

Editorial:

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In discussion recently, a group of coaching and mentoring students at Oxford Brookes University highlighted how studying coaching and mentoring, using rigorous methods to answer meaningful questions had developed their practice more than they could have ever anticipated.

This issue of IJECBM draws particular attention to the questions asked by those studying coaching and mentoring and illustrates the benefits to practice of undertaking meaningful and systematic research. The issue includes papers presented at the recent Coaching and Mentoring Research Conference, held at Oxford Brookes University on 7th April 2006. Since research in the field of coaching and mentoring is relatively new, this annual conference was instigated specifically to provide an opportunity for postgraduate students from any institution to share their work with a much wider audience.

The benefits to coaching practice of well-formed questions are articulated in the summary by P. Alex Linley of his keynote presentation at the conference. In this paper Linley, writing as an academic researcher, talks about the advantages of research for coaching and mentoring and the obstacles to research both for the academic and the practitioner. He suggests that there is an interesting shift from first generation coaching, based on the expertise of the guru, to second generation coaching, based on explicit psychological principles and a solid evidence base and he argues that this evidence base relies on good research questions. Good questions, Linley suggests, help bridge the academic-practitioner divide.

This claim is amply illustrated in the rest of the papers presented in this edition of our journal. John Cull, for instance, in the next article, asks what leads to success when mentoring young entrepreneurs. As a mentor with the Princes Trust, Cull was motivated to undertake case studies looking at the success factors evident on both sides of the Atlantic (in Canada and in Scotland). The results have provided the Canadian Youth Business Foundation and the Prince's Scottish Youth Business Trust with useful evidence to guide their work with young people.

Another example of how practical good research can be is identifiable in Colleen Harding's contribution. Harding achieved a distinction in her MA at Oxford Brookes University and has presented a fascinating and original account of her action research study of the use of multiple intelligences (MI) in coaching contexts. Harding worked closely with a group of coaches in a university setting and the result has been a helpful toolbox of MI interventions.

Janet Butwell's article on group supervision is an important and timely contribution. Whilst not presenting at the conference this year, Janet is still a student of coaching and mentoring. Her superb question, 'Group supervision - is it worthwhile?' provides the basis for a qualitative study using, participant observation, focus groups and interviews and uncovers a range of supervision issues that are highly relevant for the development of best practice guidelines in this area.

Also in this issue, Beddoes outlines a case study focusing on the matching issue in mentoring. The question of matching is significant in voluntary mentoring relationships,

but, as I have argued elsewhere (Cox, 2005), any attempt to match mentor and mentee may not always achieve its aim. In this case study, however, Beddoes argues that cognitive matching is beneficial for the sustaining and developing of successful mentoring relationships.

Longhurst's paper is a phenomenological study that asks about the effects on belief and behavioural change of the 'aha' moment, especially as it occurs within co-active coaching. The paper reports on ongoing PhD research and presents some initial conclusions on the levels of consciousness along which the 'aha' moment occurs, concluding that moments of insight are fundamentally different from insights of a problem-solving, purely cognitive nature.

The researchers sharing their work here do not inhabit the ivory towers of academe: they are first and foremost practitioners and the papers here all represent the 'Pragmatic science' (Anderson *et al*, 2001, cited in Linley in this issue) in that they take a relevant theme and explore it in a methodologically rigorous and robust way. Plus the papers all illustrate the importance of questions and this cannot be over stated: not only do questions define the scope and nature of the research endeavour, they also determine its design, the sample respondents and provide a guide for data collection and analysis. With such an emphasis on pragmatics it seems likely that questions when they lead to rigorous and robust research as much to do with informing practice as they do with developing theory.

References

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