

All aboard at the coaching conference

Mark Adams reports from the British Psychological Society's Special Group in Coaching Psychology Conference.

The Special Group in Coaching Psychology Conference (SGCP) took place at the Holiday Inn, London, on 10-11 December 2015. The event was attended by colleagues from across a number of BPS divisions, including professionals from Counselling, Clinical, Occupational and Health Psychology. In addition, the inclusive nature of the SGCP means that the conference is also attended by practitioners, researchers and writers from a range of other professional backgrounds, which further enriches the professional learning context.

The conference was divided into four strands, encompassing: Leadership, Business and Executive Coaching Psychology (led by Michael Webster and Paul Philips); Positive Psychology Coaching (led by Professor Stephen Palmer and Dr Suzy Green); Tools and Techniques in Coaching Psychology (led by Nancy Doyle and Gurcharn Dhillon); and Learning in Action (led by Professor Sarah Corrie and David Webster). Each delegate is therefore able to select a menu of talks and activities that caters for their own professional interests. The workshops reported on below are presented through my own professional lens as an Educational & Coaching Psychologist.

Steven Oakes of the Blue Coat School in Oldham provided a summary of a school-based programme designed to support pupils' mental toughness, in which teachers received two days of training in the '4 Cs' concept of mental toughness (control, commitment, challenge, confidence – see Strycharczyk & Clough, 2012), and then delivered six lessons on the subject to a group of Year 11 students over a 12-week period. This resulted in positive gains for the pupils and also a significant impact on teachers' own development as regards this particular quality.

This was followed by a talk from Clive Leach on the relevance of positive psychology interventions (e.g. the 'Your Best Possible Self' exercise – see Peters et al, 2010) to career transition. Then, Michelle Deeks introduced a practical approach to strengths-based coaching, in which coachees are asked to remember a personal success experience and then, with support from the coach, to select words from a pack of strength cards which best represent the strengths they demonstrated in their story. Day 1 concluded with a keynote talk from Professor Roger Steare on values-based leadership and culture, contrasting the approach of such organizations with the impact of those who are focused on what Roger called Rule Number One – "You will make the numbers, or else!" (readers interested in this theme are referred to Sisodia, Sheth & Wolfe, 2014).

Day two began with a keynote talk from Dr Suzy Green of the Positivity Institute, Australia, about the interface between positive psychology and coaching psychology (see Leach & Green, 2015), and the Positive Education programme for schools. The International Positive Education Network is an organisation to be aware of for those interested in how coaching psychology and positive psychology can make a difference in educational contexts, with its aim of establishing education for character and wellbeing as being of equal importance as the fulfilment of intellectual potential. **Dr Esther Cavett then provoked debate about the boundaries that should exist for professional coaches who are not psychologists when drawing on positive psychology models in their work.**

Elizabeth Robson-Kelly reported evidence of how psychology-informed coaching in schools can report in improved outcomes for vulnerable young people, including stress-reduction, enhanced confidence, and improved interpersonal skills (see Robson-Kelly & van Nieuwerburgh, in press). This theme was continued by Michelle Pritchard, who reported on how an appreciative coaching and positive psychology interventions group programme impacted on the life experience of at-risk young girls (Pritchard, in press). Their respective studies will be published in forthcoming issues of *International Coaching Psychology Review*, one of the journals of the Special Group in Coaching Psychology.

The conference concluded with input from Rachael Skews of Goldsmiths University of London, who reported on her doctoral research into ACT-based coaching. After carrying out over 500 hours of ACT-based coaching in a randomized controlled trial, Rachael reports “significant differences between the ACT coaching and control groups for performance, wellbeing, self-efficacy, goal-directed self-regulation, and psychological flexibility”.

Readers interested in updates from the Special Group in Coaching Psychology or the International Society for Coaching Psychology can follow them on Twitter (@SGCP or @ISfCP) or visit their websites (www.sgcp.org.uk or www.isfcp.net).

Also, read more in The Psychologist archive.

References

Leach, C. & Green, S. (2015). Coaching and positive psychology. In van Nieuwerburgh, C. (Ed), *Coaching in Professional Contexts*. London: SAGE.

Peters, M. L., Flink, I. K., Boersma, K., & Linton, S. J. (2010). Manipulating optimism: Can imagining a best possible self be used to increase positive future expectancies? *Journal of Positive Psychology*, 5(3), pp. 204-211.

Pritchard, M. (in press). The perceptual changes in life experience of at-risk young girls subsequent to an appreciative coaching and positive psychology interventions group programme: An interpretative phenomenological analysis. *International Coaching Psychology Review*, 11 (1).

Robson-Kelly, E. & van Nieuwerburgh, C. (in press). What does coaching have to offer young people at risk of developing mental health problems? A grounded theory study. *International Coaching Psychology Review*, 11 (1).

Sisodia, R., Sheth, J. & Wolfe, D. (2014). *Firms of Endearment: How World-Class Companies Profit from Passion and Purpose*. Pearson FT Press.

Strycharczyk, D. & Clough, P. (2015). *Developing Mental Toughness: Coaching Strategies to Improve Performance, Resilience and Wellbeing*. Kogan Page.

© Copyright 2000-2016 The British Psychological Society

The British Psychological Society is a charity registered in England and Wales, Registration Number: 229642 and a charity registered in Scotland, Registration Number: SC039452, VAT Registration Number: 240 3937 76