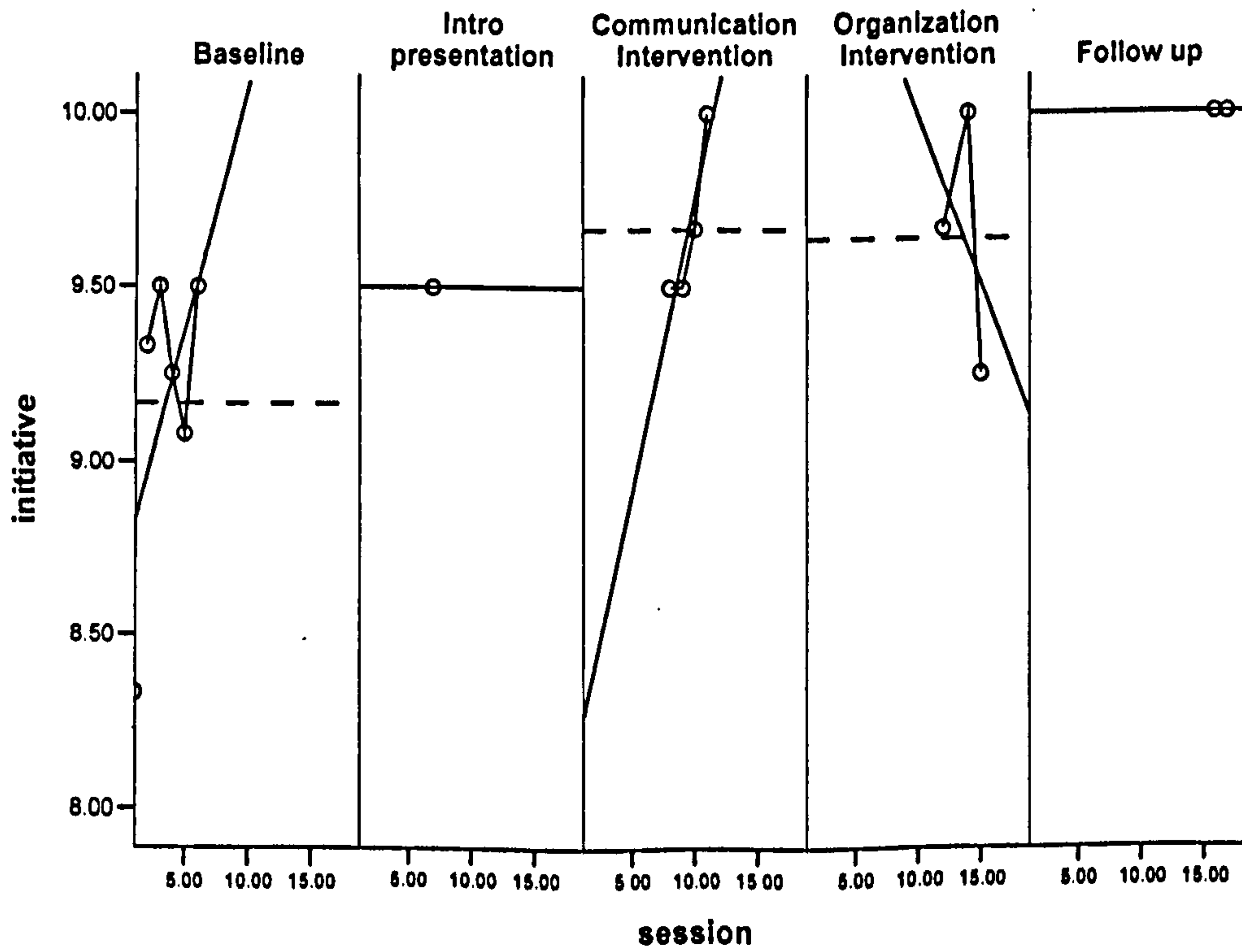




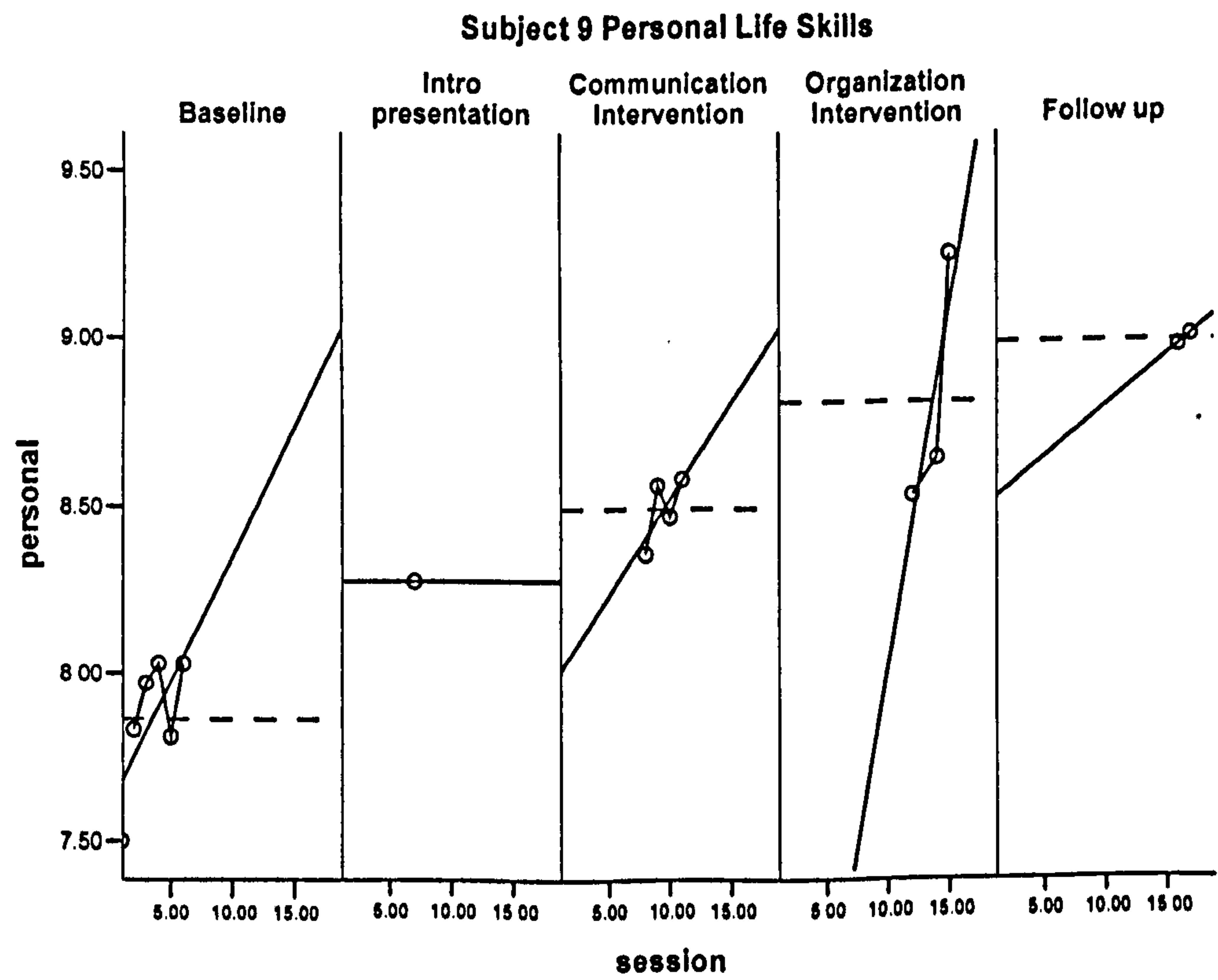
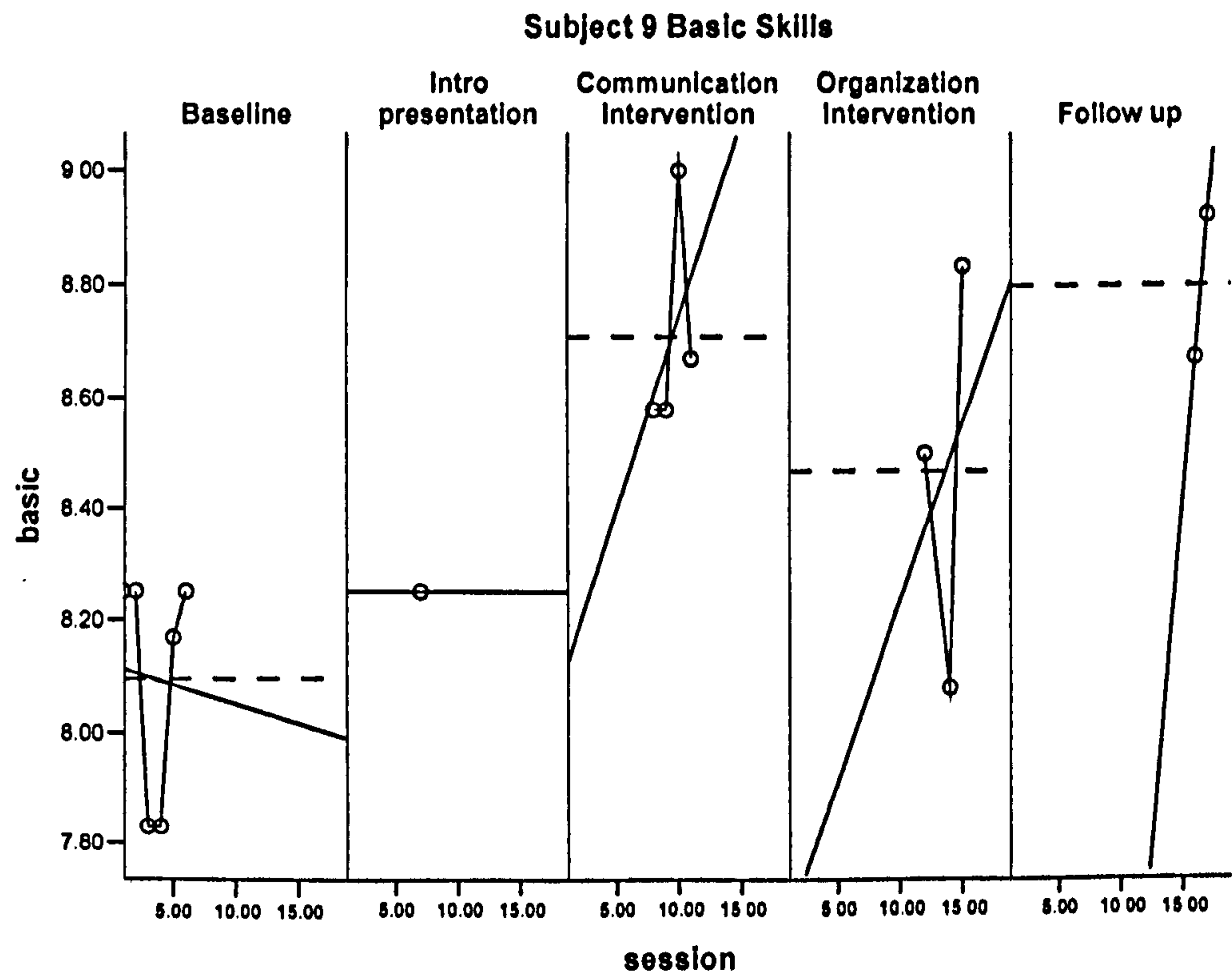
### Subject 9 Identity Experiences



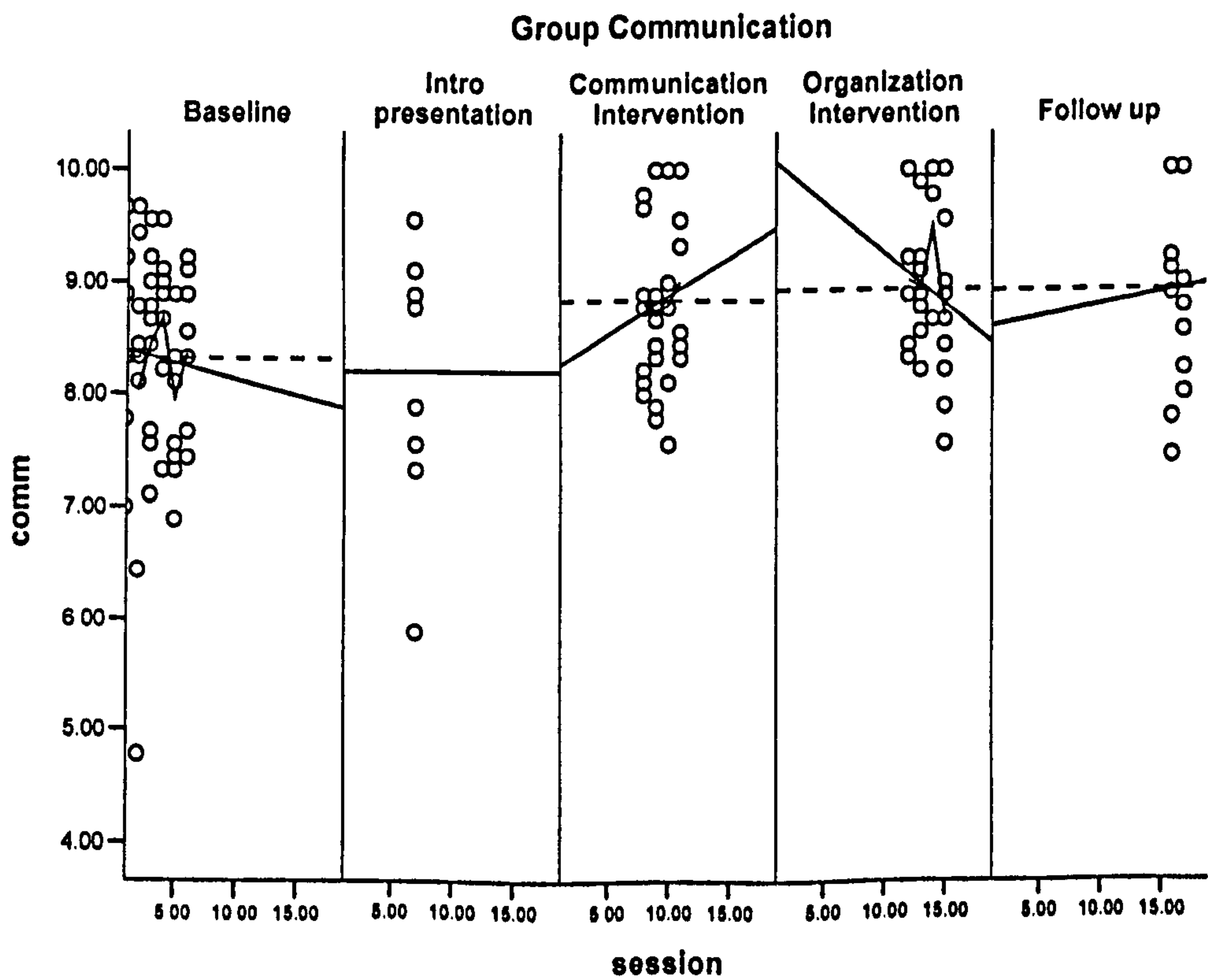
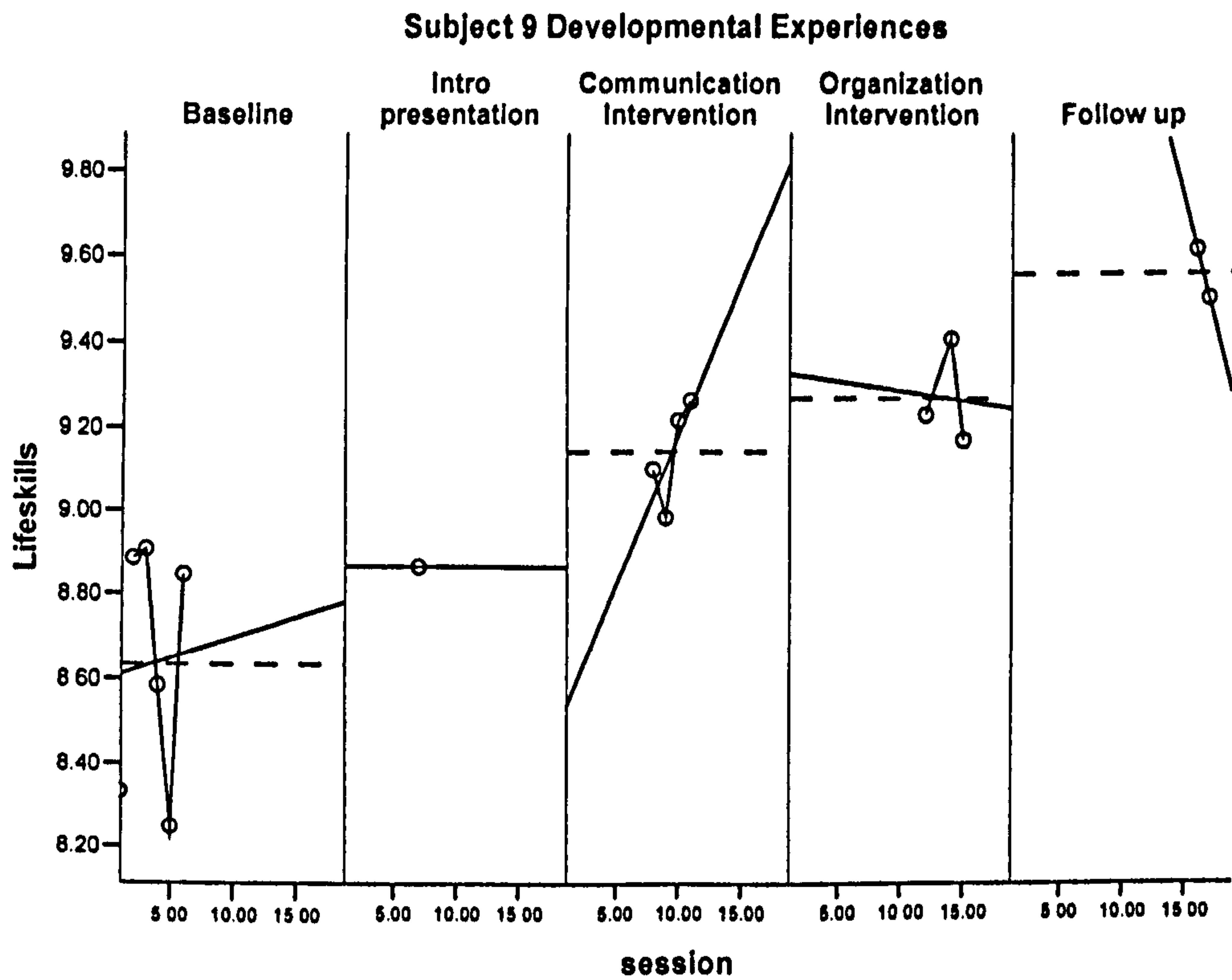
### Subject 9 Initiative Experiences





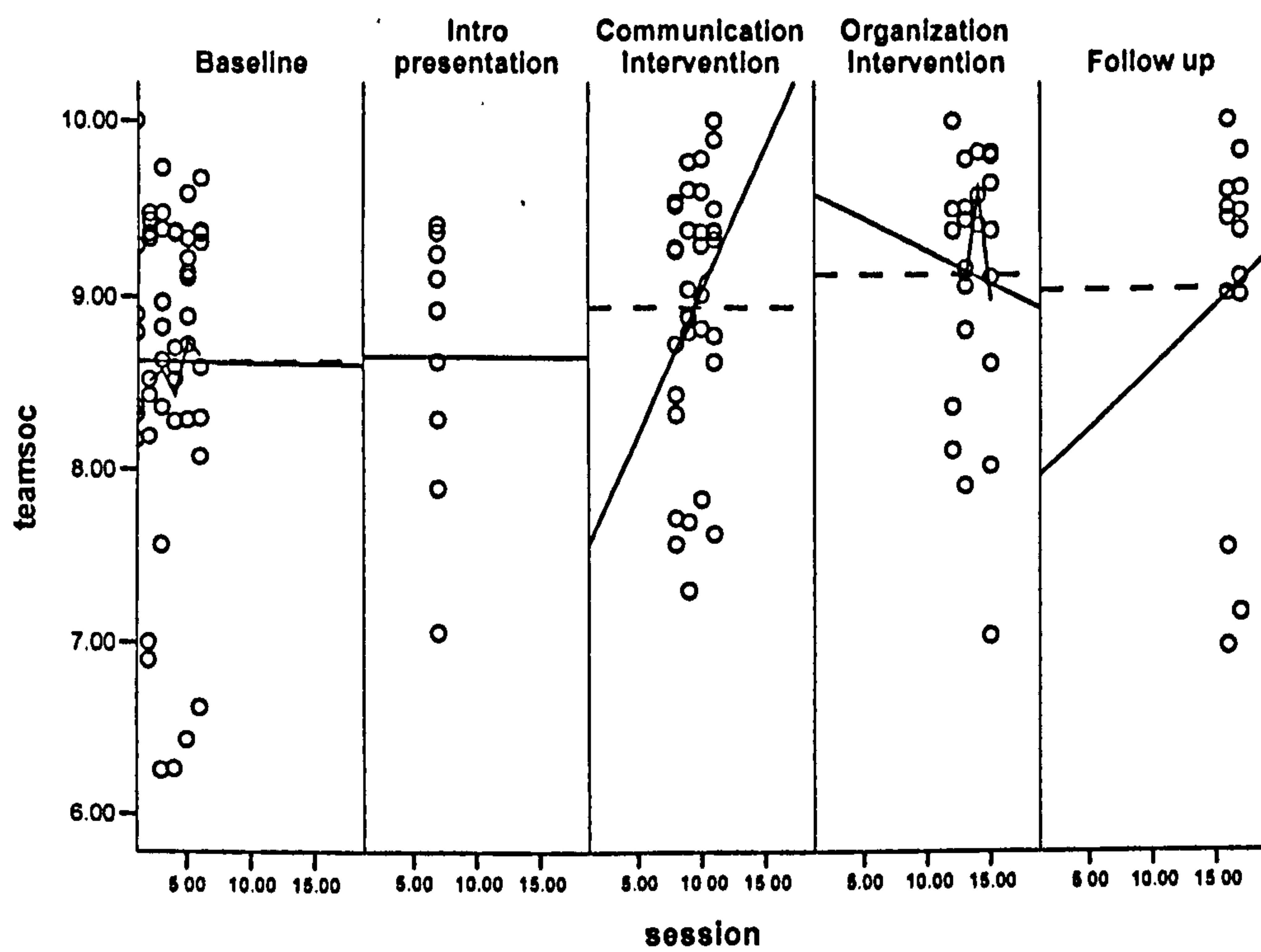




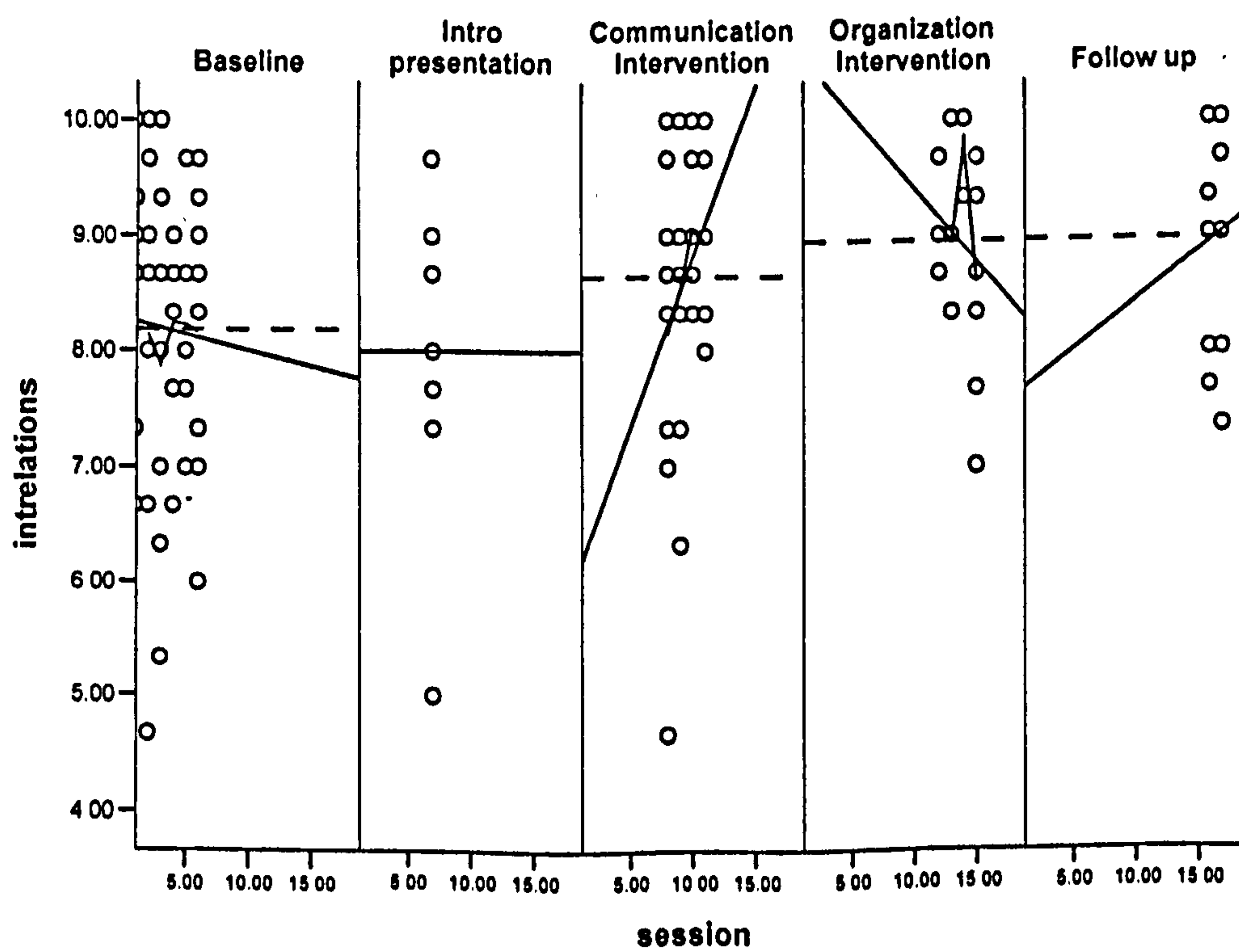




## Group Teamwork and Social Skills

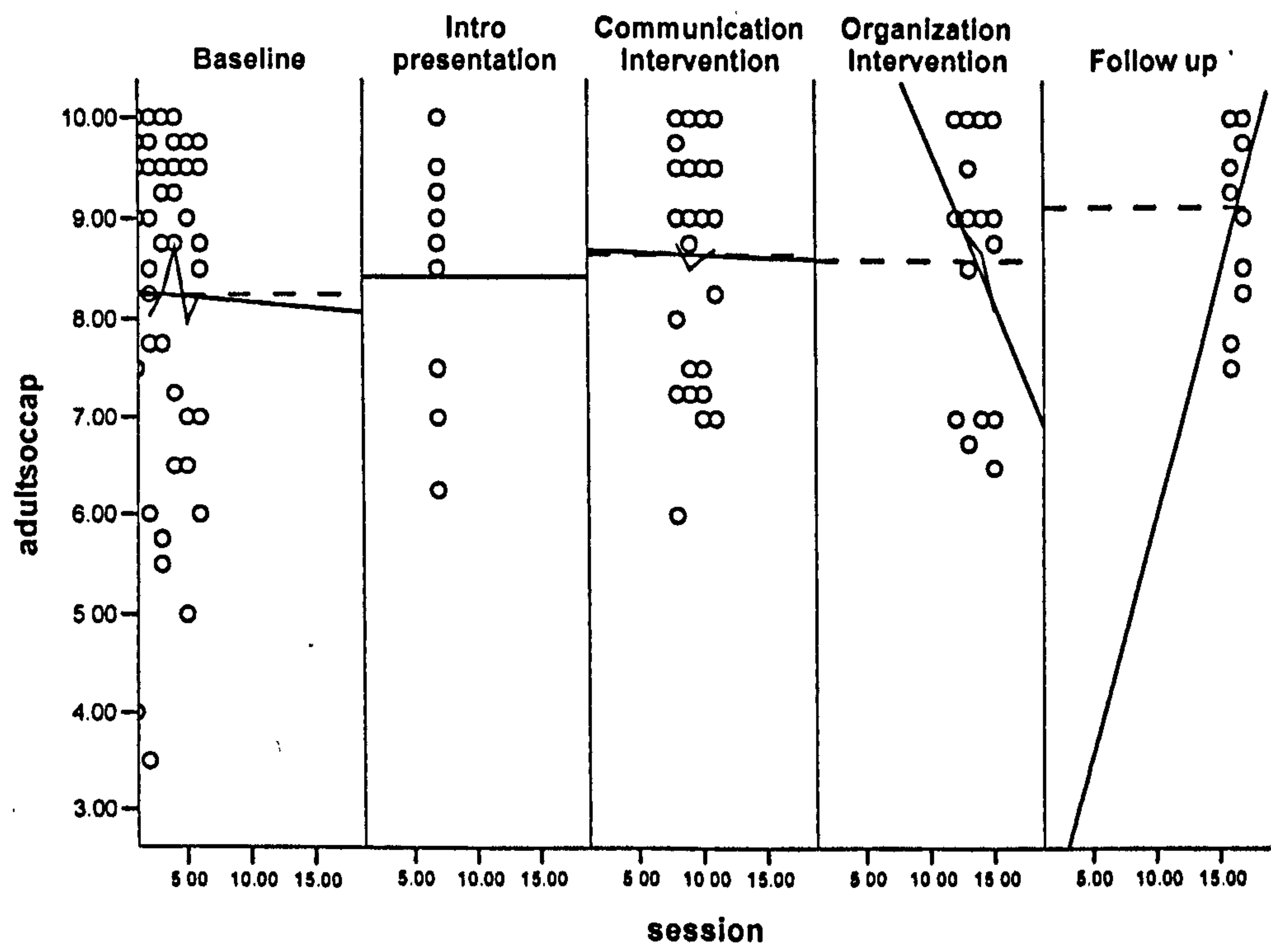


## Group Interpersonal Relationships

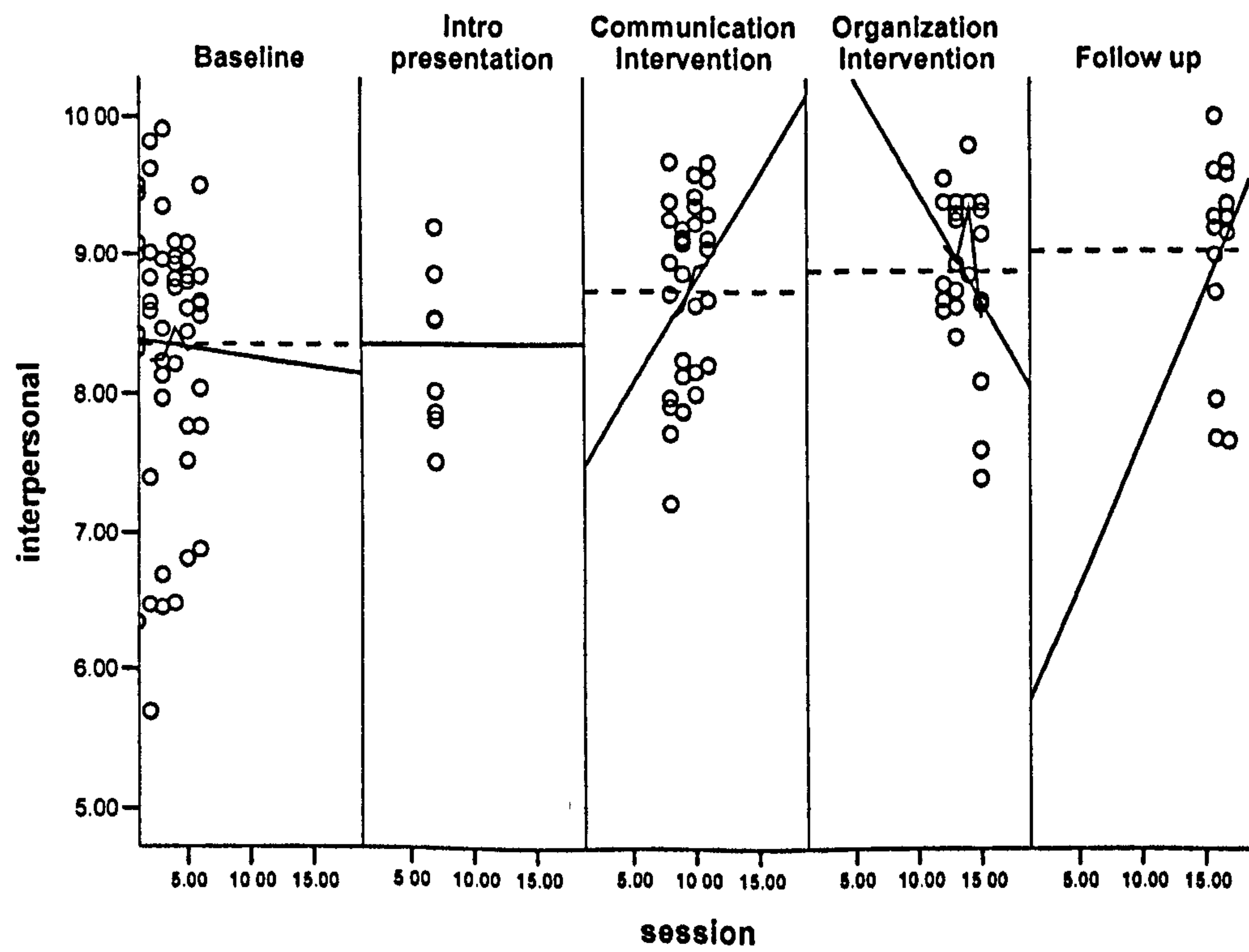




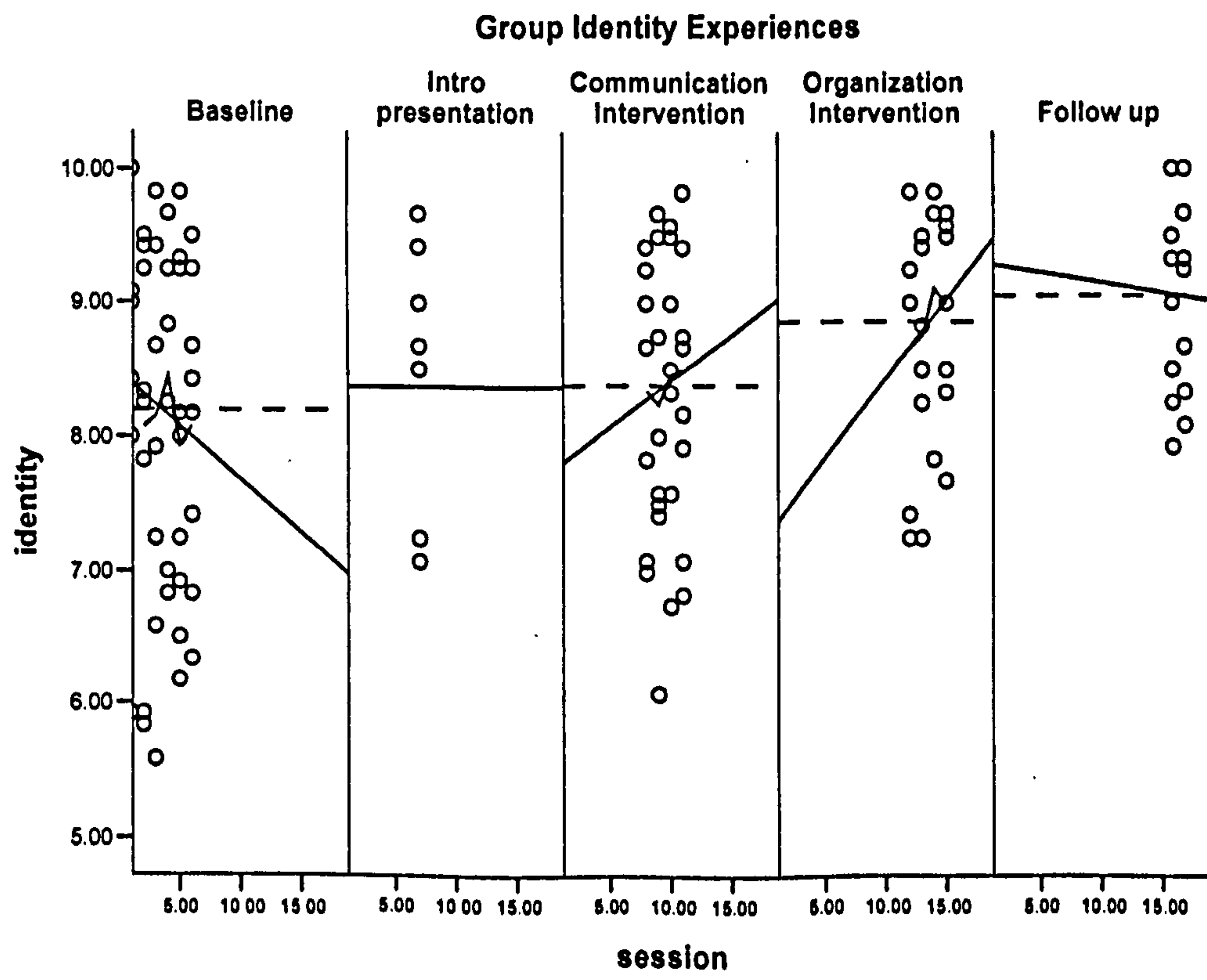
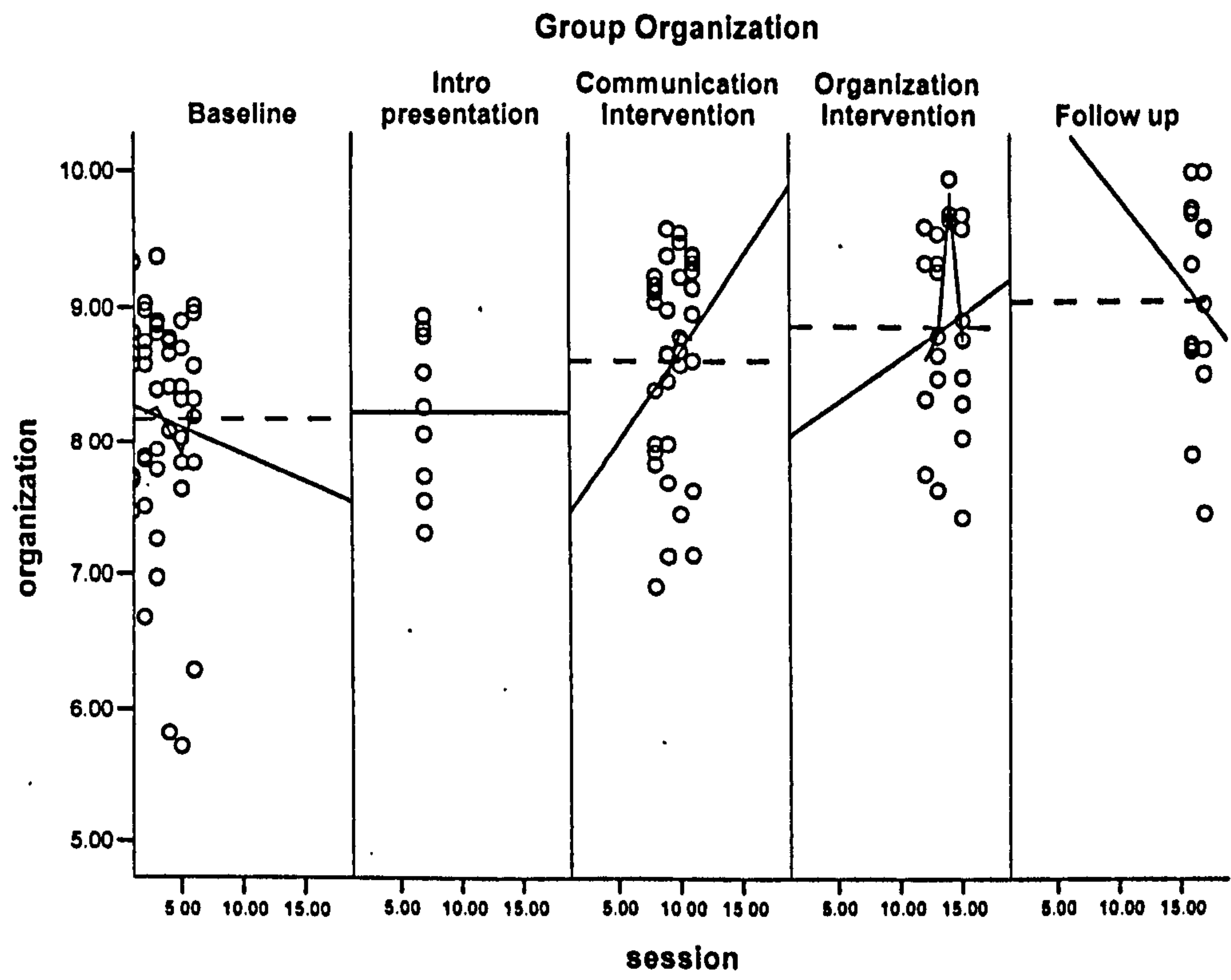
Group Adult Networks and Social Capital



Group Interpersonal Life Skills

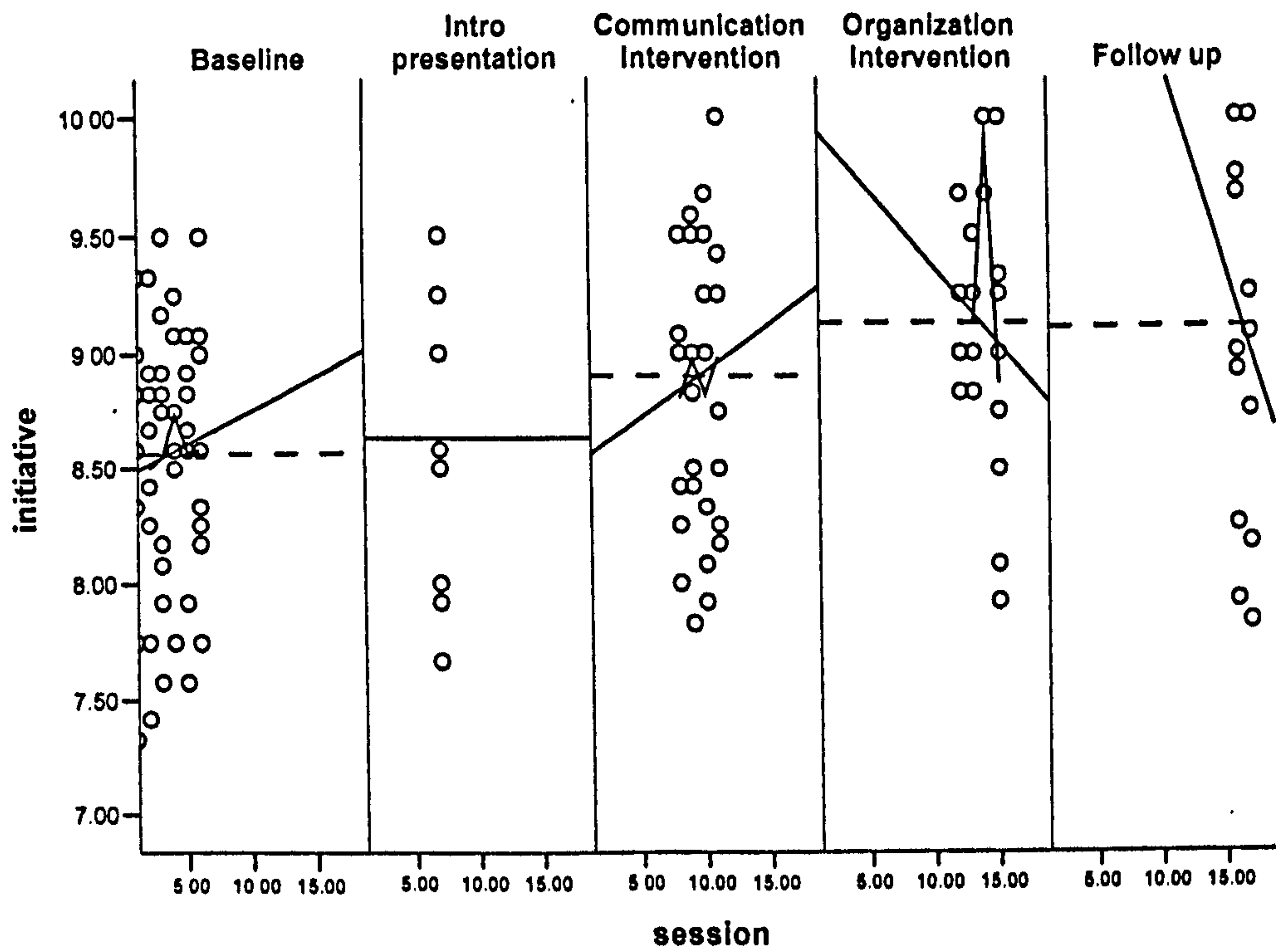




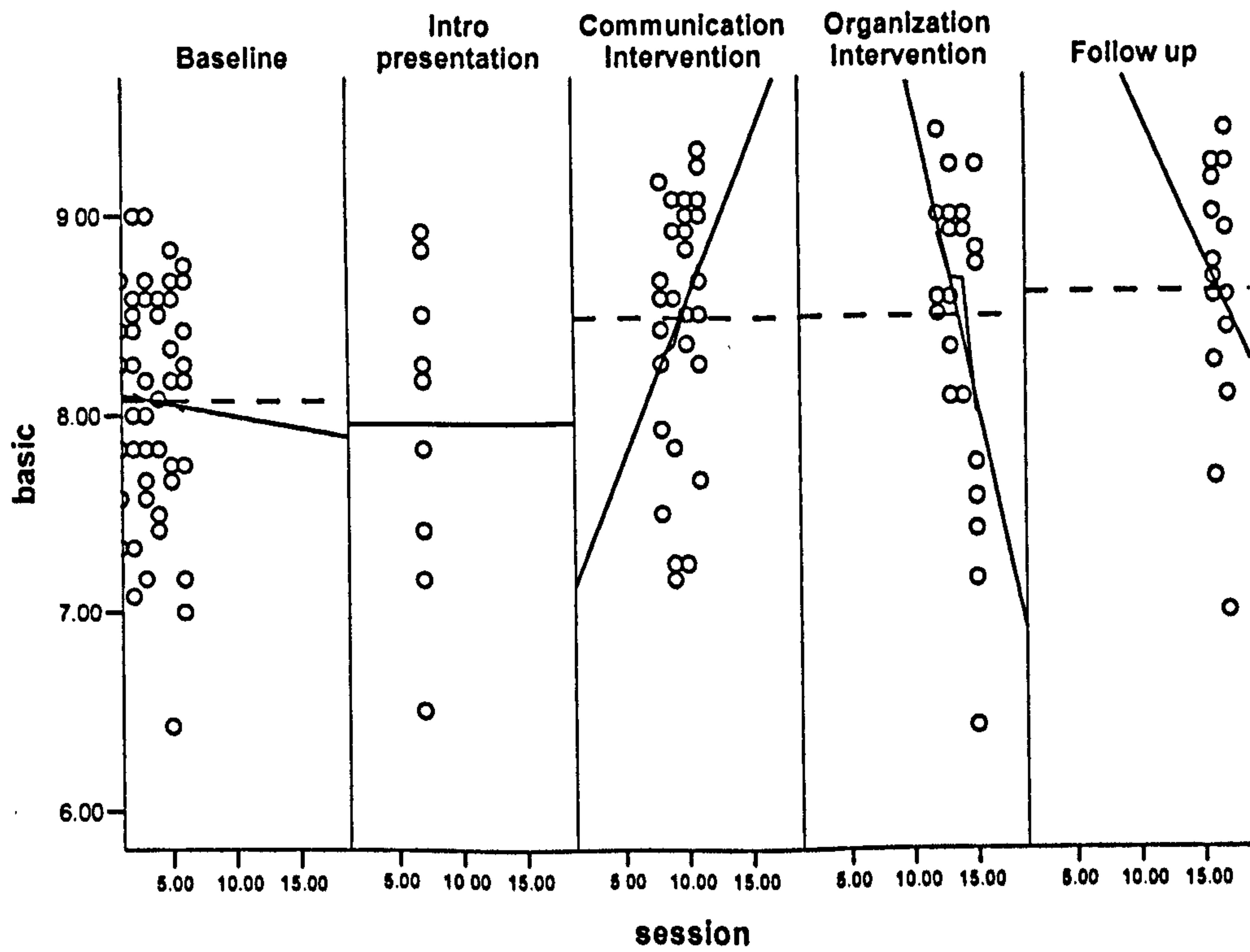




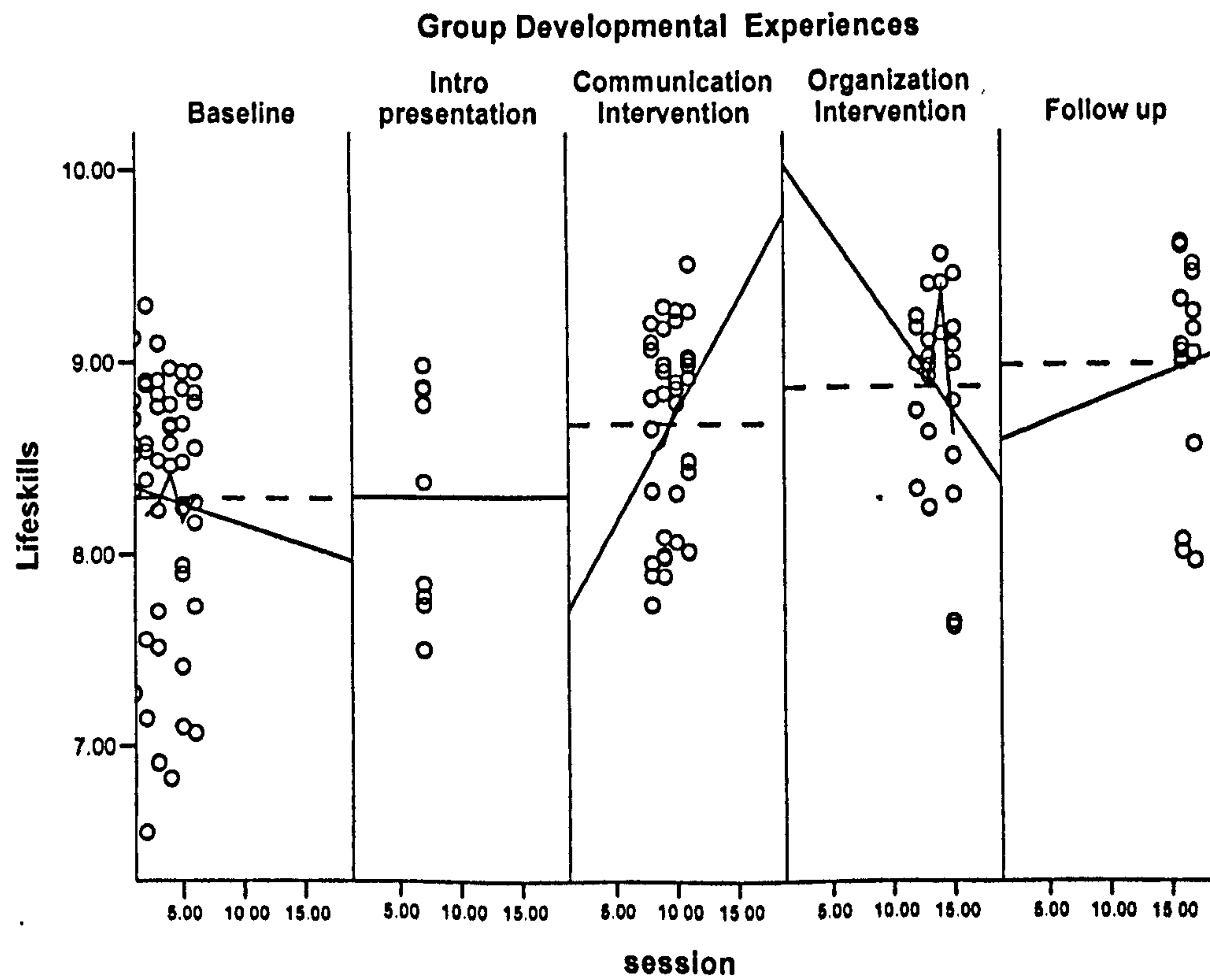
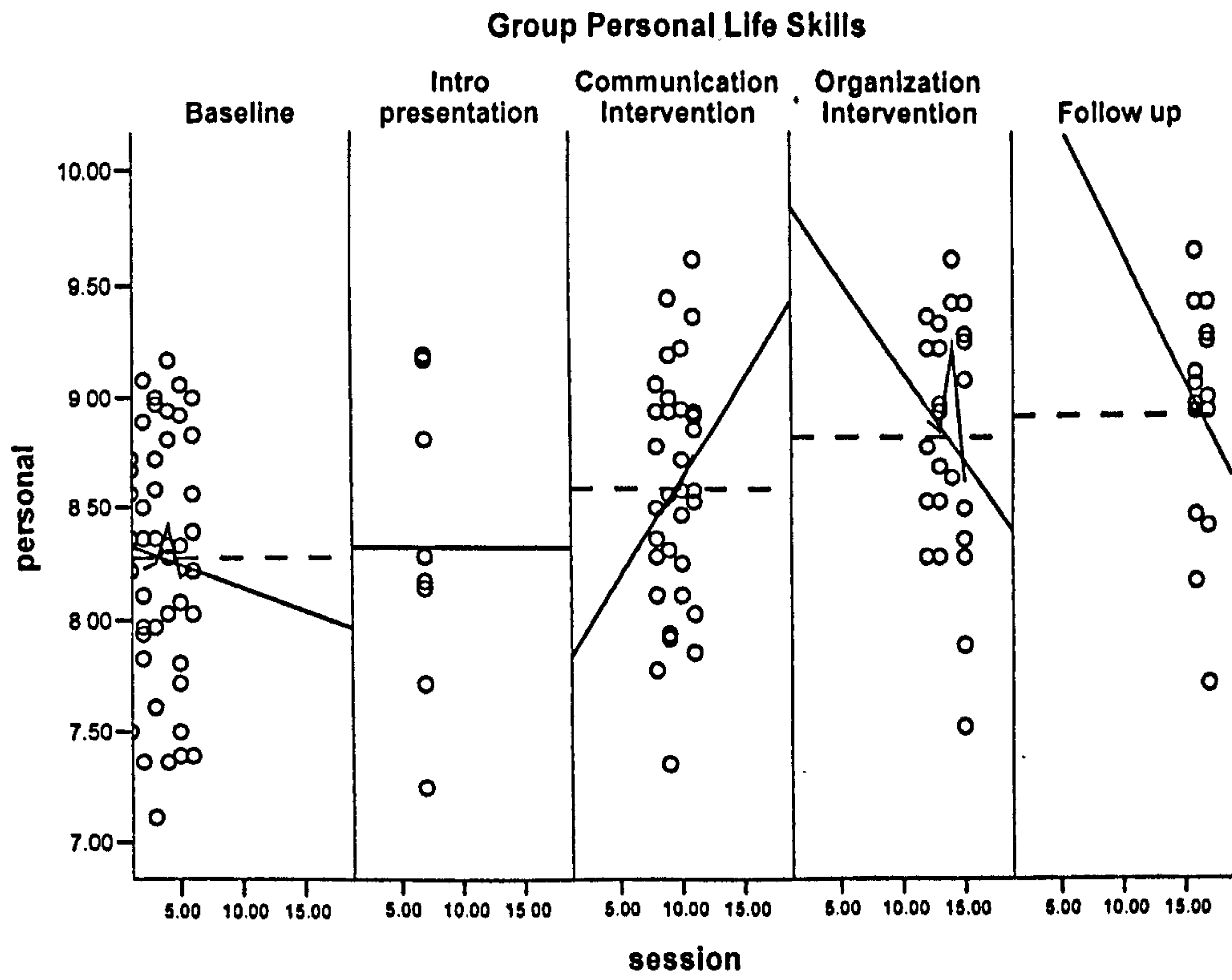
## Group Initiative Experiences



## Group Basic Skills









# ETHICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE



## Ethical Clearance Checklist

(TO BE COMPLETED FOR *ALL* INVESTIGATIONS INVOLVING HUMAN PARTICIPANTS)

All staff wishing to conduct an investigation involving human participants in order to collect new data in either their research or teaching activities, and supervisors of students who wish to employ such techniques are required to complete this checklist before commencement. It may be necessary upon completion of this checklist for investigators to submit a full application to the Ethical Advisory Committee. Where necessary, official approval from the Ethical Advisory Committee should be obtained *before* the research is commenced. This should take no longer than one month.

**IF YOUR RESEARCH IS BEING CONDUCTED OFF CAMPUS AND ETHICAL APPROVAL FOR YOUR STUDY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY AN EXTERNAL ETHICS COMMITTEE, YOU MAY NOT NEED TO SEEK FULL APPROVAL FROM THE UNIVERSITY ETHICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE. HOWEVER, YOU WILL BE EXPECTED TO PROVIDE EVIDENCE OF APPROVAL FROM THE EXTERNAL ETHICS COMMITTEE AND THE TERMS ON WHICH THIS APPROVAL HAS BEEN GRANTED.**

**If you believe this statement applies to your research, please contact the Secretary of the Ethical Advisory Committee for confirmation.**

**IF YOUR RESEARCH IS TRANSFERRING INTO LOUGHBOROUGH UNIVERSITY AND APPROVAL WAS OBTAINED FROM YOUR ORIGINATING INSTITUTION, THERE IS A REQUIREMENT ON THE UNIVERSITY TO ENSURE THAT APPROPRIATE APPROVALS ARE IN PLACE.**

**If you believe this statement applies to your research, please contact the Secretary of the Ethical Advisory Committee with evidence of former approval and the terms on which this approval has been granted.**

**IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF INDIVIDUAL INVESTIGATORS TO ENSURE THAT THERE IS APPROPRIATE INSURANCE COVER FOR THEIR INVESTIGATION.**

**If you are at all unsure about whether or not your study is covered, please contact the Finance Office to check.**



**Name and Status of Senior Investigators (Research Grade II and above):**  
(Please underline responsible investigator where appropriate)

Dr David Lavalley (Reader, Sport and Exercise Psychology  
.....

**Department:** School of Sport & Exercise Sciences.....  
**Name and Status of Other Investigators:**

Martin Ian Jones (PhD student, Sport Psychology) .....  
.....

**Department:** School of Sport & Exercise Sciences.....

Title of  
Investigation

Developing life skills through participation in sport.....  
.....

**Section A: Investigators**

Do investigators have previous experience of, and/or adequate training in, the methods employed?

Will junior researchers/students be under the direct supervision of an experienced member of staff?

Will junior researchers/students be expected to undertake physically invasive procedures (not covered by a generic protocol) during the course of the research?

Are researchers in a position of direct authority with regard to participants (e.g., academic staff using student participants, sports coaches using his/her athletes in training)?

Yes	No* *
Yes	No* *
Yes**	No
Yes**	No

\*\* If you ONLY select answers marked \*\*, please submit your completed Ethical Advisory Checklist accompanied by a statement covering how you intend to manage the issues (indicated by selecting a \*\* answer) to the Ethical Advisory Committee.

**Section B: Participants**

*Vulnerable Groups*

Will participants be knowingly recruited from one or more of the following vulnerable groups?

Children under 18 years of age (please refer to published guidelines)

Yes*	No
------	----



People over 65 years of age  
Pregnant women  
People with mental illness  
Prisoners/Detained persons  
Other vulnerable group (please specify \_\_\_\_\_ )

Yes*	No
Yes*	No
Yes*	No
Yes*	No
Yes*	No

\* Please submit a full application to the Ethical Advisory Committee.

**Chaperoning Participants**

**If appropriate**, e.g., studies which involve vulnerable participants, taking physical measures or intrusion of participants' privacy:

Will participants be chaperoned by more than one investigator at all times?  
Will at least one investigator of the same sex as the participant(s) be present throughout the investigation?  
Will participants be visited at home?

Yes	No*	N/A
Yes	No*	N/A
Yes*	No	N/A

\* Please submit a full application to the Ethical Advisory Committee.  
If you have selected N/A please provide a statement in the space below explaining why the chaperoning arrangements are not applicable to your research proposal:

**Advice to Participants following the investigation**

Investigators have a duty of care to participants. When planning research, investigators should consider what, if any, arrangements are needed to inform participants (or those legally responsible for the participants) of any health related (or other) problems previously unrecognised in the participant. This is particularly important if it is believed that by not doing so the participants well being is endangered. Investigators should consider whether or not it is appropriate to recommend that participants (or those legally responsible for the participants) seek qualified professional advice, but should not offer this advice personally. Investigators should familiarise themselves with the guidelines of professional bodies associated with their research.

**Section C: Methodology/Procedures**

To the best of your knowledge, please indicate whether the proposed study:

Involves taking bodily samples (please refer to published guidelines)  
Involves procedures which are likely to cause physical, psychological, social or emotional distress to participants  
Is designed to be challenging physically or psychologically in any way (includes any study involving physical exercise)  
Exposes participants to risks or distress greater than those

Yes †	No
Yes †	No
Yes †	No
Yes*	No



encountered in their normal lifestyle

Involves collection of body secretions by invasive methods

Prescribes intake of compounds additional to daily diet or other dietary manipulation/supplementation

Involves testing new equipment

Involves pharmaceutical drugs (please refer to published guidelines)

Involves use of radiation (please refer to published guidelines. Investigators should contact the University's Radiological Protection Officer before commencing any research which exposes participants to ionising radiation – e.g., x-rays).

Involves use of hazardous materials (please refer to published guidelines)

Assists/alters the process of conception in any way

Involves methods of contraception

Involves genetic engineering

Yes*	No
Yes*	No
Yes*	No
Yes*	No
Yes*	No
Yes*	No
Yes*	No
Yes*	No

\* Please submit a full application to the Ethical Advisory Committee

† If the procedure is covered by an existing generic protocol, please insert reference number here \_\_\_\_

If the procedure is not covered by an existing generic protocol, please submit a full application to the Ethical Advisory Committee.

**Section D: Observation/Recording**

Does the study involve observation and/or recording of participants? If yes please complete the rest of section D.

Will those being observed and/or recorded be informed that the observation and/or recording will take place?

Yes	No
Yes	No*

\* Please submit a full application to the Ethical Advisory Committee



Will participants be fully informed of the objectives of the investigation and all details disclosed (preferably at the start of the study but where this would interfere with the study, at the end)?

Yes	No*
Yes	No*

Will participants be fully informed of the use of the data collected (including, where applicable, any intellectual property arising from the research)?

For children under the age of 18 or participants who have impairment of understanding or communication:

- will consent be obtained (either in writing or by some other means)?
- will consent be obtained from parents or other suitable person?
- will they be informed that they have the right to withdraw regardless of parental/ guardian consent?

Yes	No*	N/A
Yes	No*	N/A
Yes	No*	N/A
Yes	No*	N/A
Yes	No*	N/A

For investigations conducted in schools, will approval be gained in advance from the Head-teacher and/or the Director of Education of the appropriate Local Education Authority?

For detained persons, members of the armed forces, employees, students and other persons judged to be under duress, will care be taken over gaining freely informed consent?

Section E: Consent and Deception

Will participants give informed consent<sup><</sup> freely?

Yes	No*
-----	-----

If yes please complete the *Informed Consent* section below.  
\*If no, please submit a full application to the Ethical Advisory Committee.

<sup><</sup> Note: where it is impractical to gain individual consent from every participant, it is acceptable to allow individual participants to "opt out" rather than "opt in".

Informed Consent

\* Please submit a full application to the Ethical Advisory Committee

Does the study involve deception of participants (i.e., withholding of information or the misleading of participants) which could potentially harm or exploit participants?

Yes	No
-----	----

If yes please complete the *Deception* section below.

Deception

Is deception an unavoidable part of the study?

Yes	No*
Yes	No*

Will participants be de-briefed and the true object of the research revealed at the earliest stage upon completion of the study?



Has consideration been given on the way that participants will react to the withholding of information or deliberate deception?

Yes	No*
-----	-----

\* Please submit a full application to the Ethical Advisory Committee

Section F: Withdrawal

Will participants be informed of their right to withdraw from the investigation at any time and to require their own data to be destroyed?

Yes	No*
-----	-----

\* Please submit a full application to the Ethical Advisory Committee

Section G: Storage of Data and Confidentiality

Please see University guidance on [Data Collection and Storage](#).

Will all information on participants be treated as confidential and not identifiable unless agreed otherwise in advance, and subject to the requirements of law?

Yes	No*
-----	-----

Will storage of data comply with the Data Protection Act 1998? (Please refer to [published guidelines](#))

Yes	No*
-----	-----

Will any video/audio recording of participants be kept in a secure place and not released for use by third parties?

Yes	No*
-----	-----

Will video/audio recordings be destroyed within six years of the completion of the investigation?

Yes	No*
-----	-----

\* Please submit a full application to the Ethical Advisory Committee

Section H: Incentives

Have incentives (other than those contractually agreed, salaries or basic expenses) been offered to the investigator to conduct the investigation?

Yes**	No
-------	----

Will incentives (other than basic expenses) be offered to potential participants as an inducement to participate in the investigation?

Yes**	No
-------	----

\*\* If you ONLY select answers marked \*\*, please submit your completed Ethical Advisory Checklist accompanied by a statement covering how you intend to manage the issues (indicated by selecting a \*\* answer) to the Ethical Advisory Committee.



**Compliance with Ethical Principles**

If you have completed the checklist to the best of your knowledge without selecting an answer marked with \* or † your investigation is deemed to conform with the ethical checkpoints and you do not need to seek formal approval from the University's Ethical Advisory Committee.

Please sign the declaration below, and lodge the completed checklist with your Head of Department or his/her nominee.

**Declaration**  
I have read the University's Code of Practice on Investigations on Human Participants. I confirm that the above named investigation complies with published codes of conduct, ethical principles and guidelines of professional bodies associated with my research discipline.

Signature of Responsible Investigator .....

Signature of Student (if appropriate) .....

Signature of Head of Department or his/her nominee .....  
.....

Date .....

If the provision for Compliance with Ethical Principles does not apply, please proceed to the *Guidance from Ethical Advisory Committee* section below.

**Guidance from Ethical Advisory Committee**

If, upon completion of the checklist you have ONLY selected answers marked \*\*, please submit your completed Ethical Advisory Checklist accompanied by a statement covering how you intend to manage the issues (indicated by selecting a \*\* answer) to the Ethical Advisory Committee.

If, upon completion of the checklist, you have selected an answer marked with \* or † it is possible that an aspect of the proposed investigation does not conform to the ethical principles adopted by the University. Therefore you are requested to complete a full submission to the Ethical Advisory Committee. You should aim to complete the entire form in brief but need only provide specific detail on the questions which relate directly to the issues for which you have selected an answer marked \* or † on the checklist. A copy of this checklist, signed by your Head of Department should accompany the full submission to the Ethical Advisory Committee. Please contact the Secretary if you have any queries about completion of the form. The relevant application form can be downloaded from the Committee's web page.



Signature of Responsible Investigator .....  
Signature of Student (if appropriate) .....  
Signature of Head of Department or his/her nominee .....  
.....  
Date .....



Appendix M: IPA data table

	Raw data Theme	Interview One	Interview Two	Interview Three	Interview Four	Interview Five
1	School sport	P2 L3 P3 L27				
2	Skill transfer	P2 L9 P 4 L 3 P17 L15 P25 L11		P16 L10		
3	Tennis outside of school	P2 L16				
4	Time constraints stopping tennis	P2 L24 P3 L8 P6 L17 P6 L23 P10 L26 P12 L3				
5	Transition of playing standard	P3 L18				
6	Increased playing time	P4 L1				
7	Initiation through family	P4 L25				
8	Matches more important then lessons	P5 L3				
9	Being like Brother	P5 L14				
10	Reduced importance of brother as role model	P5 L20				
11	Commitment to education	P6 L1				
12	Changes in important of tennis	P6 L3				
13	Structure of USA college system – increased time	P7 L16				
14	Structure of USA college system – developing skills	P8 L6 P9 L12		P10 L24	P9 L12	
15	Dedication	P8 L17				
16	Tennis importance	P8 L21 P19 L17		P28 L24		
17	Enjoyed USA structure	P10 L1				
18	Academic importance	P10 L22 P11 L1 P11 L23				



		P12 L3 P 14 L24 P17 L10				
20	Self awareness	P11 L13	P10 L 6 P10 12 P10 17 P11 L16 P27 L 24 P27 L7 P29 L12 P29 L21 P30 L24	P9 L5 P9 L11 P10 L9 P10 L21 P11 L4 P12 L13	P17 L9	
21	Future aspirations	P11 L15 P12 L19 P13 L20 P14 L1 P16 L13 P17 L 7 P17 L19 P21 L17 P22 L5	P18 L23	P12 L9		
22	Tennis importance when work was easy	P12 L13				
23	Personality factors	P13 L3	P17 L1		P7 L16	
24	Learn through family / family values	P13 L7	P15 L8 P16 L1		P13 L18 P20 L12	
25	Hard work values	P13 L13	P 2 L2 P 3 L 9 P10 L 17 P12 L3 P12 L24 P17 L18	P12 L7 P12 24		
26	Hard work as a process		P14 L5	P11 L20 P13 L9		
27	Self imposed pressure	P 15 L3 P15 L19 P15 L1	P16 L12 P16 L18			P9 L24



28	Difficult to accept reduction in tennis	P17 L19				
29	Identity	P18 L6 P19 L 21	P19 L3			P9 L1
30	Family integration	P18 L11	P7 L20			
31	Tennis importance related to parents sacrifice	P18 L21				
32	Tennis as recreation	P19 L1				
33	Identity associated with competence	P19 L27				
34	Aspiration associated with competence	P21 L23				
35	Value to be the best	P22 L17	P2 L 12 P17 L19 P29 L21		P21 L13	
36	Low confidence		P1 L14 P1 L23 P 2 L 9 P 3 L 4 P4 L 16 P33 L 8 P33 L21	P18 L10		
37	Support to compensate for low confidence			P18 L13		
38	Perceived academic competence		P 2 L5			
39	Born with abilities		P 2 L 22 P14 L18 P28 L23			
40	Success attributed to repetition of skills		P 3 L 18			
41	Perceived competence from repeated success		P 3 L 23			
42	Success reinforces skills		P31 L1	P7 L2 P22 L24		
43	Rewards reinforce skills			P11 L12		
44	Similarity of contexts facilitates transfer		P25 L16 P26 L14			



			P32 L 23			
45	Interaction factors/ systems		P 4 L 7 P15 L10	P8 L20	P18 L25	
46	Family supporting		P5 L 11 P5 L21 P6 L 2 P19 L8	P15 L9		
47	Friends don't understand experiences in tennis		P5 L15			
48	Role of Dad supporting		P5 L24 P19 L25			
49	Relationship with father		P19 L25 P20 L6 P20 16			P5 L22 P6 L 1 P6 L19 P7 L2 P7 L18 P8 L2 P11 L1
50	Role of mother supporting		P6 L 14 P7 L7 P7 L14 P9 L 5 P20 L25 P21 L1 P31 L9			
51	Relationship with mother		P20 L20 P21 L5 P21 L16 P21 L23 P22 L7 P22 L16			P6 L 18 P7 L2
52	Relationships with siblings		P23 L6 P23 L 23 P24 L11			
53	Role of living arrangements		P7 L 3 P24 L1 P24 L17			



54	Belief that life skills were learnt through sport		P9 L23	P1 L13		
55	Perfectionism		P11 L16 P12 L17 P12 L 24	P28 L2		
56	Comparisons with peers to learn about self		P11 L22 P12 L3 P15 L 1	P9 L25 P10 L1 P10 L14 P12 L15 P12 L23 P13 L14	P12 L7 P13 L8	
57	Situational requirements teaching skills		P12 L 17 P14 L22 P26 L1 P27 L3 P28 L19 P29 L9	P2 L 14 P2 L24 P4 L7 P6 L7 P8 L9 P11 P23 P13 L21 P14 L12 P15 L1 P15 L23 P19 L2 P19 L3 P19 L24 P21 L1 P21 L12 P21 L27 P22 L8 P22 15 P23 L15 P24 L4	P6 L20 P10 L14 P15 10 P16 L3 P18 L1 P23 L4	P13 L10 P14 L1 P 14 L 17 P 15 L1 P15 L 15
58	Negative results stimulate awareness			P22 L18		
59	Sport specific requirements			P3 L2 P23 L19		P 13 L24 P14 L 21
60	Learning skills to be successful		P13 L16			
61	Learning skills to limit perceived		P15 L1			



	weakness					
62	Use of skills associated with perceived importance		P17 L 25 P18 L6		P16 L21	
63	Relationship skills		P25 L24 P28 L1	P1 L30		
64	Transfer associated with confidence		P26 L11 P32 L5	P2 L 1		
65	Transfer associated with successful application across domains			P17 L16		
66	Individual strengths facilitate learning skills		P27 L 6	P6 L7 P6 L 26		
67	Feeling of responsibility to behave in certain way		P27 L13			
68	Sport reinforcing born with skills		P28 L24			
69	Learnt through experience		P30 L9			
70	Unconscious process		P32 L18	P21 L23 P22 L11 P23 L1	P6 L14	P15 L9
71	Learning to communicate with coach			P2 L18 P4 L20		
72	Learning to communicate in tough situations			P3 L9		
73	Placed outside of comfort zone			P3 L9 P3 18		
74	Self development			P5 L1		
75	Self responsibility			P5 L8		
76	Negative coach relationship in USA			P7 L17		
77	Outcomes associated with USA			P7 L22 P8 L3		
78	Life skills associated with playing intensity / standard			P10 L18		
79	Pressure increasing reflection /awareness			P11 L5		
80	Perceived coach expectations			P12 L2 P12 L6		



81	Organisation skills			P14 L8		
82	Skills become habits			P14 L23 P17 L24 P18 L3		
83	Using coach as a resource			P15 L1		
84	Shift in importance of tennis /work			P16 L19		
85	Coach encouraging balanced life			P17 L3		
86	Coach encouraged focus on process			P17 L7		
87	Interpersonal parity with coach			P18 L19		
88	Building relationships			P19 L7 P19 L18 P20 L23	P10 L5	
89	Competing without hatred			P20 L1		
90	Learnt to communicate			P20 L11		
91	Communication reduced reliance on others			P20 L12		
92	Life skills associated with prolonged exposure to situations			P21 L12		
93	Learning when secure in the environment			P22 L3		
94	Resourcefulness			P27 L20		
95	Independence facilitated skills			P27 L20		
96	Changes in identity and meaning associated with maturity			P28 L10		
97	Privileged life					P1 L13 P 3 L25 P 12 L 4
98	Volunteering					P1 L18
99	Giving something back					P1 29 P3 L1 P3 L16 P3 L25 P4 L1
100	Prioritising					P2 L3
101	Change in meaning of life					P2 L8
102	Personal reasons for volunteering					P3 L12



103	Belief that everyone privileged should give back					P4 L6
104	Tennis enjoyment meaning in beginning					P4 L25 P5 L4
105	Athletic Identity					P5 L9 P8 L20 P9 L1
106	Meaning attached to Identity					P5 L18 P8 L25 P9 L9
107	Meaning of tennis associated with Dad					P5 L23
108	No interference from others facilitated bonding					P8 L5
109	Subjective / Individual experience					P8 L12
110	Identity changed to protect self				P11 L1	P9 L20
111	Meaning changed with pressure					P10 L2
112	Meaning changed to social and Loughborough					P10 L13
113	Meaning associated with current situation					P10 L20
114	Key role of tennis in life					P11 L12
115	Sport reinforces skills					P11 L25
116	Sport promoted thriving					P12 L8
117	Sport changed attitudes					P12 L16
118	Holistic development					P12 L22
119	Learn from negatives				P11 L22	P13 L19
120	Coach interested in whole person				P1 L27 P8 L1	
121	Coach structured sessions				P2 L1 P2 L14 P2 L21 P4 L1	
123	Professionalism of coach				P3 L14	
124	Coach maximising potential				P3 L21	
125	Modelled coach				P3 L25	
126	Impact of changing coach				P4 L14	



					P5 L5 P8 L14	
127	Impact of changing club				P4 I19	
128	Coach influenced aspirations				P5 L14	
129	Change In Identity required different skills				P5 L9	
130	Skills by products of performance				P5 L22 P6 L3	
131	Coach encouraged hard work				P8 L1	
132	USA experience changed identity				P10 L27	
133	Team environment				P11 L7 P15 L5	
134	Multiple demands requires balance				P12 L18	
135	Parent split -changes				P14 L11	
136	Individual /subjective experiences				P15 L14 P18 L21	
137	Variety of experiences teaches variety of skills				P19 L21	
138	Displacement of negative behaviour				P20 L19	
139	Importance buffered negatives				P21 L1 P23 L11 P24 9	
140	Contribution to self				P22 L5	
141	Contribution to others				P22 L15	
142	Sport buffers peer pressure				P25 L 4 P26 L10	



## Appendix N: IPA groupings

### Identity

#### Identity

Changes in identity  
 Changes in identity and associated with maturity  
 Identity change to protect self  
 Identity associated with competence  
 Change in identity required different skills  
 Key role of tennis in life  
 Athletic identity  
 Academic identity  
 Shift in importance from tennis to work  
 Future aspirations

### Experiential factors

Repetition of skills  
 Enjoyed structure of USA College  
 Team environment  
 Situational requirement teaching skills  
 Variety of experiences teaches range of skills  
 Learned through experience  
 Subjective / individual experience  
 Life skills associated with playing standard./ intensity  
 Sport specific requirements  
 Structure of USA college system increased playing time  
 Structure of USA college system required specific skills  
 Outcomes associated with USA college system  
 Placed outside of comfort zone  
 Success reinforces skills  
 Skills by product of performance  
 Life skills associated with prolonged exposure to experiences  
 Pressure increases reflection / self awareness  
 Learning when secure in the environment

### Meaning

Meaning attached to identity  
 Changes in meaning of life associated with changes in tennis  
 Meaning changed with pressure  
 Tennis as recreation  
 Tennis importance  
 Meaning associated with current situation  
 Meaning changed to social at Loughborough  
 Enjoyment during initiation  
 Changes in the importance of tennis  
 Changes in meaning associated with changes in identity



Meaning of tennis associated with spending time with dad

## **Coach**

Perceived coach expectations  
 Professionalism of coach  
 Coach structured sessions  
 Coach influenced aspirations  
 Impact of changing coach  
 Using coach as a resource  
 Coach interested in whole person  
 Learning to communicate with coach  
 Coach encouraged a balanced life  
 Interpersonal parity with coach  
 Coach encouraged focus on process  
 Coach maximising potential  
 Negative coach relationship in USA  
 Modelled coach  
 Coach encouraged hard work

## **Family**

No interference from others facilitates bonding with dad  
 Role of living arrangements  
 Parent split changes  
 Role of mother supporting  
 Family integration  
 Tennis importance related to parents sacrifice  
 Family supporting  
 Initiation through family  
 Relationship with father  
 Being like brother at initiation  
 Reduced importance of brother as role model  
 Role of dad supporting  
 Relationship with mother  
 Relationships with siblings  
 Family values  
 Support compensated for low confidence

## **Transfer**

Skills transfer  
 Transfer associated with confidence  
 Similarity of contexts facilitates transfer  
 Transfer associated with successful application across domains

## **Process**

Hard work as a process  
 Use of skills associated with perceived importance



Unconscious process  
 Self awareness  
 Comparisons with peers to learn about self  
 Perceived competence from repeated success  
 Learning skills to limit perceived weakness  
 Learning skills to be successful

### **Dispositions**

Sport reinforcing born with skills  
 Personality factors  
 Individual strengths facilitate learning skills  
 Hard work values  
 Born with abilities  
 Commitment to education  
 Value to be the best  
 Perfectionism  
 Sport reinforces skills  
 Low confidence

### **Contribution**

Volunteering  
 Giving something back  
 Personal reasons for volunteering  
 Contribution to self  
 Contribution to others  
 Privileged life  
 Belief that everyone privileged should give back

### **Outcomes**

Learning to communicate  
 Building relationships  
 Organisational skills  
 Resourcefulness  
 Self responsibility  
 Learning to communicate in tough situations  
 Relationship skills  
 Prioritizing  
 Dedication  
 Sport changes attitudes  
 Competing without hatred



## Appendix O: Reflection questions

Describe the here and now of the experience (when, where, what)

What essential factors contributed to this experience (why)

Who are the significant actors?

What were the key issues?

What was I trying to achieve?

Why did I intervene as I did?

What internal factors influenced my actions (thoughts feelings, previous experiences)?

What external factors influenced my actions (other people, organisational factors, time)?

What sources of knowledge did/should have influenced my decision making?

What were the consequences of my actions for?

How did I feel about this experience when it was happening?

How did the participants feel?

How did I know what the participant felt like?

Could I have dealt with the situation better?

What other choices did I have?

What would be the consequences of these choices?

How do I now deal about this experience?

How have I made sense of this experience in light of past experiences and future practice?